



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Lesson 8

Forgive Yourself; Refusing to Blame God

Day One

Forgive Yourself

As we discussed in lesson 7, forgiving others is difficult. We do not want to let others off the hook for the hurt and devastation they have caused in our lives. Why should we?

If we were not followers of Jesus Christ, we could hang on to our anger and hate as much as we would like, even if it is detrimental to our health. However, in Christ, we are called to a higher standard—a godly standard. We are called to love others, even our enemies.

Christians have different levels and nuanced choices because of free will. For example, if we choose to love, we should also choose to act in love. When the apostle Paul gave a definition of love in 1 Corinthians 13, he included these words in verse 5: *It [love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.*

Loving others means we do not dishonor them. One way of dishonoring people is by telling others the wrong they have done. There is a tendency to make the offender, real or imagined, suffer degradation or loss of reputation. It is a sneaky way of revenge. Love does not put itself first but takes the lower position. When we are acting in love, we are not easily angered. To love means we forgive and do not keep a record of wrongs committed against us or anyone else.

Jesus died for us so that all our offenses can be wiped away. Being His disciple, we are called to do the same—forgive and let it go. When we learn to forgive from the heart—we pray for our opponents to be blessed without any consequences for their wrong-doing. When we are able to do this, we cross over into the heavenly realm and appear a little more like Jesus.¹

The battle to forgive will be ongoing. In this life, there are many ways we may be hurt either emotionally or physically. We may succeed in forgiving our current offenders, only to have someone else hurt us. Do not be discouraged. God promises to help us (Hebrews 4:16).

1. What do you find most difficult about forgiving others and what will you do to overcome it?

¹ R.T. Kendall, *Total Forgiveness*, (Lake Mary, Florida: Charisma Publishing, 2007), 32.

Two aspects of forgiveness: 1) Forgiveness from God, and 2) Forgiving Others were considered in lesson 7. We now turn to 3) Forgiving Yourself and will conclude with 4) Blaming God.

3) Forgive Yourself

We have been talking about forgiving others, but what if you are the transgressor? What if you have done terrible things and are filled with guilt and remorse? How do you forgive yourself?

Just as forgiving others is difficult, it can be difficult to forgive yourself. In fact, if we have trouble forgiving others, we may have difficulty forgiving ourselves. We may be hard on ourselves and others for various reasons, including the sins of perfectionism or self-righteousness. Perfectionism is the refusal to accept any standard short of perfection.

Not forgiving ourselves results in living with regret and guilt over our past actions. No matter what the past action is, we may also feel it excludes us from fruitful work. *How could God use me now? I'm such a horrible person or I made such a terrible mistake.*

After serving as Founder and Executive Director of Prison Alliance for 25 years, I retired in 2021. My husband and I moved from North Carolina to Alabama to be near family. My husband and I had prayed about our retirement and move and believed it was God's will. We also believed God was leading us to start a new ministry, In Jesus Steps.

However, it was not too long before I began having regrets. *Maybe I missed God's will. Did He really want me to leave Prison Alliance? I should have stepped down as Executive Director and worked in another capacity. What other founder completely walks away from their ministry?*

It has taken awhile, but I recognize that even if I had missed God's will, He is not finished with me. I am forgiven in Christ, and God can still use me. He is not hampered by our wrong decisions and certainly not our *confessed* sins. God is greater than our actions and can even take our mistakes and turn them into wildly successful outcomes. Yes, God works out all things for good for those who love Him.

If you have this problem of not forgiving yourself, consider Jesus appearing to His disciples after His resurrection. The disciples were gathered together in fear and guilt. They had deserted Jesus at His most difficult hour by running away. Yet, Jesus said nothing about that. Instead He said, *"Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."* And with that he breathed on them and said, *"Receive the Holy Spirit (John 20:21–22)."* Jesus, not only assured them of their future ministry, but gave them the gift of His Holy Spirit.²

Forgiving ourselves reverts back to the beginning of lesson 7—Forgiveness from God. The reason we forgive ourselves is because God has forgiven us. Jesus died a horrible, excruciating death to pay the penalty for your sin and mine. This is where forgiving ourselves begins—at the cross.

² Ibid., 149–150.

2. Read John 8:36. What does this verse mean to you?

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. John 8:36

Previous to being born again, we were a slave to Satan and sin. We could not break the bonds of slavery and sin on our own. What we could not do on our own, Christ did for us through His death and resurrection. He smashed open Satan's steel cuffs of bondage and set us free.

When we think we are unworthy to receive God's forgiveness or that our sin is beyond God's capacity to forgive, we are *not* being humble. In fact, we are being quite the opposite—we are being prideful. We are placing ourselves in a special category that mocks the crucified Christ. In essence, we are saying His blood sacrifice is not good enough for me.

Another aspect of not forgiving ourselves is our lack of faith—sin of unbelief. We do not trust in Jesus for our deliverance for one or more of our sins. With this attitude we are also despising God's Word that tells us all sins are forgiven in Christ (Mark 3:28; Hebrews 10:12; 1 John 2:2).

3. After reading the three paragraphs above, if you have been unable to forgive yourself for one or more sins, what do you think is the reason?

4. What will you do in order to accept God's forgiveness in Christ and forgive yourself?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #3–4 with your discipleship team.

The devil is a liar and tries to twist our minds and hearts into unbelief. Sadly, he and his demons are good at it, having been practicing their deceit for thousands of years. However, the Bible tells us that our hearts are also deceitful.

Definition: The adjective *deceitful* is defined as having a tendency or disposition to deceive. *Deceive* means to cause one to accept as true or valid what is false or invalid; misleading others; giving false impressions.

5. How does Jeremiah 17:9 describe the human heart?

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? Jeremiah 17:9

Yes, even our own hearts have a tendency or disposition to deceive us. It can cause us to believe things about ourselves and our sins that are false—like we should not or cannot be forgiven. So when the devil comes knocking on the door of our hearts and attempts to emphasize these lies, we can be more easily deceived.

We must read the Word, pray, and seek God to change the deceitfulness of our hearts and thwart the devil's ploys. Although not an easy task, the heart and mind can be disciplined. Plus, the really good news is that God is greater than our hearts.

Read 1 John 3:19–20 and answer questions 6–7:

This is how we know that we belong to the truth and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence: ²⁰ *If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.* 1 John 3:19–20 (See also Romans 10:9–11)

6. How do we set our hearts at rest in God's presence (v. 20)?

7. What have you done in the past when your heart condemns you?

If your heart is condemning you after you have asked for forgiveness in Christ, seek God. He is greater than our hearts and can straighten out your thinking. Now, if you are *not* sorry for your sins, that is another matter. You will need to ask God to help you understand the gravity of your sin and give you the desire to repent. However, we are talking about those who *are* sorry for their sins, but are having difficulty forgiving themselves.

Disciples of Christ are free from condemnation from God, others, and even from ourselves (Romans 8:1–2). When we sin, we confess, repent, and are forgiven. In turning from our sin, God may ask us to act in some way to restore what we have taken from another. This would be considered an act of restitution.

If God does not condemn us, who are we to condemn ourselves. If God forgives us, who are we not to forgive ourselves. Are we holier than God? Not forgiving ourselves when we have confessed and repented reveals a prideful heart. Your heart is saying, *I'm more righteous than God—I hold myself to a higher standard than God. My sin is so severe, so great, it is beyond the death and blood sacrifice of God's Son.*

But what does God say? What does the Bible say? Scripture is the factual reality beyond our own minds and hearts. By immersing ourselves in the Word, we align our thinking with Christ.

Read Romans 8:1–2 and answer questions 8–10:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. Romans 8:1–2

Definition: *Condemnation* is the English word translated from the Greek word *katakrima* (κατάκριμα). It is a legal technical term for the result of judging, including both the sentence and its execution. The Greek word is also translated *condemnation*, penalty, sentence of doom and

punishment. To *condemn* means to pronounce to be guilty, to sentence to punishment, or to pass judgment against.

8. How much condemnation is there for those who trust in Christ Jesus (v. 1)

9. What have believers been set free from (v. 2)?

10. If you have *not* been set free from condemnation from God, people, and yourself, please explain why?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #6–10 with your discipleship team.

R.T. Kendall's thoughts on guilt from his book, *Total Forgiveness*:

The ability to forgive ourselves comes partly from understanding guilt. Guilt is, at heart, a feeling that one is to blame. For example, when you blame others, you have kept a record of their wrongs. But when you blame yourself, you have kept a record of your own wrongs. The Holy Spirit shows us our sin; the initial work of the Spirit according to John 16:8 is that He convicts of sin.

God only uses guilt to get our attention. When we say, 'I'm sorry,' and mean it, that's enough for God. He doesn't beat us black and blue and require us to go on a thirty-day fast to supplement Christ's atonement. He convicts us of sin to get our attention, but having done that, He wants us to move forward.³

Moving forward after confession may involve restitution or reconciliation, or both. For example, if we have stolen money, we should return it. If we have ruined someone's reputation, we should try and restore it. Making amends will be the focus of our discussion for Day Two.

Whether we are forgiving ourselves or others, we are called to right our wrongs. That is, we are to seek peace by extending our forgiveness or accepting forgiveness from someone else. This is not a means to supplement Christ's atonement, but to obey His commandments.

Often our feelings and emotions get in the way of our forgiveness. But we do not have to let them. We have the freedom to act and to choose to forgive and be forgiven. Understand that it may take time for our feelings and emotions to catch up to our minds assent to forgive. But forgiving is God's reality (Ephesians 4:32). Therefore, we choose God's way and look to Him for help for each step of the journey.

—End Day One—

³ Ibid., 159–160.

Day Two

Restitution and Reconciliation

Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teach that God desires our hearts. He wants our inward thoughts and minds to belong to Him. Jesus spent time teaching His disciples, the religious leaders, and crowds the importance of our internal state.

The Pharisees especially were adept at outward displays of devotion, but harbored anger, murder, and malice in their hearts. How about you and me? Are we really willing to forgive from our hearts and therein worship God in the way He desires?

Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was countercultural to first century values and still is today. The standards of God's kingdom are high—almost unrealistic. When a friend gave me a Bible in my thirties, I read part of it and tossed it aside. I had thought, *Nobody can be that good*. I did not even want to try. However, what I would learn much later and after I was saved, is that God has given us His Holy Spirit to help us live up to His expectations.

The part of Jesus' sermon we are going to focus on today has to do with forgiveness, worship, and mercy. Jesus quoted the law: "You shall not murder. If anyone does murder, they will be subject to judgment (Matthew 5:21b)." Jesus continued by saying that if anyone is angry with their brother or sister, they will also be subject to judgment.

Jesus was moving His listeners from mere outward obedience to an inward change of heart. He then proceeds to teach how we bring forgiveness, worship, and mercy together. He gives us four commands—leave, go, be reconciled, and offer your gift. Gift is the following verses is any kind of offering as set forth in Old Testament law: animal, grain, dove, or pigeon.

Notice that Jesus is concerned about our actions towards others. We are always concerned with the wrong done to us, but rarely spend time considering the wrong we have done to others. Although this goes against our human nature, we are supposed to consider the wrong *we* have done before we worship God.

Read Matthew 5:23–24 and answer questions 11–15:

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift." Matthew 5:23–24

Definition: *Reconciliation* is defined as a change from enmity to friendship—making peace with someone. It is exchanging hostility for good relations; being restored to normal relations.

11. What command did Jesus give to those offering a gift when they remembered someone had something against them (v. 24)?

12. What does it mean to be reconciled (v. 24)?

13. The offering of a gift at the altar was expressive of worshipping God. True False (Underline One)

14. How will *you* become more concerned about who you have hurt or offended rather than those who have hurt or offended you?

15. How could the apostle Paul's teaching on believers examining themselves before the Lord's Supper relate to Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:23–24 (See 1 Corinthians 11:28–29)?

When Jesus commands us to go and be reconciled, He means that we are to acknowledge our wrong and make it right. That would include restitution. Before we can worship God properly, we must compensate the injured party and do justice to them with due diligence and discipline. In other words, going to church and doing Bible studies will not make up or make amends for sinful acts against other people.

Definitions: *Restitution* is the restoration of something lost or stolen to its proper owner; recompense for injury or loss. *Recompense* is to compensate or give back in return to someone for loss or harm suffered.

16. Read Luke 19:18. When Zacchaeus turned from his sin to follow Christ, what restitution did he plan?

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Luke 19:8

Restitution may take different forms to match the "crime." Zacchaeus, the tax collector, was overcharging people and pocketing the extra money. Therefore, he paid back those he had cheated or stolen from. Zacchaeus made a tangible effort to right the wrong he committed.

In the case of murder, child abuse, rape, or other sins you may have committed (Proverbs 6:16–19; John 19:11), seek God for what He requires of you. It may be a letter of apology, paying for Christian counseling for the victim, or attending therapy yourself. Only God can direct your steps in holy restitution.

Action Step

17. Prayerfully consider and make a list of anyone with whom you need to make restitution. How will you proceed?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer to #11–17 with your discipleship team.

In addition to restitution, there is a much harder path—reconciliation. Part of reconciliation may have an element of restitution or promise of restitution in it. Jesus’ teaching on reconciliation is clear and universal. If we are attempting to worship God or donate money to the church and someone has something against us, we are to stop immediately and be reconciled with the person we have offended or hurt. Then we return to worship God and present our gift.

Why is it so difficult to make peace with someone? A lot of the difficulty comes from our pride and self-righteousness. We do not like to humble ourselves and admit we were wrong. Although we are instructed to think of others as better than ourselves, most of us have difficulty putting this Scripture into practice (Philippians 2:3–8). Our human nature strives to put ourselves first by justifying and mitigating our own sinful actions and condemning and magnifying others’ sins.

18. Do you think putting yourself first by justifying and mitigating (lessening) your own sinful actions and condemning and magnifying others’ sins is something you need to work on? If so, what will you do about it?

Recognizing our propensity to make little of our own faults and enlarge the faults of others is the first step in becoming a reconciler. The next step is harder—changing our minds and attitudes.

Be encouraged. Jesus died to make us new people with new minds. Trust God’s promise of a new mind (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:22–25), and with your new mind—stop magnifying others’ faults and downplaying your own.

Now that you are willing to take responsibility for your actions and seek reconciliation, you may come across another kind of problem. You may encounter those who do not want to restore the relationship or the person with whom you are seeking reconciliation may have died. In either case, you still need to forgive, even if reconciliation is no longer an option. You cannot make another person desire peace, but we can pray for God’s direction and trust Him with the results.

19. Share a time when you tried to reconcile but the person was not willing?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer #18–19 with your discipleship team.

God expects us to make peace and reconcile with everyone as far as it depends on us (Romans 12:18). However, God does not want us to place ourselves in danger. In some cases, it may not be possible or wise to seek reconciliation due to inherent dangers to self or others. Other times, the offending party may refuse to recognize their sin and will not admit any wrongdoing. Then there is the possibility of the one offended pretending it was nothing and forgiveness is not necessary.

In the above instances, or when making peace with someone, search the Scriptures, pray, and allow the Holy Spirit to lead each step of the way. Like restitution, your peacemaking may vary depending on the person(s) or circumstances. Be open and obedient to the Lord’s directions. In

your reconciliation journey, a good question to ask is: *Have I obeyed God and taken sufficient steps to be reconciled?*

We have been emphasizing our wrongs against others, but what about the wrongs done against us? Jesus' instructions about discovering Christians in sin are also helpful in approaching a brother or sister who has sinned against us. The following teaching could apply to non-Christians as well, up to the point of telling it to the church.

Read Matthew 18:15–17 and answer questions 20–22:

“If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. ¹⁶But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ¹⁷If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Matthew 18:15–17

20. What is the first thing you should do if you discover a Christian engaging in sin or if someone has sinned against you (v. 15)?

21. What is the second thing you should do after witnessing another Christian engaging in sin or if someone has sinned against you (v. 16)?

22. If the sinning person is a Christian what is the third and fourth thing Jesus instructs (v. 17)?

Action Steps

23. Prayerfully consider and make a list of anyone that you need to be reconciled with and pray the following prayer.

Merciful Father, forgive me for harboring grudges, saying unkind things, and being insensitive to the hurt I have caused to others. I forgive any who have hurt me and give up any claim against them. I also forgive my brothers and sisters in Christ who have harmed me and pledge to live with them in your kingdom in a way that reflects your mercy and grace. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.⁴

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer to #20–23 and if you prayed the above prayer.

—End Day Two—

⁴ <https://www.heartlight.org/wjd/matthew/0222-wjd.html>>(accessed 6/14/2023)

Day Three

Lessons from Job

Reconciliation can certainly take us out of our comfort zone. It is difficult to approach others whether we are confessing our own sins against them or addressing their sins against us. We do not know how the other person will react and it may seem easier to ignore the whole thing.

Although it may be easier, it is not wise to ignore any of Jesus' commands and especially those regarding reconciliation. Why am I emphasizing reconciliation? God's kingdom is built on reconciliation. Consider the fact that we are born in sin and rebellion against God. We are His enemies until our relationship is changed through our trust in Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross for our sin changes our relationship with God from one of enmity to one of friendship.

24. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18–19 and Romans 5:10–11. God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. What is our ministry of reconciliation and why do you think it would include being reconciled to our neighbor?

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:18–19

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. Romans 5:10–11

After studying 1) Forgiveness from God, 2) Forgiving Others and 3) Forgiving Yourself, we now turn to our last aspect of forgiveness: 4) Refusing to Blame God.

4) Refusing to Blame God

Definitions: *Blame* is defined as assigning responsibility for a fault or wrong. *Disappointment* is the negative emotion one feels when an outcome does not match up to one's expectations.

Disappointment also includes sadness and displeasure resulting when one's hopes or expectations have not been met, fulfilled, or satisfied by someone or something.

How is blaming or being disappointed with God an aspect of forgiveness? Forgiveness of self involves pardoning ourselves for sins we have committed against others. When people are hurt and angry about things done to them or even things they have done themselves, they may become disappointed and blame God for letting the event happen in the first place. In other words, God is in control and He could have stopped the perpetrator.

You may have even asked God some of these questions during times of heartache and trouble: *How could You allow this to happen, Lord? You could have prevented this? Why me, what have I done to deserve this? I follow Jesus and always try and do right, why am I cursed and not blessed? Do You really love and care for me?*

25. Why do some people, Christians and non-Christians, blame God for the hurtful actions they experience at the hands of others?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer #24–25 with your discipleship team.

Many Christians and non-Christians recognize the omnipotence of God. They believe God is powerful enough that He could have prevented the tragedy now afflicting them—but did not. So they are disappointed, even angry that God did not save them or their loved one from their misfortune.

The truth is God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and in control of the universe. He could prevent all sinful actions and suffering but that would circumvent God’s design and human free will. To review God’s perfect creation, the Fall, and God’s solution please see Unit 1: Who Is God?, Lesson 1: God Is God.

Philip Yancey in his book, “Where Is God When It Hurts?” offers two principles God built into creation that could be the cause of much of our world’s suffering. First, God created a physical world that runs according to consistent natural laws. Second, God gave us human freedom or free will.

By committing Himself to those two principles, both good principles in themselves, God allowed for the possibility of their abuse. For example, water proves useful to us and all creation because of its “softness,” its liquid state, and its specific gravity. Yet those very properties open up its rather disagreeable capacity to drown us—or even more alarming that we might drown someone else.⁵

While we may accept facts about creation and that a certain amount of suffering will exist due to free will or natural cause, we may still wonder at the depths of human depravity and extent of natural disaster. For example, why does God allow children to be killed and the mass devastation of earthquakes or tsunamis?

We do not have a definitive answer. Suffering is part of our world and will remain until Jesus returns. At that time all will be made right and believers’ suffering will cease. Until then, some people will question and blame God for their troubles.

If you are starting to go down that slippery slope of blaming God or even being largesse in thinking that you have to forgive God, think again. God is righteous; He is just (Deuteronomy

⁵ Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1990), 65.

32:4; Psalm 89:14, 145:17). Everything He does or allows to happen is right and just. Frankly, we do not have the whole picture. How could we?

We do not forgive God because He never does anything wrong. We trust in Him. Therefore, we recognize and acknowledge our lack of perception and faith. We seek God's grace and mercy.

God's righteousness does not mean there is not real pain and suffering in our world. There is. When we are experiencing it, we may be tempted to fall into despair and faithlessness. However, if our hearts grow cold, God is greater than our hearts (1 John 3:20) and will keep us blameless at the coming of Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23–24). Trust Him.

Could God have made the world in another way so pain and suffering did not exist? Could there have been a world where no one would be hurt or offended? That perfect world was created in the beginning and will be formed again when Jesus returns. In the meantime, God wants to be loved and trusted for who He is. How would God know whether we genuinely loved and trusted Him if we lived in a world without conflict, distress, or the possibility for rebellion?

Love, trust, and respect were the subjects of discussion and the wager made between God and the devil in the book of Job. God was bragging about Job because *he feared God and shunned evil* (Job 1:8c). Fear in this context means love and respect. Job held God in honor and awe, submitting to His word and will.

Read Job 1:9–11 and answer questions 26–28:

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. ¹⁰“Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. ¹¹But now stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” Job 1:9–11

26. According to Satan, why did Job fear God (v. 10)?

27. According to Satan, what would happen if God took away everything Job had (v. 11)?

28. What was Satan implying about human nature?

Satan was telling God that Job only honors Him because of what God has given him. In other words, Satan is saying that Job does not love God for Himself but only because of the material wealth and blessings he has received. Sadly, Satan is on solid ground when it comes to our human nature. Few of us would be as steadfast and faithful as Job was during his ordeal.

God accepts Satan's challenge and allows him certain power over Job's life. Satan goes about causing havoc by destroying Job's livestock, property, servants, and his seven sons and three daughters. Yet, in all this heartache, Job did not sin by blaming God for wrongdoing.

... and [Job] said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised. Job 1:21

The devil is a persistent adversary. Instead of accepting defeat when Job continued to praise God, he counters with another challenge: *... stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face (Job 2:5).*

With the power Satan received, he afflicted Job with painful sores all over his body. Job's wife said, *Curse God and die (v. 9)!* But Job replied, *You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (v. 10).*

Satan was wrong again. Job remained faithful. God won the challenge. From this point forward in the book of Job, we do not hear anymore from Satan. Instead, Job was challenged by friends to admit and confess his sins. Job called upon God for vindication.

29. What have you learned or have been reminded of from the above discussion of Job?

Job was going through a trial of trouble, pain, and suffering—and all heaven was watching. God was so pleased with Job that He held him up as an example. Satan thought he could take Job down and “embarrass” God. In other words, Satan was out to prove that God could only be loved for the blessings He gave and not simply for who He is.

After Satan leaves the scene, Job's friends tell him to repent and submit to God. They believe Job's suffering is God's punishment for his sins. Job calls for an audience with God. Job says, *If I have walked with falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit—⁶let God weigh me in honest scales and he will know that I am blameless— Job 31:5–6*

Read Job 38:1–4 and answer questions 30–32:

Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: ² “Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? ³Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ⁴ “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.” Job 38:1-4

30. How did the Lord answer Job (vv. 2–4)?

31. Can humans understand God and how He created the world (v. 4)? Yes No (Underline One)

32. Did God address Job's suffering or questions about divine justice? Yes No (Underline One)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer #26–32 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Three—

Day Four
Blaming God

Although Job did not get answers concerning his suffering and divine justice, God revealed Himself to Job in a way that increased his faith and spiritual understanding. He saw God in a way that transcended his human suffering and hardship. Job replied to God, *My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.* ⁶ *Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.* Job 42:5–6

Job was humbled by God's revelation and therefore, he humbled himself further by repenting in dust and ashes. Sprinkling dust on one's head and rolling in ashes was a common practice signifying repentance and mourning in the ancient world. When faced with the magnificence and power of God, Job recognized his knowledge of God was vastly limited.

Job's view of suffering was partially correct—the righteous are blessed and the unrighteous are cursed. Consequently, Job falsely assumed God owed him an explanation for his misery. God never owes anyone an explanation for anything, but that is not the point. The point is: Job's view of suffering was incomplete and simplistic. Not that it was his fault—he was only acting on the knowledge he had at the time.

Regarding God's revelation to Job, I have heard believers testifying to this truth. That is, I have met believers who came to know God more intimately through their suffering and heartache. Because of this deeper relationship with God, these believers are not sorry for their past difficulties.

33. Can you share a time of tragedy when you were able to trust God and grow closer to God?

God vindicated or justified Job in front of his friends. God told the friends they had not spoken the truth about Him as Job had. So He had Job pray for them so they could be forgiven. God also restored Job's fortunes and his wife gave birth to another seven sons and three daughters. There is nothing in Scripture to indicate Job married again or received a new wife.

God works differently in each of our lives so we cannot say that because God justified Job and restored his fortunes that He will do the same for us. We may have to wait for Jesus' return before all is made right in our lives. The point is to trust that God has our best interest at heart.

When we are tempted to blame God, we should remember that God is sovereign. In fact, it is good idea to review this divine attribute or divine activity from Unit 1: Who Is God, Lesson 4, God Is Sovereign. Some of the material we have repeated in the current lesson.

In the Old Testament, suffering did come upon the Israelites for their sinful actions. This was due to God's covenant with Israel. If they disobeyed God's commands they would be punished with terror, disease, fever, and multiple afflictions (Leviticus 26:14–39). If they repented, God would remember His covenant with them and restore them (vv. 40–46). If the Israelites obeyed God, He would bless them with prominence, prosperity, success, and protection (Deuteronomy 28:1–13).

Jesus expanded and illuminated on the principles of punishment and suffering. Sinners are not always cursed in this life, nor are the righteous always materially blessed. He taught that when catastrophe strikes, do not think of those on the receiving end as worst sinners than other people. Instead take it as a warning and repent.

Read Luke. 13:1–5 and answer questions 34–35:

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. ² Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? ³ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. ⁴ Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? ⁵ I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” Luke. 13:1–5

34. Pilate killed Galileans and eighteen people died when a tower fell on them. Were they more guilty than those living around them? Yes No (Underline One)

35. What is the point Jesus is making that we should take to heart (v. 5)?

God may be punishing people for their misdeeds but not necessarily. It is a good reminder “not to judge.” Our job as disciples is to reach out to those facing difficulties with compassion and prayer. We are Christ’s hands and feet. When God seems absent in a person’s life, it may be our cue to allow God’s love to flow through us to them.

One of the main reasons people suffer emotionally and physically is because we live in a fallen world (Romans 5:12–19; 1 Corinthians 15:21). Hardship, pain, and suffering originally entered the world by way of Adam and Eve’s sin. Since then, all people have and will sin. Therefore, it is wise to ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and minds and convict us of any wrongdoing so we may confess.

Since we live in a fallen world, Satan and his demons are active and cause havoc. Humanity also suffers when we use our free will to rebel against God or harm others. People can also experience pain when they choose to suffer for another’s good. Think of a mother who forgoes food for her starving child. She suffers hunger and even death so her child will survive.

God did not choose hardship and pain to enter the world, however He knew it would happen because He is all-knowing. God knows the past, present, and future—He is omniscient. Therefore, God knew the possibility of Adam and Eve rebelling when He gave them a free will.

Now that sin and suffering have entered into the world, God uses it in His divine economy to accomplish His purposes. Why did God allow hardship, pain, and suffering to exist or enter our world in the first place? The Bible does not explain why. However, the Bible makes it clear that God is so vastly superior to us, that when given a glimpse of His majesty, “whys” are replaced with praise.

Since God uses hardship, pain, and suffering, we will look at four of the ways He accomplishes His good purposes. First, God uses sufferings to draw people to Himself, second, He uses it in our discipline, third, our suffering can result in testing and spiritual gain and fourth, our suffering is an opportunity to glorify God.

Four Ways God uses Suffering

(1) God uses suffering to draw people to Himself.

When people are in difficult situations they tend to call out to God for help. Even among the non-religious, when facing tragedy, one in five adults will pray according to a survey conducted by ComRes in the UK.⁶ God uses this tendency to draw people to Himself. Some respond, but sadly, not all will turn to God.

Read Amos 4:6–9 and answer questions 36–39:

“I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD. ⁷“I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. ⁸People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD. ⁹“Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, destroying them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me,” declares the LORD. Amos 4:6–9

36. What are things God did to get the Israelites’ attention so they would seek Him (vv. 6–9)?

37. Even through their hunger and thirst, did the Israelites return to the Lord (v. 9b)? Yes No (Underline One)

38. How does knowing the Lord uses suffering to draw people to Himself change your perspective on pain and loss?

39. Has there been a time in your life that you were far from the Lord, tragedy struck, and you earnestly sought Him?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer #36–39 with your discipleship team.

On October 7, 2023, Israel was attacked by Hamas terrorists. Hamas’ goal or charter calls for the destruction of Israel and the establishment of an Islamic society in historic Palestine. After firing 5,000 rockets into southern and central Israel, armed Hamas militants stormed into Israel killing 1,300 and injuring 3,300.

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jan/14/half-of-non-believers-pray-says-poll><(accessed 9/29/2023).

Women were raped, children were killed in front of their parents, parents were killed in front of their children, and babies had their heads cut off. Two hundred hostages have also been taken. This is all happening as I am writing this lesson. This evil is hard to fathom. It certainly puts most of our petty grievances and penchant toward unforgiveness in perspective.

Why, O God, would you allow this to happen? It could be that God is using this tragedy to draw the Israelis to Himself through His Son, Jesus Christ. Being rocked by this evil I have been praying for Israel and hear that God is moving people all over the world to pray.

Satan may be behind this attack as he positions nations against Israel— prophesied for end times (Ezekiel 38:5–6; Revelation 12, 20). God could be using this massacre for a myriad of reasons, both for nations and individuals. God is not limited to using an event or incident for just one purpose.

Our response should be one of faith. We trust God and refuse to blame Him for the evil perpetuated in this world. We also ask what we can do. *Father, what would you have me do in the case of this tragedy?* Ask the Holy Spirit for His help in immediately obeying and completing your assignment.

(2) God uses suffering to discipline His children (believers).

Another form of suffering may come in the form of discipline. Discipline is the active rearing and guiding of someone, usually a child, toward maturity through instruction and the use of punishment for disobedience. God the Father may have to discipline His children to help them mature in holiness and in likeness to Jesus.

Our heavenly Father uses what is necessary to get our attention so that we become like His Son. Sometimes our heavenly Father's teaching is sweet and gentle and other times it may be necessary for Him to dole out harsh consequences. However, God will not use a 2x4 if a feather will do. But even if He uses the 2x4, it is designed for our good.

Read Hebrews 12:5–12 and answer questions 40–47:

And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all.

⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. Hebrews 12:5–12

(See also Deuteronomy 8:5; 2 Samuel 7:14; Proverbs 3:11–12)

Definitions: The Greek word for *rebuke* in Hebrew 12:5 is *elegchomenos* (ἐλεγχόμενος). It is used in an intensified sense meaning to *rebuke*, discipline, and punish. The Greek word also means to disapprove of wrongdoing, reprove, and show fault. The Greek word for *chasten* in verse 6 is *paideuei* (παιδεύει) and is defined in this context as *discipline* with punishment for corrective purposes. The Greek word *paideuei* is used elsewhere in the New Testament where it means bringing up children and guiding them toward maturity; instruct, train, and educate.

40. What is the word of encouragement that addresses you [believers], as a father addresses his son or children (vv. 4–6)?

41. Why might you lose heart (give up; lose courage) when the Lord rebukes and chastens you?

42. State the reason the author of Hebrews gives for not making light (regarding as little value) and not losing heart when the Lord disciplines, rebukes, and chastens you (v. 6)?

43. What are we to remember as we endure (persevere, continue firm) through the hardship of divine discipline (v. 7)?

44. Why does God discipline believers (v. 10b)?

45. Fill in the blanks. *No discipline seems _____ at the time, but _____* (v. 11a).

46. What does painful discipline produce for those trained by it (v. 11b)?

47. In verse 12, the author of Hebrews uses the imagery of strengthening body limbs (hands\arms and knees) to command believers to be strong and steadfast in their faith in light of the previous instruction. How do you strengthen your faith when faced with hardship or discipline?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer #40–47 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—

Day Five
Spiritual Gain

(3) God uses suffering for testing and our spiritual gain.

Testing in the biblical sense, is defined as God's examination or trial as a means to determine the quality of our walk with Christ. Truthfully, we really do not know how we would respond unless we are faced with a particular situation. When we do face difficult situations, rely on the Holy Spirit, and do what is right, we are strengthened in our faith for future battles of challenges.

Definition: The Greek word translated *fiery ordeal* is *purosei* (πυρώσει). Literally, it is defined as the process of burning but figuratively, it refers to suffering sent by God for the spiritual refinement of believers; fiery test; painful suffering. It can also be used with regard to metallurgical refining imagery.

Read 1 Peter 4:12–13 and answer questions 48–50:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12–13

48. Should we expect to be tested (v. 12)? Yes No (Underline One)

49. Read 1 Peter 4:12–13. Why should we rejoice when fiery ordeals come on us (v. 13)?

50. If you have been tested through suffering, please share?

God uses suffering for testing and spiritual gain. No matter the reason we experience suffering, it can culminate in spiritual gain for ourselves and others. Our suffering is temporary but the gain is everlasting.

While it is difficult to think of spiritual gain when we are suffering, it is possible. Jesus faced a vicious scourging and brutal death on the cross for the joy set before Him (Hebrews 12:2). What was that joy? It was the spiritual gain He won for humanity. The joy set before Jesus was that of fulfilling His Father's commission—redeeming humanity.

Read Isaiah 53:3–5 and answer questions 51–52:

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.
Isaiah 53:3–5

51. Who is Isaiah prophesying about?

52. Why do you think Jesus is called the suffering servant?

The Father's will and commission was that Jesus would suffer for a divine purpose. Jesus, *fully God* and fully human, embraced His suffering and divine purpose. We may not know exactly why God allows and uses suffering or our suffering in particular, but we do know that Jesus experienced the worst agony the world has to offer. And He did it for us.

Jesus took our place on the cross and accepted horrific punishment for the sins of the world. He secured heaven for those who trust in Him. Considering Jesus' sacrifice for us, should we not be willing to sacrifice and endure hardship to further God's plans on earth?

(4) God uses suffering to glorify Himself.

But no matter the cause of suffering, Jesus' taught a worthy outcome for it—to glorify God.

Definitions: *Glorify* means to give *glory*, praise, and honor. *Glorifying* God is recognizing God's holy character, His goodness, and tremendous worth. He's the most excellent, the greatest, and unsurpassed Supreme Being. We serve and *glorify* a triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Read John 9:1–3 and answer questions 53–55:

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. John 9:1–3

53. Regarding the man blind from birth, who sinned, the man or his parents (v. 3a)?

54. Why was the man born blind (v. 3b)?

55. How would it help overcome our pain and suffering by focusing on glorifying God?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer #50–55 with your discipleship team.

Our chief aim or primary purpose in life is to glorify God. We were made in God's image to honor and praise Him. By our faith and trust in God we are proving to the world that God is worthy of our love, worship, and reverence no matter how dreadful our circumstances may seem.

Read John 17:1–5 and answer questions 56–60:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: “Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ²For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” John 17:1–5

56. What is the hour that has come (v. 1)?

57. How did God the Father glorify the Son and how did Jesus glorify God (vv. 2–4)?

58. What is eternal life (v. 3)?

59. How did Jesus bring God glory on earth (v. 4)?

60. Did Jesus exist before the world was created (v. 5)? Yes No (Underline One)

At the time of Jesus’ prayer in John 17, He was hours away from His degradation, scourging, and crucifixion. Jesus knew what was coming—the sins of the world emptied into His body. With this immense suffering in sight, Jesus talks openly and intimately with His heavenly Father.

Jesus was not disappointed, nor did He blame God the Father for His approaching rejection, pain, and heartache. Instead, the Father and Son are unified—they are one with each other. They want the same thing—restoration of humanity to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Jesus focuses on His mission of the cross which will glorify both the Father and the Son. The Son is willing to walk this dark and desolate path to restore God’s light to humanity. Both the Father and the Son want people to know God and live with Him forever. Not in a sense of endlessness, but outside of time as God Himself is not restricted to days and hours.

The question of time in heaven is an interesting one. We do not have a definitive answer. Arguments can be made for both for the new earth to be outside of time (2 Peter 3:8; Revelation 24:23, 22:5) and for the new earth to be bound by time (Revelation 6:9–10, 8:1, 22:1–5). Then again, God may create something new, combining time and timelessness. Do not underestimate the creative genius of God.

Through Messiah’s sacrifice, humanity is given the opportunity to have sins forgiven and to be in a loving relationship with God. Believers are given the amazing gift of knowing God and living with Him forever. This gift enables us to recognize God’s holy character, His goodness, and tremendous worth. Our Triune God is the most significant and important Person in the universe. We glorify His holy Name by making Him known.

Action Steps

61. How have you make God known lately?

62. Like Jesus, will you glorify God by completing the work He has given you to do (John 17: 4)? Yes No (Underline One)

63. If you answered yes to #60, ask God if your work is currently in His will or are there other things you should be doing.

64. If you answered no to #60, please explain your answer.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answer #61–64 with your discipleship team.

Suffering, whether through emotional or physical pain is not easy. But our response to God is critical. We respond to God with faith, confidence, and trust in His goodness and justice. No matter the dire circumstances, they are temporary but our future is eternal joy—free from pain.

Not only is our response to suffering critical as disciples of Christ, but it is also critical for us to help other believers in their response to suffering. Encourage them to cling to God, whether or not they know the why of their suffering. Help them to recognize that God understands their pain. The suffering servant has made that clear.

When helping others in their suffering, remember that it is best to listen and offer comfort. They might appreciate an encouraging word from the Lord, but not a sermonette. Put yourself in their situation. How would you like to be treated when you are going through tragic circumstances?

65. Read 1 Peter 4:19. What is the apostle Peter's advice for those who suffer according to God's will?

So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good. 1 Peter 4:19

—End of Day Five and Lesson 8—

Next—Lesson 9: Worship in Christ, Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Rev 5/28/2024