

# SERMON NOTES

God

Based on the Book by  
**RANDY ALCORN**

IF GOD IS GOOD

PUBLISHED BY MULTNOMAH BOOKS

12265 Oracle Boulevard, Suite 200

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80921

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Published in the United States by WaterBrook Multnomah, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House Inc., New York.

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The publisher gratefully acknowledges Steve Halliday for his collaboration in developing the content for this sermon outline.

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# A GOOD GOD AND A WORLD OF EVIL

Genesis 18:17-33

The central question of *If God Is Good* asks, “If God is good, then why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?” (p. 2). Abraham, the “man of faith” according to the New Testament (Gal. 3:9), long ago asked the question many still ask today: “Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?” Although his question concerned God’s threatened judgment on wicked men, it really extends to God’s rule over all the earth. Even when we do not understand what God has done or what He has allowed, we can still affirm that He always does what is right, for He is eternally good.

## **I. God wants His children to reflect His goodness** (vv. 17-19).

- A. God had the most freedom to bless Abraham when Abraham kept “the way of the Lord” and did “what is right and just”—in other

words, reflect God's character (v. 19).

- B. God had great plans for Abraham that would ultimately benefit the whole world—another reflection of the goodness of His character (v. 18).
- C. God's good character sometimes means that He acts in ways that confuse and puzzle us (since we often mistake "pleasant" for "good")—so God sometimes hides what He plans to do (v. 17; see also Isa. 45:15).

## **II. God takes it seriously when humans fail to reflect His goodness**

(vv. 20-21).

- A. The Lord is never unaware of human evil (v. 20).
- B. The Lord will always personally and accurately judge the level of human evil (v. 21).

## **III. The goodness of God means that He always judges justly**

(vv. 22-33).

- A. Abraham reflected the goodness and justice of God in his pleas for Sodom.
- B. God displayed His goodness and justice in hearing Abraham's pleas.
- C. God's justice and goodness never oppose one another; He is good when He judges, and His judgments are always good. The answer to Abraham's question—"Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (v. 25)—is always "yes."

## **Conclusion:**

Whether God acts in judgment or temporarily refrains from judging; whether He allows some catastrophe or prevents it—He always does good. We may not understand what He does, or even agree with His actions, but Abraham is right: the Judge of all the earth will do right. Always. Knowing this can give us comfort even in the most difficult of times.

Related material from the book:

- Hume's questions about God (p. 18)
- Theodicy (p. 40)
- Inwagen quote (p. 9)
- Greg Laurie story (p. 9)
- Bethany Hamilton/shark victim story (p. 13)
- Pastor Boice story (p. 15)
- A mother's scarred arms story (p. 22)
- Lt. Col. Birdwell story (p. 42)

# SHAKEN AND STIRRED

## **The faith that can't be shaken is the faith that has been shaken**

1 Peter 1:6-7

In a day when faith in Christ seems increasingly under attack—from hard-core atheists such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens to “evangelicals” turned skeptics such as Bart Ehrman (*If God Is Good*, chapter 11, p. 95ff)—what can we do to build a strong, lasting faith? To make the question more personal: Do you want a faith that can't be shaken? Do you want to persevere in your faith and remain standing strong when others around you lie flat and quivering on the ground? The good news is, you can have such a faith. But it comes at a steep price—although in the end, the price will seem a bargain.

In other words, the Bible does not offer us an easy faith that won't hold up under fire. Rather, it offers us a robust faith with the ability

to thrive and grow whatever the climate. Paradoxically, it turns out that a faith that can't be shaken is one that has been shaken... and in the process stirred (*If God Is Good*, p. 4).

## **I. Something to shout about** (v. 6a)

A. We “greatly rejoice” in the salvation, deliverance, and inheritance we have in God through our faith in Christ (vv. 3-5).

- “Greatly rejoice” = Gk. *agalliasithe*, present indicative, “jubilant and thankful exultation” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 12., 1 Peter, Edwin A. Blum, pp. 220-221)
- The Christian life is essentially a celebratory life; great joy lies at its core. Such deep gladness should show up on our faces and in our actions. But this does not mean that believers participate in one long, uninterrupted laugh track.

## **II. Something to sigh about** (v. 6b)

A. Suffering, grief, and hardships in many forms are part of the Christian’s experience of life in this age.

- As difficult as these things can be, they last only “a little while.”
- To live well in this life, we have to take the long

view; focusing only on life's difficulties results in spiritual myopia, which leads to sorrow, not joy.

### **III. Something to get serious about** (v. 7a)

- A. Painful trials come, in part, to test the genuineness of our faith.
- Severe trials can seem like we're in a blast furnace. Fire can purify or destroy: it depends on the substance in the fire.
  - God has a purpose in sending or allowing trials into your life, even the most severe trials (see Job 23:10).
  - Even refined gold will one day perish; but genuine faith never will, regardless of the heat it has to endure.
  - Genuine faith is worth more to God (and ultimately to us) than anything considered priceless on this earth.

### **IV. Something to sing about** (v. 7b)

- A. Genuine faith endures, in part, by looking ahead; it keeps a stubborn eternal perspective (see Job 13:15; 19:25-27).

Genuine faith, proven real through suffering, results in:

- Praise
- Glory
- Honor

All three results refer both to God and to the tested believer.

## Conclusion

There is only one way to build a solid, persevering, joyful faith: through the path of suffering, sometimes intense suffering. The price seldom seems worthwhile during the pain, but we will be eternally thankful for it after it serves its function as a purifying force (see Hebrews 12:11). As the psalmist says, “weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5, NIV).

Related material from the book:

- Alice Gray story (p. 4, 5)
- Bethany Hamilton/shark victim story (p. 13)
- Mabel story (pp. 124-125)
- Randy Alcorn story (pp. 172-173)
- David O’Brien story (pp. 232-234)
- B.B. Warfield and wife story (pp. 235-236)

# THE PROBLEM YOU CAN'T AFFORD TO IGNORE

1 Thessalonians 3:1-8

From the very beginning, suffering, pain, and persecution have raised doubts about the legitimacy, reality, and possibility of faith in a good God. If we don't face those doubts head-on with both honesty and courage, we are setting ourselves up for a different and far worse kind of pain later on. We can't afford to ignore the problem of evil and suffering.

The apostle Paul spent only a short time in Thessalonica before he had to flee the city. He left behind a small church of brand-new believers who immediately faced painful opposition to their faith. Therefore Paul immediately took action to address their suffering, knowing that otherwise his evangelistic efforts might come to nothing.

## **I. The urgency of the question** (vv. 1, 5)

- A. Paul had a deep concern for the Thessalonian believers (see also 1:2; 2:8, 11-12, 17-19).
- B. The Thessalonians faced severe suffering (see also 1:6; 2:2, 14).
- C. Paul feared that the Thessalonians' suffering might overwhelm their faith (v. 5).
  - It is wise to ask suffering believers direct questions about their faith, and discuss the struggles they may be enduring.

## **II. The response to the question** (v. 2)

- A. Paul took action to counter the threat:
  - He sent a personal representative, Timothy, to “strengthen” and “encourage” the Thessalonians in their faith.
  - He wrote two short letters to instruct the Thessalonians in their faith, especially about the reality of suffering and how to deal with it (so that it would not “unsettle” them).

## **III. The inevitability of the question** (vv. 3, 4)

- A. Suffering, especially suffering for one's faith, is guaranteed (see also Jas. 1:2-4; Heb. 10:32-39; 1 Pet. 4:12-19).
- B. Part of dealing successfully with suffering is to recognize it will come; dodging the question or hiding from it will not make it go away.

#### **IV. The resolution of the question** (vv. 6-8)

- A. Celebrate a suffering believer's faith and love in Christ (v. 6a).
- B. Recall the goodness of God and past experiences of His grace and mercy, especially in relationships (v. 6b).
- C. Tell suffering believers how much they and their faith mean to you personally (v. 7).
- D. Encourage suffering believers to stand firm in the Lord, and offer all available support (v. 8).

#### **Conclusion**

Just because we don't have all the answers to why people suffer, doesn't mean we have none, and certainly it doesn't mean we shouldn't prepare ourselves for the suffering that will inevitably come our way. God intends to use our suffering to prune us (Jn. 15:1-2; Heb. 12:11) and make us more productive, joyful followers of Christ. Part of our job is to prepare for the pain and cooperate with God in the process, for His glory and our benefit.

Related material from the book:

- The problem of pain is the problem (p. 11)
- Be prepared for the question when it comes (p. 14)
- Scuba diving illustration about preparation (p. 39)
- Case study of Bart Ehrman (pp. 95-106)
- The importance of having a theology of suffering (pp. 490-491)



# A FAITH WORTH LOSING

2 Kings 6:24-33

Randy writes, “a faith that leaves us unprepared for suffering is a false faith that deserves to be lost” (p. 12). Genuine faith is not so much a hot air balloon that lifts us out of all troubles, as it is a shield to protect us in the midst of troubles, keeping us alive. Just as great financial prosperity offers no clear evidence of God’s blessing (drug kingpins are fabulously wealthy), so acute suffering offers no clear proof of God’s judgment or lack of love (think of Job). Jesus says that God causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and unrighteous (Mt. 5:45). False faith can “look” like the real thing... until great suffering stampedes into the picture (see Mt. 13:5-6, 20-21). Such suffering can reveal, like nothing else can, the difference between genuine and counterfeit faith.

## **I. We live in a world where unimaginable suffering exists**

(vv. 24-25).

A. Sometimes the suffering is caused by wicked human activity.

- Examples: Cambodia (pp. 132-133), Nazi Germany (pp. 127-128)

B. Sometimes the suffering comes by accident.

- Examples: Willis family (pp. 103-104), Greg Laurie's son (p. 9)

C. Sometimes the suffering comes by sickness or natural catastrophe.

- Examples: Boice (p. 15), tsunami (p. 84)

D. The world groans (Rom. 8:22-23).

## **II. Human suffering can prompt deep emotional upheavals in us**

(vv. 26-30a).

A. The king of Israel felt genuine anguish for his suffering people.

- He wanted to help, but didn't see how he could
- He wanted to know more about the suffering
- By tearing his robes, the king showed his deep emotional turmoil.

## **III. Acute suffering can expose the difference between true and false faith** (vv. 27, 30-32).

A. To a certain point, the king looked like a man of faith.

- He spoke of God (v. 27).

- He participated in customary religious ritual (v. 30).
  - He took an oath in God’s name (v. 31a).
- B. The king’s response to suffering finally revealed his true spiritual state.
- He lashed out at God’s genuine representative (v. 31b).
  - He took action against God’s genuine representative and became a “murderer” (v. 32, see also Mt. 5:21-22).

#### **IV. A false faith blames God and refuses to wait for him to act**

(v. 33).

- A. The king blamed God for the disaster—not his own corrupt regime.
- B. An unwillingness to wait for God reveals a refusal to trust God (see Isa. 64:4).

#### **Conclusion**

It’s easy for us to roll our eyes at the king of Israel and condemn him for a false faith—but how do we respond when severe suffering hits us? Do we blame God? Accuse him? Abandon him? Or do we consider the suffering a test to reveal the quality of our faith (see 1 Pet. 1:6-7)? Do we commit ourselves to a faithful creator and continue to do good (1 Pet. 4:19), allowing him to use the suffering to prune us and mold us into the likeness of Christ?

Are we willing to wait for God to act in mercy and grace, even at our darkest hour? If only the king had read 2 Kings 7, he would have known God was about to miraculously move in power! But of course, he couldn't; it wasn't written yet. He had to live by faith . . . just as we do.

Related material from the book:

- Bethany Hamilton/shark attack victim story (p. 13)
- A mother's scarred arms story (pp. 22-23)
- Emmanuel Ndikumana story (p. 380)
- Allen Gardner story (p. 174)
- David O'Brien story (p. 232)
- Lee Ezell story (p. 353)
- Nancy Guthrie story (p. 365)

# WHAT'S SO BAD ABOUT SIN?

Romans 7:11-13

One of the biggest reasons why we struggle so deeply with the amount and depth of evil in our world is that we hardly ever struggle deeply with the pervasiveness and depth of our own sin. We tend to think of sin as a simple mistake, a slight error, a momentary departure from our good natures—certainly not a reflection of the catastrophic evil that rules every unredeemed heart and that remains at war with every redeemed soul. The Bible has a very different take on human sin. It sees it not as an aberration, but as a rule; not as a minor fault, but as a world-ruining cataclysm; not as something to be excused, but as something to be eradicated; not as an accidental slip-up worthy of human acceptance, but as a deadly disease requiring a divine cure. In order to better understand and deal with evil in the world, we first must come to better grips with the evil in our own hearts. In Romans 7:11-13 the apostle

Paul describes the utter horror of sin by showing how it brought death to humankind through the good gift of the divine law.

## **I. Sin deceives** (v. 11).

A. The nature of sin is to deceive, to direct attention away from the truth (see 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14). It deceives in several ways, among them:

- “This won’t hurt you; just try it.” (see Gen. 3:4)
- “People do a lot of things that are far worse.” (see 1 Cor. 10:12)
- “If it makes you happy, it must be from God.”
- “God will forgive you.”

B. Satan traffics in sin, and he does so successfully because he’s an accomplished liar (see Jn. 8:44).

## **II. Sin kills** (v. 11).

A. If sin separates the sinner from a holy God, and God is the author and giver of life, then sin separates sinners from life. It kills in several ways:

- Physically
- Spiritually
- Emotionally
- Relationally

- Socially
- Culturally

B. Satan, who traffics in sin, is a murderer as well as a liar (see Jn. 8:44). He kills through his lies.

### III. Sin disguises itself (v. 13).

- A. It's not always easy to recognize sin for what it is (see Packer quote, p. 63).
- B. Satan and his demonic associates often appear as angels of light and ministers of righteousness (see 2 Cor. 11:14-15).
- C. The only practical way we have of identifying sin is by evaluating *everything* by God's Word, which is truth (see Jn. 17:17). God has the right to call something sin; we have the responsibility to obey him.

### IV. Sin utterly corrupts (v. 13).

- A. A sin habit is like a methamphetamine habit; it gets progressively worse and leads to destruction. In the end—not always at the beginning—it shows its utter corruption.
- Paul shows the utter evil of sin by demonstrating that it uses something totally good—God's law, which reflects his perfect and holy character—to kill (see C.S. Lewis quote, p. 64).

- B. God may choose to use catastrophes and tragedies, whether calamities of human or natural origins, to awaken us to our perilous condition (see Lk. 13:1-5).

## **Conclusion**

Contrary to Rabbi Harold Kushner, from a biblical perspective there are no “good people” to whom bad things happen (see Alcorn p. 71). That fact points to the wonder of God’s grace and the boundlessness of his love, that he would send his Son to die for people like us, utterly steeped in sin (see Rom. 5:8).

Related material from the book:

- John Newton story (pp. 62, 63)
- Westley Allen Dodd story (pp. 75, 76)
- Humans are evil (p. 72)
- Jews left to die at hands of Nazis (p. 75)
- Texts on sin (pp. 63, 64)
- Sin as an outrageous offense against God (pp. 64, 65)
- Focus on God’s standards and the atonement (pp. 65, 66)
- Sin is also what we fail to do (pp. 74, 75)
- We differ from one another in the degree of our sin, not in its kind (pp. 75, 76)
- A denial of human evil keeps people from the gospel (pp. 76, 77)
- Believers are also prone to sin (pp. 77, 78)
- The more we grasp the true nature of sin, the more we appreciate God’s grace (pp. 78, 79)
- The need to recover the lost art of blaming ourselves (p. 82)

# JESUS: THE ONLY ANSWER BIGGER THAN THE QUESTION

Revelation 7:17

When people in our world see the horrors of suffering and evil all around them, they often ask accusingly, “Why didn’t God do something about that?” But in asking the question, they either overlook or ignore the fact that God *did* do something about it, and far more than we had any right to expect: He sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross on our behalf. God allowed Jesus’ temporary suffering in order to prevent our eternal suffering. The best answer to the problem of evil and suffering is not a philosophy, but a Person; not mere words, but the Word Himself, Jesus Christ.

## **I. The Lamb who is the Lord.**

A. Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who has triumphed

over sin and death (Rev. 5:5). He is worthy in a way no one else is or ever will be (Rev. 5:1-4).

B. Jesus is the Lamb who was slain for our sin (Rev. 5:6, 9-10).

C. Jesus is God himself, sitting at the right hand of God the Father's heavenly throne (Heb. 12:2, Rev. 5:6; 7:17).

- The cross was God's plan from the beginning (see Gen. 3:15; Rev. 13:8).
- Jesus, as the Lamb, is the perfect intermediary between sinful man and a holy God (see 1 Tim. 2:5).
- Jesus voluntarily laid down his life for us (see Jn. 10:17-18; Isa. 52:13—53:12) to bring us to God (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

## **II. The Lamb who is a Shepherd.**

A. Jesus leads his flock to whatever they need (Ps. 23).

B. Jesus provides great care for his flock (see Is. 40:11; Jn. 10:1-39).

C. Jesus humbly serves his flock (see Phil. 2:7-8).

- Jesus is and always will be the Good, Great, and Chief Shepherd (Jn. 10:11; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4).

## **III. The Lamb of God who is our Comforter.**

A. The Triune God not only sees and empathizes with our pain—he will ultimately wipe it all away (see Isa. 25:8; Rev. 21:4).

- Jesus is our High Priest who knows exactly what we have to endure (see Heb. 4:15).
- Jesus knows the pain of feeling forsaken (see Ps. 22:1, cf. Mt. 27:46).

## **Conclusion**

No merely intellectual argument can answer our questions about evil and pain; the only adequate answer is Jesus himself, the Lamb slain from the creation of the world. So we are told to fix our eyes on him (see Heb. 12:2-3) and to taste and see for ourselves what kind of Friend, Savior and Lord he is. Why didn't God do something about evil and suffering? *What more could we possibly have expected Him to do?* Jesus himself is the only answer bigger than the question.

Related material from the book:

- Nazi prison camp stories (pp. 210-211)
- Randy & Kevin Butler story (p. 212)
- Tim Keller quotes (pp. 212, 218)
- John Stott quote (p. 217)
- Chapter 21 (pp. 206-220)



# TURNABOUT IS GOD'S PLAY

Genesis 50:20

The Old Testament account of the patriarch Joseph clearly demonstrates God's ability to take evil—any and all evil—and use it for good. His story should remind us that whatever happens, however difficult or tragic or cruel, God has the wisdom and the power to use those events for his purposes and for the benefit of his people and the glory of his name. None of us is clever enough to see what God may be accomplishing even in the worst of situations—so it always makes sense to trust him. As the old saying goes, “Don't doubt in the darkness what God has shown you in the light.”

## **I. Human evil causes human suffering—for the godly and the ungodly alike.**

A. Joseph suffered unjustly through his brothers' treachery; first

as a prisoner in a dry well, then as a commodity to be sold, then as an Egyptian slave (see Gen. 37:3-4, 12-28, 36).

B. Jacob suffered emotionally because of his sons' jealousy (see Gen. 37:31-35; 42:36, 38).

C. Joseph's brothers suffered persistent guilt because of their sin (see Gen. 42:21-22).

## **II. In this fallen world, bad things often give way to worse things.**

A. Just when things seemed to be looking up for Joseph, evil struck again, and he wound up unjustly in prison (see Gen. 39:6-20).

B. Joseph spent over two years in prison when a man he'd helped forgot his promise to return the favor (see Gen. 40—41:13).

- The presence of hardship does not mean the absence of God (see Gen. 39:2, 23).

## **III. Despite our pain, God often seems silent and motionless.**

A. Two years passed between Genesis 40 and 41, during which time Joseph stays in prison. No angel appears to him; he gets no word from heaven. Just silence (see Isa. 45:15; 42:14; Ps. 109:1; Mt. 15:23).

- The absence of a visible or audible response from God to

our cries for help does not mean the presence of divine indifference.

#### **IV. God loves to take tragedy and turn it into blessing.**

A. At just the right time, God acted—and everyone benefited: Joseph, his brothers, his father, the Egyptians. And God received praise.

- Gen. 50:20 is a description of a typical divine turnabout. What wicked men or even the devil himself means for evil, God can and does use for our good and his glory (see Rom. 8:28).

### **Conclusion**

Illustration: the Staines family, pp. 436-437. (cf. 2 Cor. 4:17)

Related material from the book:

- Chapter 27 (pp. 282-290)
- Chapters 37—41 (pp. 392-445)



# HOW LONG, O LORD?

Psalm 6:3

When we find ourselves trapped for an extended period in some painful and apparently meaningless difficulty, it's easy to give in to hopelessness on the one hand or bitterness on the other. *Why doesn't God act?* we wonder. *What's taking him so long? Doesn't he care? Can't he see this is destroying me?* Sooner or later, all of us have to deal with protracted suffering of one kind or another. It seems to make no sense. It appears to have no end. And God doesn't seem the least bit interested in lifting a finger to help. And so we cry out, along with the psalmist, "How long, O Lord?"

What should we do as we wait for a heavenly response? Where can we turn for encouragement and comfort? When we find ourselves in God's waiting room, eager for answers, how should we conduct ourselves...as the clock keeps ticking?

## **I. Ask the question.**

- A. It is no sin to ask the Lord, “How long?” Lots of godly people in the Bible asked the question (see Ps. 13:1-2; 35:17; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; Isa. 6:11; Hab. 1:2; Zech. 1:12; Rev. 6:10).
- B. We are to ask such questions with humility, not arrogance. We ask them to express our confusion and hurt, not our insolence and presumption (cf. Mt. 26:39-45).
- C. We must remember that God owes us no answers, and some answers he may never give because they lie beyond our understanding (see Deut. 29:29).

## **II. While you wait for an answer, continue to do good.**

- A. Look for ways to live out 1 Peter 4:19.
- B. Serving others in the midst of your own pain can yield a powerful witness (see Heb. 13:12-16).
- C. Doing good despite your suffering keeps you from growing weary in the battle (see Gal. 6:9-10, Heb. 12:1-16).

## **III. Remember that God also asks the question, “How long?”**

- A. God seems to ask the question of us as much or even more than we ask the question of him (see Ex. 10:3; 16:28; Num. 14:11, 27; 1 Sam. 16:1; 1 Kings 18:21; Ps. 4:2; 82:2; Prov. 1:22; Jer. 13:27; Hos. 8:5; Mt. 17:17; Lk. 9:41).

- B. As you ask God, “How long?” listen for his voice asking you the same question.
- C. What stops you from answering God’s “How long”?

#### **IV. Turn your waiting time into a faith-building time.**

- A. There is a strong connection between waiting patiently for God and building trust in God (see Job 14:14; Lam. 3:24-26; Hab. 3:16-19).
- B. Waiting on God doesn’t mean laziness (see Heb. 11).
- C. Waiting on God translates to loving God (Isa. 64:4 cf. 1 Cor. 2:9).

#### **Conclusion**

If you are asking God, “How long, O Lord?” realize you’re not alone. Through the centuries, that has been a common cry of God’s people. God understands and appreciates your anguish; it was He, after all, who put Proverbs 13:12 into the Bible: “Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.” He may or may not answer your question; but in the meanwhile, he asks you to trust him, to wait in hope (see Ps. 33:20-22). He may well be accomplishing more in your life than you can see or know.

Related material from the book:

- The problem of evil (pp. 20-23)
- Chapter 44 (pp. 469-478)
- Jerry Hardin illustration (pp. 492-493)

# FINDING HELP IN DARK TIMES

Various texts

When we suffer, often it is not answers we seek so much as comfort and help. Where do we turn for support and relief in dark times? What can give us comfort? How can we learn to partner with God in these difficult times to strengthen our faith and not sabotage it? And beyond finding help for ourselves in suffering, how can we go beyond ourselves to offer help and encouragement to others who have their own stories of suffering and hurt? *If God Is Good* suggests several ways to approach these questions.

## **I. Find comfort in God's promises.**

- A. Evil is temporary; God's goodness and our joy will last eternally (Ps. 13:5-6; Heb. 12:2-3).
- B. God promises not to replace our grief with joy, but to turn it into joy (Jn. 16:20-22; Rom. 8:22).

- C. God pledges to be with us while we endure life's greatest heartaches (Isa. 43:2; Heb. 13:5).

## **II. Look forward to God's rewards.**

- A. A proper response to suffering brings eternal reward (Heb. 11:25-26; 1 Cor. 9:24; 2 Tim. 2:3-7; Lk. 6:23).
- B. Suffering now can bring greater capacity for joy in heaven (2 Cor. 4:16-18; Mt. 5:11-12).
- C. God will never forget our faithfulness in suffering (Ps. 56:8; Rev. 21:4).
- D. God's rewards are eternal (Mt. 6:19-21).

## **III. Know that suffering will one day end.**

- A. Suffering is not forever (Ps. 30:5; 2 Cor. 4:17).
- B. God will eternally banish evil and suffering (Rev. 21:4, 27; 22:14-15).
- C. Suffering here and now cannot compare with glory there and then (Rom. 8:18).

## **IV. Remember that prayer lightens the load.**

- A. Humbly accepting God's will brings peace (James 4:7).
- B. Praying in light of God's sovereign grace and unfailing life brings peace (Phil. 4:4-7).

- C. God hears the prayers of the afflicted and will strengthen their hearts (Ps. 10:17).
- D. Ask God to use your suffering for his glory (1 Pet. 4:1-2).

**V. Learn to give as well as receive help and comfort.**

- A. Words are not always necessary, but caring hearts are always welcome (Job 2:11-13; Eph. 4:32).
- B. Don't avoid those who need you more than ever (Rom. 12:15).
- C. Help the dying to come to terms with death and to seek dying grace (Mt. 16:21-23).

**Conclusion**

Scripture gives us many reasons to find hope in dark days. No one has to go through suffering alone; God provides not only his special presence for the journey, but also has provided his people to be companions along the way. Those who suffer tend to move toward increasing isolation, when God knows they need exactly the opposite. Hebrews 10:24-25 is not merely an exhortation toward church attendance; it's a challenge to the church in tough times.

Related material from the book:

- Heaven (pp. 293-306)
- Grief and weeping are godly (pp. 366, 367)
- Ask for help (p. 367; pp. 397-401)
- Chapters 42—43 (pp. 449-468)



# ENLIGHTENED LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Psalm 39:4-7

Everyone dies: the rich, the poor; the happy, the sad; the powerful, the weak; the famous, the unknown; the educated, the ignorant; the religious, the secular. As Randy says, there are no 150-year-old faith healers. We can try to ignore death or deny it, but we can't avoid it. So it makes sense to take steps *now* to prepare for that inevitable day when we will step out of this life and into the next. Fortunately, Scripture says a great deal about living wisely in death's shadow.

Followers of Christ do not have to fear death, because regardless of their circumstances, their confidence is in the One who promises them: *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future”* (Jer. 29:11).

## **I. Wise believers ponder their own death.**

- A. Death is certain (Heb. 9:27).
- B. “Ponder” doesn’t mean “obsess over” (Ps. 39:4-7).
- C. You live better today by giving thought to your death tomorrow (Ps. 90:10, 12).

## **II. Death isn’t the worst that can happen to a believer; it leads to the best.**

- A. A believer’s death is “precious” to God (Ps. 116:15).
- B. Being with Christ is “far better” (Phil. 1:23).
- C. The worst here cannot be compared to the best there (Rom. 8:18).

## **III. Christ transforms the death of every believer.**

- A. Grief, yes; hopelessness, no (1 Thess. 4:13; 2 Pet. 3:13).
- B. The promise of God overshadows everything (Rev. 21:4).
- C. Through Christ we become heirs of God’s eternal kingdom (Rom. 8:17).

## **IV. Use every day of your life to prepare for your death.**

- A. Take to heart the reality of your own death (Eccl. 7:2).
- B. Knowing the reality of your death should change the way you live and plan for life (Jas. 4:13-16) (see Matthew Henry quote, (p. 483).

## **V. Remember that God remains sovereign even over death.**

- A. God has numbered your days (Job 14:5; Ps. 39:4; 139:16).
- B. There are no “accidents” with God (Jn. 7:30; 8:20; 13:1).
- C. Aim to glorify God through your death (Jn. 21:19).

## **Conclusion**

Stephenie Saint’s death, p. 484.

Related material from the book:

- Chapter 45 (pp. 479-485)
- Death is loss vs. death is gain (p. 490)

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

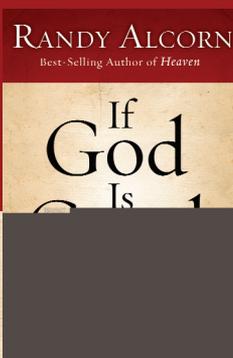


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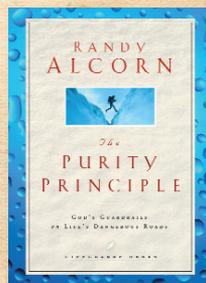
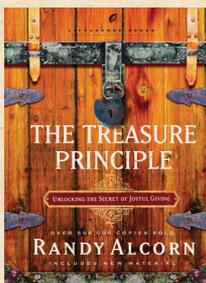
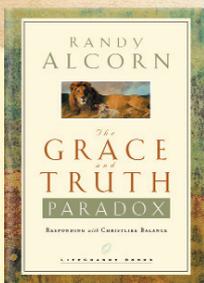
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