

Devotional Guide for August 17-23

Life Isn't Fair

Jeremiah 12:1; Psalm 73:1 – 5; 12 – 15

Monday

John 11:21; Job chapters 1, 2; Job 38:2 – 3; Job 42

The question of why there is evil, translated personally, becomes, “Why am I, a relatively good person, suffering; while bad people are prospering?” Theologically the question is: “How can a good, omniscient, and omnipotent God permit suffering?” Sometimes the question is both theological and personal, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” (John 11:21)

Think About It: When did the story of Job occur, and where does it stand chronologically in terms of God’s revelation to man? What does that say about the importance of the message of Job? How might God’s answer to Job’s complaints Job 38:2 – 3) be paraphrased? Why is Job 42 an inseparable part of understanding the problem of evil and suffering? What is the message that underlies Job 42?

Prayer: Lord, help me to trust You when the way is dark and I can’t understand.

Tuesday

Job 35:9 – 11; 36:8, 10, 15, 22

One biblical answer to why God permits suffering is for educational purposes. Sinners are allowed to suffer the consequences of their sin in order to teach them to be repentant. God may also permit suffering that is not a direct consequence of sin, in order to teach the sufferer – for example, to teach the importance of depending on God.

Think About It: When have I experienced difficulty or suffering that I am fairly confident was not a direct consequence of my own sinfulness? What did I learn, or could I have learned, from that experience?

Prayer: Lord, help me to learn to depend on You, in good times and bad.

Wednesday

John 9:1 – 3; 24 – 39; 11:4; Revelation 15:3

God permits some suffering in order that God be glorified through the miraculous deliverance He provides.

Think About It: How long had the blind man been suffering from blindness? In what specific ways did his healing bring glory to God? Besides receiving his sight, what blessings came to the man born blind as a result of his suffering from blindness? How have some difficulties and sufferings I’ve experienced resulted in God being glorified?

Prayer: Lord, please help me to glorify You in all of my life, sufferings and difficulties included.

Thursday

Habakkuk 2:1 – 3; 2 Thessalonians 1:4 – 8; 1 Corinthians 10:13

God permits some suffering as “probationary” in order to provide proof of our faith, and to strengthen our patience while we wait for God’s ultimate justice to be revealed.

Think About It: How has my faith been tested by difficulties and suffering? How have I fared in the testing? 1 Corinthians 10:13 relates to this because the Greek word for “testing” and “temptation” are the same. In light of that, reading “testing” in place of “temptation”, what is the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13 for those who are going through probationary suffering?

Prayer: Lord, thanks for Your strength in the time of testing.

Friday

Hosea 1:2; Ezekiel 24:15 – 25

God permitted some suffering in biblical times in order to provide prophetic revelation. Hosea’s marriage to the prostitute Gomer provided a demonstration of God’s unfailing love for faithless Israel. The sudden death of Ezekiel’s beloved wife was a prophetic picture of the sufferings of the exile.

Think About It: What other examples of prophetic suffering are found in the Bible? Does this kind of suffering, or something like it, still happen today?

Prayer: Lord, thank You for all the ways that You speak Your truth.

Saturday

1 Corinthians 15:3; 1 Peter 3:18; 2 Corinthians 1:3 - 7

God permits sacrificial suffering, which is the suffering of one person as the means of deliverance for others.

Christ's substitutionary atonement is the prime instance of sacrificial suffering, the One who died for all.

Think About It: While no one other than Christ can, or needs to, die in order to provide salvation for someone else, we nevertheless have the privilege of sharing in Christ's sufferings. According to 2 Corinthians 1:3 – 7 how can our suffering be beneficial for others? When have I benefited from the suffering of someone else?

Prayer: Lord, thank You for the privilege of sharing in Your sufferings.

Sunday

Psalms 22:1; Psalm 10:1; Isaiah 59:11

God permits some suffering for which there appears to be no reason; mysterious, apparently unexplainable suffering. Even suffering which can be explained, with hindsight, or in a theological context, may be *experienced* as meaningless and mysterious. Jesus' cry of dereliction, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" had an answer, and Jesus knew it – He was made sin for us, in order that in Him we might become the righteousness of God – but knowing that did not alter His experience of spiritual desolation and physical agony. We know the reason for Job's suffering – the argument between God and Satan – but Job was never told that reason, or any other reason, for his suffering. Instead, God explained Himself to Job. The ultimate answer to the problem of evil – why the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous suffer – is not theological knowledge, but personal knowledge of God Himself.

Think About It: God is omniscient (Job 24:1). How does knowing the only omniscient God help me deal with unexplained suffering? God is just (Jeremiah 12:1). How does knowing the only righteous and just God help me in dealing with life's unfairness? God is Holy (Habakkuk 1:13). How does knowing the only One who is Holy help me grapple with undeserved suffering and persecution? God is good (Psalm 73:1) and love (1 John 4:16). How does knowing the only good and loving God help me when I am in pain or suffering persecution?

Prayer: Lord, may my knowledge of You, and Yours of me, help me to stand firm in the evil day.