

Summer Nights @



“Strong Through The Storm”

Introduction

THE PLAN/CALENDAR

- June 3rd - The Storm
 - Is God Big and Good Enough?
- June 10th - The Desert
 - What is Suffering?
- June 17th - The Valley
 - Where is God? Can God Bring Me Through?
- June 24th - The Darkness
 - How Should We Go Through Suffering?
- July 1st - The Garden
 - Does God understand? Does God Care?

Recap

GOD IS BIG ENOUGH AND GOD IS GOOD ENOUGH

- Jesus calms the storm
- God is Sovereign
- God is Good

“Through dark be my way, since He is my Guide,
‘Tis mine to obey, ‘tis His to provide...
By prayer let me wrestle, and He will perform.
With Christ in the vessel I smile at the storm.

- John Newton, ‘Begone
Unbelief,’ Olney Hymns” (Keller 270)

BUT THERE IS EVIL

- It’s bad, it’s real, and it doesn’t make sense
- 2 Categories
 - Moral Evil - Sin and its consequences
 - Natural Evil - Hurricanes and floods and earthquakes and diseases, etc.
- God hates Evil

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

- God is Good
- God is Sovereign
- So how can evil exist?

SOME ANSWERS (THEODICIES)

- Irenaeus – Evil is necessary so that we can grow and develop spiritually
 - Augustine – It's all a misuse of human freedom: we have a choice to choose good or evil and we choose evil
 - But then again
 - What makes us think we're OWED good? deserve good?
 - How do we account for all the blessings we HAVE?
 - Especially in light of our rebellion
 - Might God have a purpose in what he's doing...
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DIFFERENT VIEWS

- "Christianity teaches that, contra fatalism, suffering is overwhelming; contra Buddhism, suffering is real; contra karma, suffering is often unfair; but contra secularism, suffering is meaningful. There is a purpose to it, and if faced rightly, it can drive us like a nail deep into the love of God and into more stability and spiritual power than you can imagine." (Keller 30)
- Christians Suffered better

CAUSES OF JOSEPH'S SUFFERINGS

- Caused by Others
- Caused by Self
- Natural
- Random (We don't know Why)
- But God was working too:
 - Growing and Preparing Joseph
 - Saving Many
 - Getting the Israelites into Egypt
 - Changing/Maturing Joseph's brothers
 - And INFINITELY more reasons

THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF SUFFERING

- Suffering as Justice and Judgment
- Suffering is often mysterious and unjust
 - "While the Bible tells us that suffering in the world is the result of human sin in general, it is just as emphatic that individual instances of suffering may not be the result of a particular sin." (Keller 132)

A WORLD WITHOUT PAIN – Not What You Think...

- "A world without pain? Can such a place exist? It not only can – it does. But it's no utopia. It's a colony for leprosy patients: a world where people literally feel no pain, and reap horrifying consequences." (Brand Back Cover)
- "For good and for ill, the human species has among its privileges the preeminence of pain. We have the unique ability to step outside ourselves and self-reflect, by reading a book about pain, for example, or by summoning up the memory of a terrifying ordeal. Some pains – the pain of grief or emotional trauma – have no physical stimulus whatever. They are states of mind, concocted by the alchemy of the brain. These feats of consciousness make it possible for suffering to loiter in the mind long after the body's need for it has passed. Yet they also give us the potential to attain an outlook that will change the very landscape of the pain experience. We can learn to cope, and even to triumph." (Brand 13)

PURPOSE IN SUFFERING

- "According to Christian theology, suffering is not meaningless – neither in general nor in particular instances. For God has purposed to defeat evil so exhaustively on the cross that all the ravages of evil will someday be undone and we, despite participating in it so deeply, will be saved. God is accomplishing this not in spite of suffering, agony, and loss but through it – it is through the suffering of God that the suffering of humankind will eventually be overcome and undone." (Keller 163)
- Brings Glory to God
- Shows God's Glory to others
- Suffering Grows Us
- Suffering Grows Us Closer to Christ

- "...suffering is at the very heart of the Christian faith. It is not only the way Christ became like and redeemed us, but it is one of the main ways we become like him and experience his redemption. And that means that our suffering, despite its painfulness, is also filled with purpose and usefulness." (Keller 163-164)

The Valley

COMPONENTS OF SUFFERING

- Emotional
 - I.e. Grieving, Anger, Unforgiveness
- Physical
 - I.e. Wounds, Chronic Pain, Cancer, Aging
- Psychological
 - I.e. Depression
- Spiritual
 - I.e. A Dark Night of the Soul
- All/None of the Above
 - I.e. Divorce, loss

COMMONALITIES

- All are change
 - The future has been lost
- All are loss
- All hurt
- All are real
- All are signs/signals that something isn't right
 - It's not that the pain is bad, it's that they point at the something that isn't right
 - This is why pain shouldn't simply be ignored, numbed, or avoided

'HEALING' IS HARD

- "Recovery is misleading and empty expectation. We recover from broken limbs, not amputations. Catastrophic loss by definition

precludes recovery. It will transform us or destroy us, but it will never leave us the same.” (Sittser 73)

- “Catastrophic loss is like undergoing an amputation of our identity.” (Sittser 81)
- “The problem with those who have suffered loss is that they are deprived of familiar material from the present in order to envision the future.” (Sittser 71)
- It just takes time
 - There are no shortcuts or work arounds
 - You can’t skip to the end
 - And you wouldn’t want it to... it would belittle the loss...
- We naturally want to numb or deflect the pain... we don’t want it to be real
- “Haidt speaks of two basic ways to cope with (adversity) - what he calls ‘active coping and reappraisal’ and ‘avoidance coping and denial.’ The latter strategy can lead to disaster, for it includes ‘working to blunt one’s emotional reactions by denying or avoiding the events, or by drinking, drugs, and other distractions.’ The former strategy can lead to real gains, as it combines doing the hard inner work of learning and growing with seeking to change the painful external circumstances. Put another way, Haidt and Davies distinguish steadily walking through suffering from standing still, lying down, or just running away from it.” (Keller 189-190)

WALKING THROUGH SUFFERING

- Stages of Grief
 - “I did not find it helpful, therefore, nor did I find it true in my experience, to identify these various responses as ‘stages’ through which I had to pass on my way to ‘recovery’. For one thing, I have still not moved beyond these stages, and I am not sure I ever will. I still feel anger, I still want to bargain with God, I still want to deny that the tragedy is true. Not that I feel the urge to escape as intensely as I used to, but that is because my internal capacity to live with loss has grown. I have more perspective now; I have more confidence in my ability to endure.” (Sittser 60)

6 STAGES OF GRIEF (Mnemonic?: DAB DAH)

- Denial
 - “Denial can be described as an emotional shock absorber. When we first discover a change has happened, particularly a big or unwanted change, we need time to adjust to it. Denial is a way of giving ourselves time to gather the psychological resources necessary to deal with what is happening.” (CK 267)
 - But be careful of permanent Denial: “Denial puts off what should be faced. People in denial refuse to see loss for what it is, something terrible that cannot be reversed. They dodge pain rather than confront it. But their unwillingness to face pain comes at a price. Ultimately it diminishes the capacity of their souls to grow bigger in response to pain.” (Sittser 56)
- Anger
 - “Once we realize something in our lives has changed and isn’t going to change back again, we get angry. We ask, ‘Why is this happening to me?’”(CK 277)
- Bargaining
 - “Bargaining is the attempt to ‘undo’ the change that has occurred. Or, if the change can’t be ‘undone,’ to try to minimize its effects by negotiating some of the conditions of the change. This is an extremely important stage of grieving because we may not be able to let go of an emotional attachment until we feel we have done everything in our power to make things turn out the way we want them to. It is important to remember that sometimes bargaining works; sometimes it doesn’t. It is the *process* that is important, not the results.” (CK 287)
- Depression
 - “Depression is a stage of deep sadness that comes when we finally come to terms with the change that has happened. It is the stage in which healing takes place; the time when we say our final ‘good-bye’ to whatever we lost in the change. Of course, the more important the loss, the deeper our depression will be. This is all a normal part of the grieving process.” (CK 295)
- Acceptance and Hope

- “These last stages move us from deep sadness to the feeling that life not only goes on, but is actually good again. Having successfully grieved the losses the change brought about, we are now ready to greet our way of life without that which we have lost.” (CK 301)
- 1 Thessalonians 4:13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

“The unusual balance of the Christian faith is seen in the metaphor of walking – through darkness, swirling waters, or fire. We are not to lose our footing and just let the suffering have its way with us. But we are also not to think we can somehow avoid it or be completely impervious to it either. We are to meet and move through suffering without shock and surprise, without denial of our sorrow and weakness, without resentment or paralyzing fear, yet also without acquiescence or capitulation, without surrender or despair.” (Keller 227)

THE REAL QUESTION

- When we’re hurting, it feels like the most important question is “Why?” ... But in fact, the most important question is “Who?”
 - Who is with you?
 - Who are you with?

Daniel: Into the Furnace... Together

INTRO THE STORY

- Nebuchadnezzar sets up a huge statue and tells everyone to worship it.
- Our boys: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, don’t.
- The jealous ones rat out our boys to Neb.
- And Neb is angry, but he likes them, so he gives them one more chance... and our passage begins with their reply...

DANIEL 3:16-25 SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO REPLIED TO THE KING, "O NEBUCHADNEZZAR, WE DO NOT NEED TO DEFEND OURSELVES BEFORE YOU IN THIS MATTER. ¹⁷ IF WE ARE THROWN INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE, THE GOD WE SERVE IS ABLE TO SAVE US FROM IT, AND HE WILL RESCUE US FROM YOUR HAND, O KING. ¹⁸ BUT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW, O KING, THAT WE WILL NOT SERVE YOUR GODS OR WORSHIP THE IMAGE OF GOLD YOU HAVE SET UP."

¹⁹ THEN NEBUCHADNEZZAR WAS FURIOUS WITH SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO, AND HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THEM CHANGED. HE ORDERED THE FURNACE HEATED SEVEN TIMES HOTTER THAN USUAL ²⁰ AND COMMANDED SOME OF THE STRONGEST SOLDIERS IN HIS ARMY TO TIE UP SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO AND THROW THEM INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE. ²¹ SO THESE MEN, WEARING THEIR ROBES, TROUSERS, TURBANS AND OTHER CLOTHES, WERE BOUND AND THROWN INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE. ²² THE KING'S COMMAND WAS SO URGENT AND THE FURNACE SO HOT THAT THE FLAMES OF THE FIRE KILLED THE SOLDIERS WHO TOOK UP SHADRACH, MESHACH AND ABEDNEGO, ²³ AND THESE THREE MEN, FIRMLY TIED, FELL INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE.

²⁴ THEN KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR LEAPED TO HIS FEET IN AMAZEMENT AND ASKED HIS ADVISERS, "WEREN'T THERE THREE MEN THAT WE TIED UP AND THREW INTO THE FIRE?" THEY REPLIED, "CERTAINLY, O KING." ²⁵ HE SAID, "LOOK! I SEE FOUR MEN WALKING AROUND IN THE FIRE, UNBOUND AND UNHARMED, AND THE FOURTH LOOKS LIKE A SON OF THE GODS."

Being There For Each Other

BEING TOGETHER (for the long haul)

- I don't think our boys could have done it if they weren't together
- Sometimes you need someone to just be present with you

HOLDING SPACE (Heather Plett)

- "What does it mean to *hold space* for someone else? It means that we are willing to walk alongside another person in whatever journey they're on without judging them, making them feel inadequate, trying to fix them, or trying to impact the outcome. When we hold space for other people, we open our hearts, offer unconditional support, and let go of judgment and control."

- “To truly support people in their own growth, transformation, grief, etc., we can’t do it by taking their power away (ie. trying to fix their problems), shaming them (ie. implying that they should know more than they do), or overwhelming them (ie. giving them more information than they’re ready for). We have to be prepared to step to the side so that they can make their own choices, offer them unconditional love and support, give gentle guidance when it’s needed, and make them feel safe even when they make mistakes.”
- The 8 Tips
 1. Give people permission to trust their own intuition and wisdom.
 2. Give people only as much information as they can handle.
 3. Don’t take their power away.
 4. Keep your own ego out of it.
 5. Make them feel safe enough to fail.
 6. Give guidance and help with humility and thoughtfulness.
 7. Create a container for complex emotions, fear, trauma, etc.
 8. Allow them to make different decisions and to have different experiences than you would

A MODEL FROM JUDAISM

- “What churches often do less well is grieve. We lack a ritual for the long and tiring process that is sorrow and loss.” (Winner 27)
- Jewish Process of Mourning
 - Time Before Burial (*Aninut*)
 - Mourners are under no obligation to do much of anything.
 - In many ways they ‘border on death themselves’
 - Not even necessarily visited all that much
 - Week After Burial (*Shiva*)
 - Lots of home visitors (Sitting *Shiva*)
 - Mirrors are draped
 - Visitors don’t speak unless spoken to
 - Month After Burial (*Shloshim*)
 - The this is the edging back into your life
 - During this time you can go back to work
 - During this time they can start going back to church... gradually

- Year After Burial (*Shneim asar chodesh*)
 - Say the *Kaddish* twice a day
 - You aren't allowed to say the *Kaddish* unless there are 10 believing adults present. So for the first week (when you can't leave the house) the church would have to come to you. After that, apparently you have to go find community to be in (twice a day)
- Anniversaries

NOT ALONE

- “But loss does not have to isolate us or make us feel lonely. Though it is a solitary experience we must face alone, loss is also a common experience that can lead us to community. It can create a community of brokenness. We must enter the darkness of loss alone, but once there, we will find others with whom we can share life together.” (Sittser 171)
- “Choosing to withdraw from people and to protect the self diminishes the soul; choosing to love even more deeply than before ensures that we will suffer again, for the choice to love requires the courage to grieve. We know that loss is not a once-in-a-lifetime experience. So naturally we dread the losses that loom ahead. But the greater loss is not suffering another loss itself but refusing to love again, for that may lead to the death of the soul.” (Sittser 184-185)

Being With God

BEING WITH GOD IN THE MIDST OF THE STORM

- “They knew God would deliver them *from* death or *through* death.” (Keller 231)
- This is why we started with all that foundational theology... to recognize the importance of being with God through the storm, recognizing that he's big and good
- The Boys (in the Daniel story), knew that they were with God, despite not knowing the outcome.

- The only way you say, “O NEBUCHADNEZZAR, WE DO NOT NEED TO DEFEND OURSELVES BEFORE YOU IN THIS MATTER. ¹⁷ IF WE ARE THROWN INTO THE BLAZING FURNACE, THE GOD WE SERVE IS ABLE TO SAVE US FROM IT, AND HE WILL RESCUE US FROM YOUR HAND, O KING. ¹⁸ BUT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, WE WANT YOU TO KNOW, O KING, THAT WE WILL NOT SERVE YOUR GODS OR WORSHIP THE IMAGE OF GOLD YOU HAVE SET UP.” is if you know you’re WITH God.

Recognizing That God is With Us

GOD WITH US

- You don’t have what it takes... but God does...
- ISAIAH 43:2-3,5 WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE WATERS, I WILL BE WITH YOU; AND WHEN YOU PASS THROUGH THE RIVERS, THEY WILL NOT SWEEP OVER YOU. WHEN YOU WALK THROUGH THE FIRE, YOU WILL NOT BE BURNED; THE FLAMES WILL NOT SET YOU ABLAZE. ³ FOR I AM THE LORD, YOUR GOD, THE HOLY ONE OF ISRAEL, YOUR SAVIOR;... ⁵ DO NOT BE AFRAID, FOR I AM WITH YOU;...

UNION WITH CHRIST

- JOHN 17:20-26
- “We are so near to Christ that we cannot be nearer, for we are one with Him. We are so dear to Christ that we cannot be dearer. Consider how close and tender is the tie when it is true that Christ loved us and gave Himself for us. It is a union more intimate than any other which exists among men, for ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.’ – Charles Spurgeon” (Sproul 36)

PSALM 23 THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD, I SHALL NOT BE IN WANT. ² HE MAKES ME LIE DOWN IN GREEN PASTURES, HE LEADS ME BESIDE QUIET WATERS, ³ HE RESTORES MY SOUL. HE GUIDES ME IN PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE. ⁴ EVEN THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL, FOR YOU ARE WITH ME; YOUR ROD AND YOUR STAFF, THEY COMFORT ME. ⁵ YOU PREPARE A TABLE BEFORE ME IN THE PRESENCE OF MY ENEMIES. YOU ANOINT MY HEAD WITH OIL; MY CUP OVERFLOWS. ⁶ SURELY GOODNESS AND LOVE WILL FOLLOW ME ALL THE DAYS OF MY LIFE, AND I WILL DWELL IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD FOREVER.

WHAT I'M LEARNING

- Pain isn't all bad
- Pain needs to be faced and gone through
- And we may even come out more healthy with a greater capacity on the other end. (Not that that justifies the loss, but it may help with getting through the day)
- So the question becomes how do we go through Pain well?

KINTSUGI

- “the Japanese art of fixing broken pottery with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum, a method similar to the maki-e technique. As a philosophy it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.” – Wikipedia



For Further Study

BOOKS:

- Keller, Timothy, Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering
- Lewis, C.S., A Grief Observed
- Sittser, Jerry, A Grace Disguised



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