

Series - Facing our Present Troubles
Topic - Perspectives On Suffering

Date - 1-Mar-2020
Speaker - Pastor Ernie Song

CORONAVIRUS “COVID-19” PREVENTION MEASURES

During this period, we recommend all cells to practice the following preventive actions to help prevent the spread of the coronavirus:

1. Minimise Contact. Avoid handshakes and hugs during this period.
2. Deny entry for those with respiratory symptoms such as cough, sore throats and runny nose.
3. Individuals that have come into contact with other individuals who are confirmed cases or suspected cases should not attend cell.
4. Practice good hygiene during cell time.

WELCOME [15 min]

You may want to look up the following websites for *icebreakers* suitable for your cell.

[Ice Breakers 1](#)

[Ice Breakers 2](#)

WORSHIP [15 min]

You may select songs like

1. Blessings (by Laura Story)
2. Living Hope
3. God I Look To You

WORD [45 min]

Spiritual Objectives

At the end of the sermon discussion, cell members will:

1. Understand that suffering does not originate from God;
2. Recognise that God can intervene in our sufferings but depending on His will and nature, He may choose not to intervene to remove the suffering; and
3. Respond in faith and together with our spiritual community, when faced with suffering.

Sermon Summary

The following are the key points of the sermon:

1. Suffering does not originate from God.
2. God may or may not intervene in our specific sufferings.
3. Having the right posture can turn our season of suffering into a season of victory.

Sermon Recap (Full Summary)

Pastor Ernie preached about the perspectives on suffering.

What is suffering? It is commonly associated with loss, pain, affliction and/or sickness. If God is omnipotent and good, why is there evil and suffering? We must beware of false or inaccurate teachings that do not accord with the reality of evil and the Scripture.

What is the origin of suffering? In the account of Genesis 3:15-19, we see that suffering and evil – natural disasters, fractured human relationships, toil and death – in this world is a result of the Fall. They do not originate from God – see Psalm 92:15 and 1 John 1:5. Through God-defying ways of exercising human free will, evils and sufferings result from our sins and the sins of others.

Does God intervene in our suffering? God has intervened in our suffering through Christ – see John 3:16-17 and Revelation 21:1-5. We are living between the CURSE (of the Fall) and the PROMISE (of Christ's return). The Scripture gives us plenty of evidence that God does intervene in our sufferings, for example, Christ healed all that came to Him. Scripture also gives us plenty of evidence that God does not intervene in **all** our sufferings, for example, the Holy Spirit led Paul to Rome to be a martyr in Acts 23:11. In 2 Corinthians 12 and other letters, Paul spoke of a "thorn in the flesh", which was likely to be a physical affliction, that was not removed from him despite him pleading with God.

If God is good, why does He not intervene in our suffering **all** the time? Pastor Ernie shared on the various reasons for this: (a) to remove all suffering is to remove free will; (b) God is not only good, merciful and loving, He is also just and wise; (c) unresolved sin; and (d) self-inflicted suffering.

What is the right posture? We can reflect on the following amid suffering:

- a. What is God doing in this season that He cannot do in other seasons? – 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.
- b. Remember what we are and who God is (that is, created and the Creator) – Job 42:4-6.
- c. Have faith in who God is – Mark 4:38-40.
- d. Ask God, personally or as a community of believers, for divine intervention – James 4:3.

God allows us to ask Him the hard questions. We should seek Him in His Word and lament (which is the honest cry of a hurting heart) with an eternal perspective – see Lamentations 3:19-23. We should get our spiritual community involved – see Proverbs 17:17. Finally, we can ask God for the strength to dance until it rains, meditating on the verses 2 Corinthians 12:9 and Psalm 84:5-6 as we pray for His victory to come!

Pastor Ernie concluded the sermon by praying for the many who are suffering as a result of COVID-19 and its global impact (loss of jobs, pay cut, limited job opportunities for fresh graduates, etc). Christians need to have the right perspective towards this season of suffering so that we can emerge stronger and not bitter.

Discussion Questions

1. **The problem of evil as set out by C.S. Lewis is: “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.” Read Genesis 3:15-19. What is the origin of suffering?**
[15 min]

Leader’s Notes: *A recap question which is essential to the Christian understanding of the problem of evil, pain and suffering. Leaders can get members to recap the main points that Pastor Ernie shared on how suffering and evil entered this world as a result of the Fall:*

- a. *Ground cursed – natural disasters*
- b. *Fractured human relationships – through greed, deceit, pride, etc*
- c. *Toil – physical/mental sufferings and hardships*
- d. *Death – sickness and physical/spiritual death.*

We cannot expect this world to be fully aligned with God’s loving design as a result of the free will of man to choose evil and rebel against God. God is all-knowing, all-powerful and all-loving, and yet He permits suffering. Suffering in this world can be a means of learning and maturing for the Christian, and as preparation of our eternity with Him. God can bring good out of evil (Romans 8:28), and we can trust Him to triumph in victory!

Amid human suffering, it is important for us, Christians, to recognize that the suffering does not originate from God and for us to continue to have faith in God’s power and goodness for man’s only way for salvation and redemption. 1 John 1:5 states that “This is the message we have heard from him (Jesus) and declare to you: God is light; in Him there is no darkness at all.”

Transition (Wrapping Up & Moving To The Next Question)

This question tackles the philosophical and logical aspects posed by the problem of evil and suffering in this world. Armed with the correct understanding of God’s nature with regards to pain in this world, we, as Christians, can be better equipped to confront the issue of God’s continuing role in our suffering.

2. **Read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Pastor Ernie mentioned that this affliction that Paul suffered could be physical and God did not take it away from Paul despite his pleading with God. Share about a time when you are faced with a suffering. When faced with this suffering, what is your response? What can we learn from Paul?** [20 min]

Leader’s Notes: *This is a reflect and relate question. Leaders can get members to discuss what our posture should be when faced with suffering and pain. Suffering has many faces – the Bible is replete with the multi-faceted ways that suffering can come upon us.*

Leaders should give members the time and opportunity to share on their unique experiences and if necessary, by breaking out into smaller groups.

The great test of our faith is when God does not intervene to remove the suffering. Are there times when we are in the same situation? Paul shared God's revelation to him that "My (God's) grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Leaders can ask members to share on what lessons they can learn from Paul's teaching and what Pastor Ernie shared on adopting the right posture.

Further resources can be found at:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/five-truths-about-christian-suffering>
<https://joycemeyer.org/everydayanswers/ea-teachings/why-do-christians-suffer>

Transition (Wrapping Up & Moving To The Next Question)

Leaders can wrap up the discussion of this question by pointing out that as *a spiritual community, it is important for us to come together to remember and have faith in who God is. Leaders can then refer to a current challenges posed by COVID-19 and the economic fallout, as a transition to the next question.*

3. As a result of COVID-19 and the resulting economic impact here and globally, many are suffering. As a Christian community, what should be our response? [10 min]

Leader's Notes: *This is a response question for members to share about the current situation where they or someone they know are facing challenges. The Christian should be sensitive to the following questions even as we ponder our response:*

- a. What is God doing in this season?*
- b. How can we stay faithful amid difficulties?*
- c. What should we ask of God for divine intervention?*

Leaders should get members to share about difficulties that members may be facing or are anxious about. Leaders can encourage members to share by saying "If you are suffering, get your spiritual community to stand with you!" Leaders can then get members to share in groups and pray for each other.

Transition (Wrapping Up, Vision Casting To Cell & Closing The Discussion)

Leaders can encourage members by indicating that Christians need to have the right perspective towards this season of suffering so that we can emerge stronger and not bitter.

WORKS [10 min]

Let's pray:

We will always respond in faith and trust our beloved Heavenly Father when faced with suffering.

Church Vision

"A radiant disciple-making church catalysing Kingdom transformation in our communities and the nations."

Mission

We exist to make disciples who behold Christ and reveal Him.