

For the month of April I'll be preaching on suffering. Anthony Burton warned me not to, whether for my sake or his, I'm not sure. But he's probably right to assume that if I preach four weeks on suffering, there's going to be some suffering – mine, his, or somebody's.

But it's a subject that I can't get away from. It has preoccupied my thoughts for several weeks and I take that as a cue that maybe the Lord intends for me to talk about it with you. The suffering that I know about in many of your lives also compels me just as your friend and pastor to offer whatever insight I can from the Scripture.

So please open your Bible with me to Rom.11. I'm not going to comment on this passage, but I just want to read it as a starting point because I think it provides a good frame for the picture I want to paint.

Rom.11:33-36 – *“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to Him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”*

Pray with me.

Father, my simple prayer is that you would enable each of us to own that doxology as our personal theology of suffering. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

Here's where I'm going for the next four weeks: there's no such thing as *pointless* evil and suffering. If God allows evil and suffering to exist it's because it serves a purpose. In fact, there's some good that must come of it that could not have come otherwise. And the good that comes is so much more glorious than the evil and suffering was hideous that the evil and suffering itself is not worthy to be compared with it, and will only serve to make our future life and joy infinitely greater.

That's my thesis, I guess you could say.

I will try to prove that with three examples of suffering from the Bible – the suffering of Jesus, Joseph, and Job. And my challenge to you will be this. I will be inviting you to ask this question: Can I see from the suffering of Jesus, Joseph, and Job that none of their suffering was pointless, but indeed all of it was divinely appointed and purposeful, and that the good that came because of the evil and suffering was far greater than the suffering itself. Can I see that? (And I'm going to help you to see that.) And if I can see that in the case of Jesus, Joseph, and Job, then can I have the faith to believe it could also be true in regard to any and all suffering that I endure?

That's where we're going.

In other words, my goal this month is for each of us to grow in our capacity to *trust a God who allows evil and suffering*. Can you trust a God who allows so much evil in the world? Can you trust a God who allows you and those you love to suffer? I believe you can and I believe you must because that's the only God there is. But why would He allow us to suffer? And why should we trust such a God? Those are the kinds of questions we'll be probing.

For this morning, though, I just want to introduce the subject and my thesis with some miscellaneous philosophical considerations. Just to open the can of worms so to speak and maybe provide enough food for thought to get you thinking and raise some questions that hopefully we can answer in the following weeks.

One of the most popular arguments against the existence of God is "the Argument from Evil." The idea behind this argument is that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of God: "there must not be a god, look how much evil there is in the world; if there was a god, such evil would not exist."

In the early 3rd century BC, the Greek philosopher Epicurus formulated the argument like this:

*Either God wants to abolish evil and cannot,
Or he can but does not want to.
Or He cannot and does not want to,*

Or lastly he can and wants to.

If he wants to remove evil and cannot, he is not omnipotent;

If he can, but does not want to, he is not benevolent;

If he neither can nor wants to, he is neither omnipotent nor benevolent;

But if God can abolish evil and wants to, how does evil exist?

Some interesting assumptions underlie that question.

1. *That human beings know what evil is and know that evil is present in our world and know that something is wrong with that.* In other words, to argue that God should not permit evil is to argue that there is such a thing as evil and we know what it is. Where does that moral intuition come from? And why is it valid to argue that so much evil is evidence there is no God, but not equally valid to argue that so much good is evidence there is a God?
2. *That a divine being, if one existed, would naturally be good and have good intentions.* Where does that expectation come from? The very fact that we recognize evil and object to it is evidence that a God of goodness has planted in us the notion of goodness. We're using God's own standards of good, which He has written in our hearts, as an argument against His existence. How ironic.

So the very question which is framed and asked in such a way as to assume it's an open and shut case – "there's evil present, there must not be a

god” – actually affirms Paul’s argument in Rom.1 that natural revelation and conscience alone are enough for us to know that there’s a god and that the existence of evil and our awareness of it serves better to confirm the existence of God than deny it. Our moral objection to evil and suffering is itself an argument for a good God.

Nevertheless, the problem of evil remains a huge hurdle to faith for many people.

In more recent times, David Hume has restated the problem this way: “Is God willing to prevent evil but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? From whence then is evil?”

But what if willing evil or allowing evil is the only way to accomplish the greatest good? What if there’s a supreme and ultimate good that could never be realized apart from the existence of evil and suffering? Then would God be malevolent for allowing evil or would he be malevolent for preventing it? Is a surgeon evil for cutting you with a knife, when cutting you with a knife is the only way to make you whole?

So is the problem that evil exists and therefore God must not, or is the problem that evil exists and we simply can’t see the reason why and perfectly good and infinitely powerful God would allow it?

John Mackie makes this case against God: “If a good and powerful God exists, he would not allow pointless evil, but because there *is* much unjustifiable, pointless evil in the world, the traditional good and powerful God could not exist. Some other god or no god may exist, but not the traditional God.”

(Keller, Reason for God, 23)

Now it seems to me that’s how many people think. But there’s a fatal flaw in that reasoning: how does he know that so much evil is pointless? The premise is faulty. The premise is that if evil and suffering appears pointless *to me*, then it must *be* pointless. “If I can’t see the point, there isn’t one.” But is that valid? Of course not. Just because you can’t see any good reason why God might allow something to happen or decree that something happen doesn’t mean there can’t be any good reason.

Let’s say you go camping at Warm Lake this summer. And at bedtime you decide to go in and make sure everything in the tent is ready. Now if you were looking to make sure there was no **bear** in your tent, it would be fairly easy to check that and you could be reasonably sure even in the dark with only a cheap flashlight that *if you didn’t see a bear there wasn’t one*. But the same could not be said if you were checking for **mosquitoes**. You might not see any, but that wouldn’t make it reasonable to assume that there weren’t any. In the same way, I think it’s equally unreasonable to assume that there could be no good reason for evil and suffering

simply because we can't see it. Perhaps not all the good reasons are as obvious as a bear in the tent?

When you consider the suffering of Jesus, which we'll do next week, you are dealing with the most unjust suffering ever. *The most unjust suffering ever!* And yet how many of us struggle to understand *why* that happened? How many of us are even shocked by it anymore? Why is that? Why is it that we're appalled more by our own suffering than by Jesus' suffering? It's because it's so patently obvious to us why He suffered. It's so patently obvious how His suffering fits within the plan and purpose of God. It's so patently obvious how much good has come of it; good that couldn't have been accomplished otherwise.

When you consider the suffering of Joseph, the purpose and reason is not so clear until the end of the story. Even Joseph didn't understand why all those bad things were happening to him. But in time it became so clear that he could say to his brothers, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." You did evil to me, and God let you because through your evil intentions God was carrying out His good intentions.

In the case of Job, the suffering he endured was also relatively unjust, and the story also has a happy ending, but in his case, the hardest case of the three in my opinion, the good reason behind his suffering was never known to him. How would you

like that? We know what was going on in heaven between God and Satan, but Job never knew.

Now think about those three categories. Jesus' suffering was unjust but the good reason and divine purpose was immediately obvious. Joseph's suffering was unjust but the good reason and divine purpose was not known until much later. Job's suffering was unjust but the good reason and divine purpose was never known.

Likewise in our lives there are *hard* cases of suffering – unjust but immediately beneficial; *harder* cases of suffering – unjust but understandable in time; and the *hardest* cases of suffering – unjust and never fully understood. And God has graciously given us examples of each kind and my hope is that He will use them to comfort us and grow our confidence in Him.

But the point is this: if already, even now, we have the eyes to see that the suffering of Jesus, Joseph, and Job was for good, good that could not have been accomplished otherwise, and we have not only the eyes to see *it*, but the capacity in our hearts to *rejoice and thank God* for it, then who can deny that perhaps in time by grace we may also enjoy the same perspective in regard to our own suffering however unjust or confusing it may now seem? That's my hope anyway.

Now just to seed the clouds of that hope, let me suggest a few good reasons why God might allow

evil and suffering. Three reasons. And I'm not trying to be comprehensive, I know I'm not answering every question, what I say may not even be comforting. But I think these general, big-picture concepts need to be considered if we're going to respond to suffering in a God-honoring way and keep trusting Him when the pain says "curse God and die."

I also think that as Christians we need to formulate an answer to this question and be able to talk about it intelligibly with each other and with non-Christians. I was reminded of that several weeks ago. Laura had a school assignment to write a paper on this very question: "Why does God allow evil and suffering?" And her mom and I were hovering over her right up to the last minute to help her get it done, when it hit me – *"This is only the hardest question in the world, and she's only 13! I don't even know how to answer that question, and I'm 47. Lighten up, it's not that easy!"*

But it's a big hurdle to faith and maybe we don't do enough to help people over that hurdle because we don't really want to stretch our brains that hard. But I think love compels us to care about the questions non-Christians wrestle with, either intellectually: "I *can't* believe there's a God when there's so much evil and suffering;" or emotionally: "I *won't* believe in a God who allows so much evil and suffering." So all of us need to think this through a little bit if not for our own sake then for others.

So what answers have I found hopeful that others might find helpful?

1. God allows evil and suffering as the just and natural consequence of sin and rebellion.

Evil and suffering exist because of sin and rebellion against God. God created everything good but certain creatures rebelled against Him and their sin (which is also our sin) brought evil and suffering into this world. Evil and suffering is the price we're paying for rejecting God and ruining His creation.

That's the first consideration. The first step in coping realistically with the problem of evil and suffering is to recognize its roots in the universal problem of sin. That's the primal cause. It wasn't God's doing, it's not His fault. He said, "*From this tree you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it, you shall die.*" They didn't believe it, they ate, and we've been dying ever since. And their sin wasn't the last one, we continue to sin and rebel against our Maker and we continue to live with the just and natural consequences.

That doesn't mean that every time you suffer it's because of your sin directly. But it means that evil and suffering pervade our world and touch our lives every day because of the sin and rebellion against God that began in the Garden of Eden and continues to this day. We live in a fallen and cursed world. It's broken. This is not how it's supposed to be. But it is, because we chose it, we

chose to rebel against God and go our own way and this is what we have to show for it: chaos and corruption and disease and death and malice and murder and anger and abuse and injustice and immorality everywhere. And the culpability lies at all our feet collectively and at each of our feet individually. And the Bible says *“it is only because of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed.”*

And it’s important to recognize that sin is the problem because that’s the only way toward a solution. If you refuse to accept that sin and rebellion is to blame for the evil and suffering in the world then there’s no hope, but if you embrace the fact that sin and rebellion is the cause, *your* sin and rebellion is the cause, then there’s hope in Jesus Christ who came to reconcile sinners back to God and reverse the curse and restore creation.

Now I’m not saying that this solves every problem as if the best admonition I could give to someone who’s suffering is: *“Stop complaining, you’re getting exactly what you deserve.”* That’s not what I’m saying. But as we face pain and suffering we do well to remember the Bible’s story line and where we are in that story line. We do well to meditate on the price of sin. I think that’s what happened in John 11 when *Jesus wept*. Standing at the tomb of his dear friend Lazarus I think the full weight of it hit Him: “this is what sin has done.” And when we’re suffering or weeping with those who weep, it’s good to let that sink in: “this is what sin has done. God I’m so sorry for the sin in my life and the pain and

misery it has caused and I'm so thankful for your grace to forgive and restore and I so long for the day when you restore all things."

Now the good news is that while the pain of evil and suffering is horrendous, even now there are glimmers of hope.

1. *The amount of suffering isn't nearly proportional to the amount of evil.* We shouldn't marvel that there's so much suffering in the world, but that there's so little compared to the amount of evil in all the sinful creatures in the world – human and demonic. In fact, in the midst of so much evil, we should really marvel that there's so much good. Even in this fallen world we experience far more good than evil and God's mercies to us are new every morning.
2. *A second ray of hope is that all evil and suffering is temporary!* Evil and suffering had a beginning and will have an end. And as the first few chapters of the Bible describe it's beginning, the last few chapters of the Bible describe it's ending: there is coming a new heaven and a new earth (Rev.21:1), where righteousness dwells (2 Pet.3:13), and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain (Rev.21:3-4), and nothing impure will ever enter into it (Rev.21:27).

But between the covers of the Bible is where we live. In fact, you could outline the whole Bible this way:

1. Before sin (Gen.1-2).

2. With sin (Gen.3 – Rev.20).

3. After sin (Rev.21-22).

And we live *with sin* and that's why we live *with evil* and suffering. But not forever.

3. *And third, the brightest beam of hope: God is doing something about evil and suffering.* He is not aloof and indifferent or distant or silent. He is here. He has spoken. He has taken action, sending His own Son as one of us to fix what our sin broke and clean up our mess and restore order and righteousness and beauty and justice. And we can trust Him to be with us and care for us even now in the midst of our suffering.

So God allows evil and suffering as the just and natural consequence of sin and rebellion. But there's a silver lining even in that. In fact, pain and suffering serves a very practical purpose, just as physical pain does: *it alerts us that something is wrong.* Something's wrong with the world, something's wrong with humanity, something's wrong with me.

C.S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Let pain and suffering do that in your life or you've wasted it. Let it be God's megaphone to you. Hear Him. Let pain and suffering alert you to what's wrong, and let it drive you to the One who makes all things right.

2. I would say that **God allows evil and suffering as a means to benefit us spiritually and relationally both with him and with others.**

This is everywhere in the Bible; there are examples on almost every page of God using evil and suffering to teach, train, discipline, grow, humble, save, and sanctify people. Nothing is wasted in God's economy. Every pain is a gain. There are no accidents, only incidents.

When suffering strikes we tend to cry out, "Why?" "Why is this happening to me?" Or more directly, "God, why are you doing this to me?" And we may not always figure out why, but the Bible does provide some "whys," and we do well to know what some of them are.

1. God may be using suffering to chasten us. **Heb.12:10** says, "*God disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness.*" And "*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.*"

Ps.119:67 says, "*Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word.*" Maybe God's using affliction in your life to teach you to obey.

Thomas Watson said "Afflictions are the medicine which God uses to carry off our spiritual diseases. Trials cure the swelling tumor of pride, the fever of lust, and the dropsy of covetousness."

2. God may use suffering to loosen your grip on the things of this world. Paul said of Demas, he deserted the ministry, and possibly the faith, because he loved this present world too much. **1 John 2:15** says, *“Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him.”*

When you dig away the dirt from the roots of a tree, the tree is more easily removed from the earth. Surely sometimes God uses the spade of suffering to dig away all that keeps us clinging to this world.

3. God may be using suffering to keep you humble. Even Paul faced that. In **2 Cor.12:7** he describes his *“thorn in the flesh”* as *“a messenger of Satan sent to buffet me – to keep me from exalting myself.”* And though he asked the Lord three times to remove it, the Lord said *no*, *“My grace is sufficient for you; I want to keep you humble to show that My power is perfected in weakness.”*
4. God may be using suffering to produce perseverance and other virtues essential to the Christian life. In **Rom.5:3**, Paul says, *“We exult in our tribulations, or “we glory in our sufferings” because we know that suffering produces perseverance, and perseverance proven character, and proven character, hope. What a statement! We glory in our sufferings. We cherish suffering. Why? Because Suffering produces spiritual character and maturity that can come no other way.*

Suffering produces perseverance. How will you persevere in the faith if you never suffer? It produces proven character. How will you ever know if your faith is real if it's never tested by suffering? It produces hope. What do you have to hope for if everything in your life is perfect?

5. God uses suffering to make us more compassionate toward others. **2 Cor.1:4** – *“God comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction.”* An example of that? Peter, **Luke 22**: *“Behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have returned again, strengthen your brothers.”*

It might not be the most comforting thing to hear, but one thought that can be held out to a grieving or suffering Christian friend is the prospect of being more fruitful and more useful to others than they could ever have imagined. The vine that bears fruit gets pruned so that it may bear more.

6. God often uses suffering to – in the words of Richard Baxter – unbolt the door of the heart, that the Word hath easier entrance. We can be so busy working, living life, even “serving the Lord,” that we stop reading and reflecting on the Word of God. But suffering comes and makes us desperate for answers, for comfort, for hope, for promises to cling to, and we run back to the Bible and once again, or maybe for the first time, view it as more necessary

than our daily food, more desirable than gold, and sweeter than honey.

How many of you could testify that for years you never understood many of the psalms until you experienced depression, or betrayal, or the death of a spouse? Suffering makes the Scripture meaningful and powerful and precious.

7. We know that God also uses the suffering of His people to spread the gospel and grow the church. Paul says so explicitly in **Philippians 1:12** – *“Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances (he was in jail for preaching Christ) have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel.”* In **vs.14** he adds, *“because of my imprisonment, many have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.”*

Believers who suffer magnify the worth of Christ and show that He is more to be desired than anything we have lost or might lose. And as Christ is magnified the Gospel spreads and the church grows.

8. Ultimately, God is always using suffering to draw us nearer to Him and to conform us to the image of His Son. How could we ever be like Christ if we never suffer? How could we ever be like God if we never experience the pain of rejection or rebellion or ingratitude or dishonor?

Malcolm Muggeridge, whom I always love to quote because I love to say his name, wrote: Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful, with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness... In other words, if it ever were possible to eliminate affliction from our earthly existence by means of some drug or other medical mumbo jumbo...the result would not be to make life delectable, but to make it too banal or trivial to be endurable. This of course is what the cross [of Christ] signifies, and it is the cross more than anything else, that has called me inexorably to Christ.” (Desiring God, 266)

So I say again, there is no pointless suffering. These reasons may not be the reason for your suffering and I don't pretend to know the reason for your particular suffering, but they ought to serve as a wide enough sampling to at least give you hope that what you're going through is not gratuitous suffering or pointless pain. God is doing something, and He doeth all things well.

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
 Of never failing skill
 He treasures up His bright designs
 And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
 The clouds ye so much dread
 Are big with mercy and shall break
 In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
 But trust Him for His grace;
 Behind a frowning providence
 He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
 Unfolding every hour;
 The bud may have a bitter taste,
 But sweet will be the flower.

Blind unbelief is sure to err
 And scan His work in vain;
 God is His own interpreter,
 And He will make it plain.

3. Here's my third answer and really my best one. To the troubling question of why God allows evil and suffering, I answer: **God allows evil and suffering so that His character and glory can be fully seen, known, adored, and enjoyed forever and ever.**

The argument from evil makes the assumption that a perfectly good being would always prevent evil as far as he can. But is that necessarily true? Suppose he had a reason to permit evil, a reason that was compatible with his never doing wrong

and his being perfect in love. Suppose that if he prevented evil completely, then we would miss out on a greater good, a good whose goodness was so great that it far surpassed the badness of evil. In that case, he might not prevent evil as far as he can, for he would have a justifiable reason to permit it.

So maybe allowing evil and suffering does not mean that God is malevolent at all. Maybe it's His benevolence that actually leads to His decree that evil and suffering be part of this world.

If that's possible, then you have to ask, "What good could be so good as to make the badness of evil worthwhile?" What could be that good? What is the greatest good? What is the best thing that could ever happen to you?

The best thing that could ever happen to you is ***for you to know God.***

God is so good and so glorious that to not know Him is to be eternally deprived of happiness. You would miss out on the supreme purpose for why God even created you if you never came to know Him. Thus Paul's passion in Phil.2, "that I may know Him..." And Jesus' affirmation in John 17:3 – "this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

If that's the greatest good, if that's the one thing that alone can make us truly and eternally happy –

knowing God as fully as He can possibly be known in the Person of Jesus Christ – then the existence of evil and suffering is absolutely necessary. Why? Because there are certain things about God that we could never know apart from the existence of evil and suffering. Right? Like what? Grace, mercy, wrath. In a world without evil and suffering present, certain divine attributes would be forever cloaked, hidden from view, never to be revealed so that we could admire them and exult in them.

If knowing God is the highest good any creature can enjoy, then isn't it reasonable that everything about God should be known, that every attribute should be displayed? Otherwise, aren't we robbed, aren't we deprived of a portion of the happiness that would be ours if we knew more of God's glory?

In other words, when you ask the question, "Why does God allow evil and suffering to exist?" you really have to back up one step and ask, "Why does God allow anything to exist?" Why did He create anything at all? He didn't have to. He didn't need to. The triune God existed from all eternity in perfect happiness. Why go to the trouble to create any kind of universe? Was it for entertainment? Are we a game or toy to God? Was it for fulfillment? Does creating something make God more complete? No. He created in order to make Himself known to creatures who could enjoy Him forever. But to do that without creating a world that includes evil and suffering would be to create a

world in which God would not be fully known, and God in all His glory being fully known is the supreme good and highest happiness created beings can know, and the only reason to bother creating in the first place.

It's all about God making Himself in all His glory known. It's about you knowing God. Evil and suffering exist because God wants you to know Him...fully.

God is so glorious and all His attributes are so worthy to be seen and adored that whatever evil and suffering is necessary to put them all on display is worth it and opens the door to our highest happiness because our highest happiness is to know God to the fullest extent that He can possibly be known.

Now just to put your mind at ease, I'm not making this one up. Greater minds than mine have seen it this way. Listen to Jonathan Edwards. He preached a sermon called "Is God Less Glorious Because He Ordained That Evil Be?" And his answer was "No, He's more glorious." Here's his explanation:

It is a proper and excellent thing for infinite glory to shine forth; and for the same reason, it is proper that the shining forth of God's glory should be complete; that is, that all parts of his glory should shine forth, that every beauty should be proportionally effulgent, that the beholder may have a proper notion of God. It is not proper that one glory should be exceedingly manifested, and another not at all. . . .

Thus it is necessary, that God's awful majesty, his authority and dreadful greatness, justice, and holiness, should be manifested. But this could not be, unless sin and punishment had been decreed; so that the shining forth of God's glory would be very imperfect, both because these parts of divine glory would not shine forth as the others do, and also the glory of his goodness, love, and holiness would be faint without them; nay, they could scarcely shine forth at all.

If it were not right that God should decree and permit and punish sin, there could be no manifestation of God's holiness in hatred of sin, or in showing any preference, in his providence, of godliness before it. There would be no manifestation of God's grace or true goodness, if there was no sin to be pardoned, no misery to be saved from. How much happiness soever he bestowed, his goodness would not be so much prized and admired. . . .

So evil is necessary, in order to the highest happiness of the creature, and the completeness of that communication of God, for which he made the world; because the creature's happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and the sense of his love. And if the knowledge of him be imperfect, the happiness of the creature must be proportionally imperfect.

Is that intense or what? I love that, and I encourage you to mull it over until you learn to love it too. Your happiness consists in the knowledge of God, and if the knowledge of him be imperfect, or incomplete, then your happiness must be incomplete. God wants your joy to be full and fullness of joy comes from knowing and seeing God in all His glory.

So what have we learned so far? Let me summarize.

1. The existence of evil and suffering is not evidence *against* God. Denying God's existence doesn't eliminate the problem that evil and suffering still exist. In fact, denying God's existence only creates a bigger problem, namely that there's no hope and no purpose for anything.
2. What may seem like pointless evil or suffering to me, may not be pointless after all, but may in fact be divinely appointed and profoundly important and necessary for the accomplishment of something so good that if I knew it I would happily endure the pain and suffering.
3. There are answers to the question, "Why does God allow evil and suffering?" even if the answers are not complete nor completely satisfying. God doesn't tell us everything we'd like to know, but He has told us everything we need to know to know that He is good, that He is in control, that His purposes are being accomplished.
4. All things working together for your good, and all things working together for God's glory, is the same thing. Your best good *is* the full display of God's glory. Whatever He uses in your life to bring you to know Him and to be satisfied with knowing Him and to love Him as the supreme being whose worth is infinitely greater than anything in the universe – say

“Amen” to it – “Yes, so let it be.” Whatever it takes that I may know Him.

Finally, we cry out for answers, God offers Himself instead. We cry out, “Where is God when it hurts?” Jesus stretches out his arms on the cross and says, “Here I am, come to Me and trust Me.”

Trust him with me.

Let’s pray.

Father, use these days and my feeble attempt to address this subject, if not to comfort those who are presently suffering, to at least supply preventive medicine for those who may soon face a great ordeal of affliction, that their faith would not fail but stand, because their house, even though it may be (like mine!) shot through with holes, is built on rock and not sand.

Open our eyes and enlarge our hearts and deepen our understanding to the point that we can say, “Amen, so let it be” to whatever it takes for us to truly know you and be conformed to Christ. And may we not be afraid of any “whatever it takes” because we know that You love us and that You are gracious and compassionate and full of lovingkindness and You are mindful that we are but dust, and you know how much pain and suffering we can endure and you will never leave us or forsake us or allow us to be tempted beyond what you will make us able to bear. Give us grace to trust you. In Jesus name, Amen.