

Trusting God in Adversity





Introduction

During the first eight lectures of our current series, *Trusting God in Adversity*, it has been my intention to demonstrate from Scripture that trials, difficulties, illnesses, pain, and loss – suffering in general - are not unusual in this life but are the consequences of Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden of Eden. Sin changed everything, so that now the whole creation eagerly waits for its redemption through Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:19). Yet we have hope, because God has graciously provided us with His own self-revelation in the sixty-six books of the Bible about who we are, why we are here, why we suffer, and what the future holds for all who have entered into a personal relationship with Jesus by grace through faith. The coming consummation will change everything.



Introduction

In the meantime, we struggle and hurt. We grieve and long for relief and a better life in the now. Philosopher Peter Kreeft of Boston College has reminded us that “this world is a ‘vale of tears,’ and all our technological genius has not been able to dry our tears....The point of our lives in this world is not comfort, security, or even happiness, but training; not fulfillment but preparation. It’s a lousy home, but it’s a fine gymnasium.” This being the case, we asked the Holy Spirit to help us build a strong biblical foundation to help us live under the Sovereign Lordship of Christ and to learn how to honor and serve Him – no matter the cost. The task before us now is to further search the Word in order that we might prepare ourselves for the rest of our lives.

A Biblical Foundation for Trusting God

1: The Reality of Suffering

2: The Problem of Evil

3: Is God Really in Control?

4: Do All Things Work Together
for Good?

5: The Extent of God's Providence

6: Does God Cause or Permit?

The Quest For Wisdom In Adversity

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials; knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. **But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.** But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (James 1:2-8).

John Calvin's Commentary on James 1:5



John Calvin
1509-1564

“Our reason, and indeed all our senses, find it strange that we should think ourselves blessed in time of woe, and so we are told to ask the Lord to bring us this wisdom.”

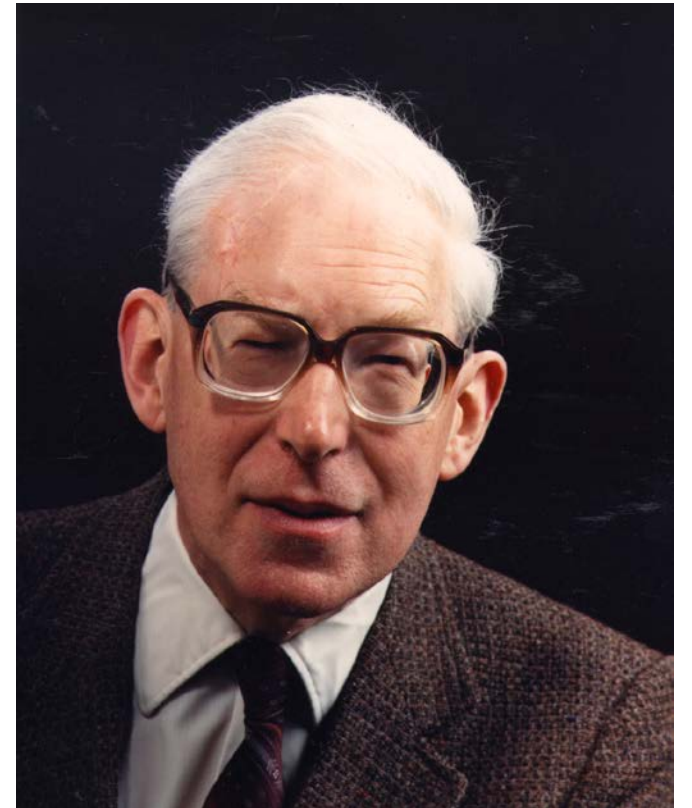


Why Trials?

- We must be brought to “complete self-distrust” (Packer).
- God wants “to stamp the required sense of impotent helplessness indelibly and decisively” on our souls (Packer).
- To teach us to submit to Him and trust Him.
- God uses sustained hardship to teach us lessons (Packer).
- To fulfill a double purpose: our sanctification and preparation for our calling and appointed ministry.
- For God’s ultimate glory and our good.

What Is God Doing?

“The same wisdom which ordered the paths which God’s saints trod in Bible times orders the Christian’s life today. We should not, therefore, be too taken aback when unexpected and upsetting and discouraging things happen to us now. What do they mean? Why, simply that God in His wisdom means to make something of us which we have not attained yet, and is dealing with us accordingly.”



J.I. Packer

1926 -



What Is Wisdom?

- **Wisdom**, *n.*, “capacity of judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgment in the choice of means and ends; sometimes, less strictly, sound sense, esp. in practical affairs, as opposed to *folly* (OED).
- **Wisdom** is a virtue that is both intellectual and ethical. “Wisdom is a form of knowledge that penetrates to the deeper significance of things and therefore enables us to apply that knowledge to practical situations. Scripture often represents it as a skill, a knowing *how*, rather than knowing *that*....Specifically, wisdom is the ability to do the right thing in difficult situations...” (John Frame).



Wisdom

- “Wisdom is closely related to prudence, knowledge and reflection, and in this sense it is best understood as the practical wisdom which is on top of life in all relations and situations” (Kittel). “I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion” (Prov. 8:12).
- “In Scripture, wisdom is a moral as well as an intellectual quality, more than mere intelligence or knowledge, just as it is more than mere cleverness or cunning. To be truly wise, in the Bible sense, one’s intelligence and cleverness must be harnessed to a right end. Wisdom is the power to see, and the inclination to choose, the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it” (J.I. Packer).



J.I. Packer on God's Wisdom

“Misunderstanding what the Bible means when it says that God is love, they think that anything painful and upsetting (illness, accident, injury, loss of job, the suffering of a loved one) indicates either that God's wisdom, or power, or both, have broken down, or that God, after all, does not exist. But this idea of God's intention is a complete mistake. God's wisdom is not, and never was, pledged to keep a fallen world happy, or to make ungodliness comfortable. Not even to Christians has He promised a trouble-free life; rather the reverse. He has other ends in view for life in this world than simply to make it easy for everyone.”

Two Kinds of Wisdom

- **Earthly Wisdom:** “Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic” (James 3:13-15).
- “And Moses was educated in all the learning (*sofia* = wisdom) of the Egyptians, and he was a man of power in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22).
- “...the world through its wisdom did not come to know God” (I Cor. 1:21).

Earthly Wisdom

- “For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for **wisdom**” (I Cor. 1:22).
- “And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of **wisdom**, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that our faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God” (I Cor. 2:4-5).
- “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, ‘He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness’; and again, ‘The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless’” (I Cor. 3:19-20).

God's Wisdom

- “But if any of you lacks **wisdom**, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5).
- “Oh the depths of the riches both of the **wisdom** and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!” (Rom. 11:33).
- “The foolishness of God is **wiser** than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (I Cor. 1:25).
- “With God are **wisdom** and might; he has counsel and understanding” (Job 12:13).

God's Wisdom

- “The **wisdom** from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).
- “We speak God’s **wisdom** in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the **wisdom** which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (I Cor. 2:7-8).
- “...making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph. 1:16-17).

The Wisdom of Jesus

- “And coming to His home town He began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they became astonished, and said, ‘Where did this man get this **wisdom**, and these miraculous powers?’” (Mt. 13:54; cf. Mk. 6:2).
- “And the Child continued to grow and become strong, increasing in **wisdom**; and the grace of God was upon Him” (Lk. 2:40).
- “And Jesus kept increasing in **wisdom** and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk. 2:52).
- “But to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the **wisdom** of God” (I Cor. 1:24).

The Wisdom of Jesus

- “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us **wisdom** from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30).
- “...Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of **wisdom** and knowledge” (Col. 2:2-3).



What It Means to “Lack Wisdom”

- The text reads: “If any of you **lacks** wisdom” (James 1:5; see also 1:4).
- The word “lacks” comes from the Greek word meaning “be or do without, lack, be in need or want of” (Arndt and Gingrich). Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon* agrees: “to be wanting or lacking in a thing.”
- The rich young ruler asked Jesus, “What shall I do to obtain eternal life?” After Jesus answered him and received his prideful response that he had kept the law since his youth, He said to him, “One thing you still **lack**; sell all you possess, and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me”(Lk. 18:22).
- James is saying to his readers, “I know you will not admit it, but you need wisdom” (Kistemaker).

How God Communicates Wisdom to Us

- **By His Spirit:** “And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him” (Dt. 34:9).
- Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty” (Acts 6:3).
- **By His Word:** “How can you say, ‘We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us’? But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of the Lord, so what wisdom is in them?” (Jer. 8:8-9).

“Let Him Ask of God”

- “Ask and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one who asks receives; and he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks it shall be opened” (Mt. 7:7).
- “And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Truly I say to you, if you have faith, and do not doubt, you shall not only do what was done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, “Be taken up and cast into the sea,” it shall happen. And everything you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive” (Mt. 21:21-22).
- “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you” (Jn. 15:7).

“Let Him Ask of God”

“You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:2-3).





Two Prerequisites

- **We must reverence God:** “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding” (Ps. 111:10). “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Prov. 9:10). “Not till we have become humble and teachable, standing in awe of God’s holiness and sovereignty, acknowledging our own littleness, distrusting our own thoughts, and willing to have our minds turned upside down, can divine wisdom become ours” (Packer).
- **We must learn to receive God’s Word.** “Wisdom is divinely wrought in those, and those only, who apply themselves to God’s revelation” (Packer).



How God Gives

- “Who gives to all men **generously** and **without reproach**” (James 1:5).
- The first word James uses to describe how God gives is the Greek word meaning *generously* or *without reserve* (Arndt & Gingrich). Note the spiritual gift of giving in Romans 12: “he who gives, with liberality” (vs. 8).
- *Without reproach*: The word (without the negative) means *reproach, revile, heap insults upon*. “And the robbers also who had been crucified with Him were casting the same **insult** at Him” (Mt. 27:44). “If you are **reviled** for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you” (I Pt. 4:14).

John Calvin

“It means that God is so well-inclined and so ready to give that He will refuse none, none will be snubbed off.” The second word was added, Calvin suggested, “in case a man should fear that he is approaching God too often....He is prepared to heap new benefits on top of the old, with neither limit nor calculation.”



John Calvin
1509-1564

Overcoming Our Independence

“By nature man is independent. He wants to solve his own problems and make his own decisions....Man has to overcome pride to admit that he needs wisdom. But wisdom is not something he possesses. Wisdom belongs to God, for it is his divine virtue. Anyone who admits the need for wisdom must go to God and ask him....The believer must ask God for wisdom.”



Simon J. Kistemaker, PhD

New Testament Scholar

1930-2017

Martin Luther



Martin Luther

1483-1546

“What I have in my own hand, I usually lose; but what I put into God’s hand, is still, and ever will be, in my possession.”