

Suffering + Sovereignty

Easter 2020



Easter Mini-Series

April 19	God and Suffering
April 26	God and Sovereignty

"My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long?" (Psalm 6:3)

*"Christian beliefs are not to be stacked in the warehouse of the mind; they are to be handled and applied to the challenges of life and discipleship. Otherwise they are incapable of bringing comfort and stability, godliness and courage, humility and joy, holiness and faith."
(Don Carson, How Long O Lord, 1990, p21).*

Note:

- (1) These studies are "preparation studies" designed to help you do some thinking ("systematic theology"), before the talks on Sundays.
- (2) If you are doing the studies in a Zoom growth group, you'll probably need to pick some shorter focus verses within the longer chapters.

God and Suffering

Part 1: Reflecting on your life

Some questions for your own private reflection.

- When have you experienced suffering, both in your own life and the world around you?
- Have you ever struggled with “the problem of evil” (ie God is all good and all powerful, so why is there evil in the world)?
- When you have suffered, what has given you comfort?

Part 2: Overview of the Bible

We’re going to read some wonderful passages. Each is deep in details. But for this study, our focus is:

- What does each passage teach us about God and suffering?
- Draw what you learn on the timeline below.

Genesis 1-3 (cf 4:1-8, 6:5-8)

Job 1-2, 38-42

Mark 14:32-42 (John 3:16)

Romans 8:18-39

1 Peter 1:3-8

Revelation 21-22



Part 3: Drawing our thoughts together

The following quotes are from *Sickness* by JC Ryle (1816-1900), which is currently available free as an e-book, from Matthias Media:

<https://matthiasmedia.com.au/products/sickness>

- Read each quote and underline the main points.
- Put a question mark next to anything you are not sure about.

Something has come into the world which has dethroned man from his original position, and stripped him of his original privileges. Something has come in, which, like a handful of gravel thrown into the midst of machinery, has marred the perfect order of God's creation. And what is that something? I answer, in one word, it is sin.

The day may come when after a long fight with disease, we shall feel that medicine can do no more, and that nothing remains but to die. Friends will be standing by, unable to help us. Hearing, eyesight, even the power of praying, will be fast failing us. The world and its shadows will be melting beneath our feet. Eternity, with its realities, will be looming large before our minds. What shall support us in that trying hour? What shall enable us to feel, "I fear no evil"? (Psalm 23:4.) Nothing, nothing can do it but close communion with Christ. Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith,—Christ putting His right arm under our heads,—Christ felt to be sitting by our side,—Christ can alone give us the complete victory in the last struggle.

The time is short. The fashion of this world passeth away. A few more sicknesses, and all will be over. A few more funerals, and our own funeral will take place. A few more storms and tossings, and we shall be safe in harbour. We travel towards a world where there is no more sickness,—where parting, and pain, and crying, and mourning, are done with for evermore. Heaven is becoming every year more full, and earth more empty. The friends ahead are becoming more numerous than the friends astern. "Yet a little time and He that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb.10:37.) In His presence shall be fullness of joy. Christ shall wipe away all tears from His people's eyes. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death. But he shall be destroyed. Death himself shall one day die. (Rev. 20:14.)

In the meantime let us live the life of faith in the Son of God. Let us lean all our weight on Christ, and rejoice in the thought that He lives for evermore.

Part 4: Summary

- How would you summarise the Bible's story on God and suffering?
- What type of Christian suffering does the NT most talk about?
(Acts 5:40–42; Phil. 1:27-30; 3:7-11)
- What questions do you still have?

Further reading

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/6-pillars-of-a-christian-view-on-suffering/>

Further watching

Don Carson, How could a good God allow suffering?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cksr6amsDHM>

God and Sovereignty

Part 1: Reflecting on your life

Some questions for your own private reflection.

- Do you every struggle to understand that God is in control of everything (“God is sovereign”)? When?
- How has God’s sovereignty been a comfort to you in the past?

Part 2: Overview of the Bible

What does each passage teach us about God and sovereignty?

Gen 1:1-2:3, 37-50 (see 50:20)

Job 42:1-3

Ps 31, 135

Isaiah 14:24-27, 40:21-26, 46:8-13

Daniel 2:19-23, 4:34-35, 7:13-14 (cf Luke 1:29-33)

Proverbs 16:9, 16:33, 19:21, 21:1, 21:30

Matthew 10:26-31

Mathew 28:18-20, John 1:1-5, 3:35, John 17:1-2, 1 Cor 15:24-27, Eph 1:18-23

Acts 2:22-24 4:27-28, 17:24-28

Part3: Drawing our thoughts together

For each of the following quotes:

- Read each quote and underline the main points.
- Put a question mark next to anything you are not sure about.

Sometimes we need to plunge our minds into the ocean of God's sovereignty. We need to feel the weight of it, like deep and heavy water pressing in against every pore, the deeper we go ... Sometimes we need to be reminded by God himself that there are no limits to his rule. We need to hear from him that he is sovereign over the whole world, and everything that happens in it. We need his own reminder that he is never helpless, never frustrated, never at a loss. We need his assurance that he reigns over ISIS, terrorism, Syria, Russia, China, India, Nigeria, France, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, and the United States of America — every nation, every people, every language, every tribe, every chief, president, king, premier, prime minister, and politician, great or small. Sometimes we need to hear specific statements from God himself about his own authority. We need God's own words. It is the very words of God that have unusual power to settle our nerves, and make us stable, wise, and courageous.

John Piper, 2015, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/plunge-your-mind-into-the-ocean-of-gods-sovereignty>

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Anglicanism describe one aspect of the sovereignty of God viz. 'Of Predestination and Election' as 'full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort'. The view of God presented by the Bible takes from our lives uncertainty and insecurity, for he who is in control of all things is our loving father who works all things for our good. This God who controls everything from the stars (Psalm 147:4) to the sparrow (Matthew 10:29) and whose knowledge is pictured as so detailed that even the hairs on our heads are numbered (Matthew 10:30, 31) is a God upon whom we can learn to rely and in whom we can have complete confidence. There is no detail of our lives too small for his sovereignty; no want too large. It is by coming to know these things about God that we are able to relax in our relationship with him and to serve him without fear. Nowhere is this seen more than in the cross of our Lord and saviour – for if he is for us who can be against us (Romans 8:31-39).

Phillip Jensen, <https://phillipjensen.com/resources/the-sovereignty-of-god/>

Even though Scripture teaches that God controls everything, we should not think of his sovereignty as an impersonal, mechanical determinism. God's sovereign lordship is deeply personal. As Lord, God not only controls everything (efficaciously, universally), but also utters commands, words of life, that graciously govern the ongoing life of his creatures. And as Lord he has made a sovereign commitment to be "with" those who are his. Indeed, God's sovereignty is a broad concept, including all that God is and all that he does, even embracing his love.

John M Frame, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-sovereignty-of-god/>

Part 4: Summary

- How would you summarise the Bible's story on God and sovereignty?
- What mistakes can we make in understanding God's sovereignty?
- What questions do you still have?

Further reading

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/plunge-your-mind-into-the-ocean-of-gods-sovereignty>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-sovereignty-of-god/>

<https://phillipjensen.com/resources/the-sovereignty-of-god/>

<https://phillipjensen.com/resources/the-guiding-god/>

Further watching

John Piper, The Sovereignty of God.

All helpful, including "7 precious truths" from 42:50.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHCfMj9IQ8Y>