

# Trusting God in Adversity





# Jerry Sittser's Story

“In one moment my family as I had known and cherished it was obliterated (drunk driver). The woman to whom I had been married for two decades was dead; my beloved Diana Jane, our third born, was dead; my mother, who had given birth to me and raised me, was dead. Three generations – gone in an instant.”

“What has happened to me has pressed me to the limit. I have come face to face with the darker side of life and with the weakness of my own human nature. As vulnerable as I feel most of the time, I can hardly call myself a conqueror....My experience has only confirmed in my mind how hard it is to face loss and how long it takes to grow from it.”



# R.C. Sproul's Daughter's Story

“Oh, Daddy!” R.C. Sproul's daughter cried out to him as she rushed into his arms. “Oh, Daddy! My baby is dead!”

Sproul recounts the moment: “I held her against my chest as she sobbed and sobbed. She was in the ninth month of her pregnancy and had just returned from a checkup with her obstetrician. He could not detect a heartbeat. As gently as he could, he explained what that meant: her unborn child had died in her womb.”

“Every woman who has delivered a stillborn baby knows the devastation it brings to the heart. Who can experience such a thing without crying to heaven and asking, ‘Why?’”

# Joni Eareckson Tada's Story

“In the summer of 1967, I found myself trapped inside a numb, useless body. Me, the teenager who just days earlier had saddled my horse for a ride in the morning, showered, then changed for tennis in the afternoon, had no idea the horror that lurked around the corner. It began as a casual trip to the beach on Chesapeake Bay. A stretch and a yawn at the shoreline, a snapping of the shoulder straps on my swimsuit, a shielding of my eyes and spotting an inviting raft rocking on gentle



# Joni Eareckson Tada's Story

swells just offshore. I swam out and hoisted myself up onto the raft. It was a simple, thoughtless dive, but it changed my life forever. My head crunched against the sandy bottom, twisting my neck and severing my spinal column. And less than 48 hours later, I was lying on a Stryker frame hooked up to tubes and machines in an intensive care unit.”

# The Journey Before Us

These three stories are heartbreaking, aren't they? We are incapable of plummeting the depths of another man's or woman's pain and loss. Perhaps they remind us of our own adversities in life and the immense – even chronic - struggles we have encountered along the way. Looked at from another perspective, they can easily breed fear and anxiety over the possibilities that *may* await us somewhere down the road.

Jerry Sittser understands: “Sooner or later all people suffer loss, in little doses or big ones, suddenly or over time, privately or in public settings.” Since this is true, let's go on a journey together and search for honest answers to a common question: “Can we really trust God?”



## *A Grief Observed.* C.S. Lewis

“Meanwhile, where is God? This is one of the most disquieting symptoms. When you are happy, so happy that you have no sense of needing Him, so happy that you are tempted to feel His claims upon you as an interruption, if you remember yourself and turn to Him with gratitude and praise, you will be – or so it feels – welcomed with open arms. But go to Him when your need is desperate, when all other help is vain, and what do you find? A door slammed in your face, and a sound of bolting and double bolting on the inside. After that, silence. You may as well turn away. The longer you wait, the more emphatic the silence will become. There are no lights in the windows. It might be an empty house....Why is He so present a commander in our time of prosperity and so very absent a help in time of trouble?”

# The Shades of Adversity

The language of adversity is multiplied on the lips of those who suffer and takes residence in the hearts and minds of those who look on others with sorrow and compassion:

- Trials
- Sorrow
- Affliction
- Difficulties
- Heartaches
- Darkness
- Numb
- Death
- Suffering
- Grief
- Burdens
- Brokenhearted
- Tragedy
- Despair
- Overwhelmed
- Hopeless
- Pain
- Betrayal
- Weary
- Loss
- Abandonment
- Shattered
- Illness
- Trouble



# Job's Observation

“Man is born to trouble  
as the sparks fly upward.”

- Job 5:7



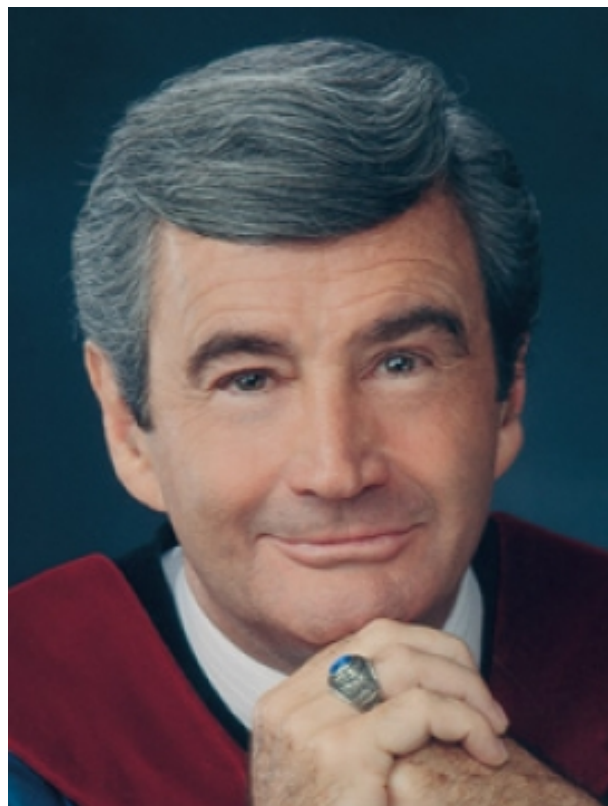
# Why This Study?

- We don't know how to turn to God in times of trouble.
- We are not sure if Rabbi Harold Kushner is right or wrong (he wrote the book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* in 1981).
- We have become much more aware of the sufferings of others and are not quite sure how to help, comfort, and console them.
- We have been asking questions about adversity for a long time and have never heard any satisfactory answers.
- Generally, our first question at the onset of adversity is "Why did God allow this to happen?" We don't know the answer to this question.

# Why This Study?

- We want to know that the Lord is with us all the time, that He will not abandon us – even when we suffer.
- We have never really taken the time to study the Scriptures to see what God has revealed about trials and suffering.
- Even if everything is going well today, it would be wise to prepare for trials that will surely come to us in the future.
- We want to see the goodness of God when we struggle with adversity.
- We need to learn to trust God.

# The Reality of Our World



**D. James Kennedy, PhD**

1930 - 2007

“Our world is full of the inexplicable, the inscrutable, the unfathomable, the impassable, and the insurmountable. We cannot take three steps in any direction without running into a solid wall of mysteries, riddles, paradoxes, and profundities. We constantly confront problems we cannot solve, labyrinths we cannot find our way out of, hieroglyphics we cannot decipher, sphinxes that simply will not speak.”

# Peter Kreeft, PhD

“Modern man does not have an answer to the question of ‘why.’ Our society is the first one that simply does not give us any answer to the problem of suffering except a thousand means of avoiding it.”



**Peter Kreeft, PhD**

Professor of Philosophy, Boston College

1937 -

# The Problem of Pain



**C.S. Lewis**  
1898-1963

“‘If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.’ This is the problem of pain, in its simplest form.”

# How *Trials* Are Presented in Scripture

- “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” (James 1:2-14).
- The New Testament word for *trials* may mean *test*, *trial* or *temptation*, *enticement* - two different meanings.
- “Blessed is a man who perseveres under **trial**; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him” (James 1:12).

# How *Trials* Are Presented in Scripture

- In Acts 20:18-19, Luke recounts the Apostle Paul's words which he spoke to the Ephesian elders who had come to see him at Miletus: "You yourselves know...how I was with you the whole time, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with **trials**..."
- "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various **trials**..." (I Pet. 1:6).
- "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your **testing**, as though some strange thing were happening to you" (I Pet. 4:12).



# How *Sorrow* Is Presented in Scripture

- “But because I have said these things to you, **sorrow** has filled your heart” (Jn. 16:6).
- “Therefore you, too, now have **sorrow**; but I will see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you” (Jn. 16:22).
- “For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have **sorrow upon sorrow**” (Phil. 2:27).
- “All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful but **sorrowful**” (Heb. 12:11).

# How *Suffering* Is Presented in Scripture

- “For I consider that the **sufferings** of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).
- “And if one member **suffers**, all the members **suffer** with it” (I Cor. 12:26).
- “For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to **suffer** for His sake” (Phil. 1:29).
- “For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under **sorrows** when suffering unjustly” (I Pt. 2:19).
- “And after you have **suffered** for a little, the God of all grace...will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (I Pt. 5:10).

# God Tested Abraham

- “After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here am I.’ He said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you’” (Gen. 22:1-2).
- “By faith Abraham, **when he was tested**, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son” (Heb. 11:17).



**Rembrandt van Rijn**

*Sacrifice of Isaac*

1635, Oil on canvas

The Hermitage Museum

# The Secrets Most Christians Will Not Tell

## Peter Kreeft shares his secrets with us:

- “I get very mad at God sometimes, especially when he lets me get hurt....I think almost every believing Christian, and probably almost every believing Jew and Moslem too, gets mad at God sometimes.”
- “Every single one of us is unhappy on a deep level.”
- “Our faith is largely an intellectual thing.”
- “We have the same moral problems everyone else has.”



# Learning to Trust God

- It can be a slow and difficult process.
- Trusting God must take into account that the fall of man was a “catastrophic personality shock” (Carl F.H. Henry) and effected all of creation.
- “Do we really want to see deeply into the heart of God?” (Larry Crabb)
- Do we just want our problems solved or do we want an encounter with the God of all creation?
- Will we be open to our internal world and become aware of what we really feel (emotions)?
- For how long have we been trying to escape from God?

# Learning to Trust God

- Do you believe that God meets you in your weakness, not in your strength? (Dan Allender)
- How invested are you in having control over your life?
- Can you identify a time in your life where you felt you were on the very edge?
- Are you comfortable in lodging your complaints against God?
- Do you know that God loves you?
- Why do you (if you do) try to eliminate the risk of trusting God?
- Do you believe that real joy is possible again?

# Philip Yancey



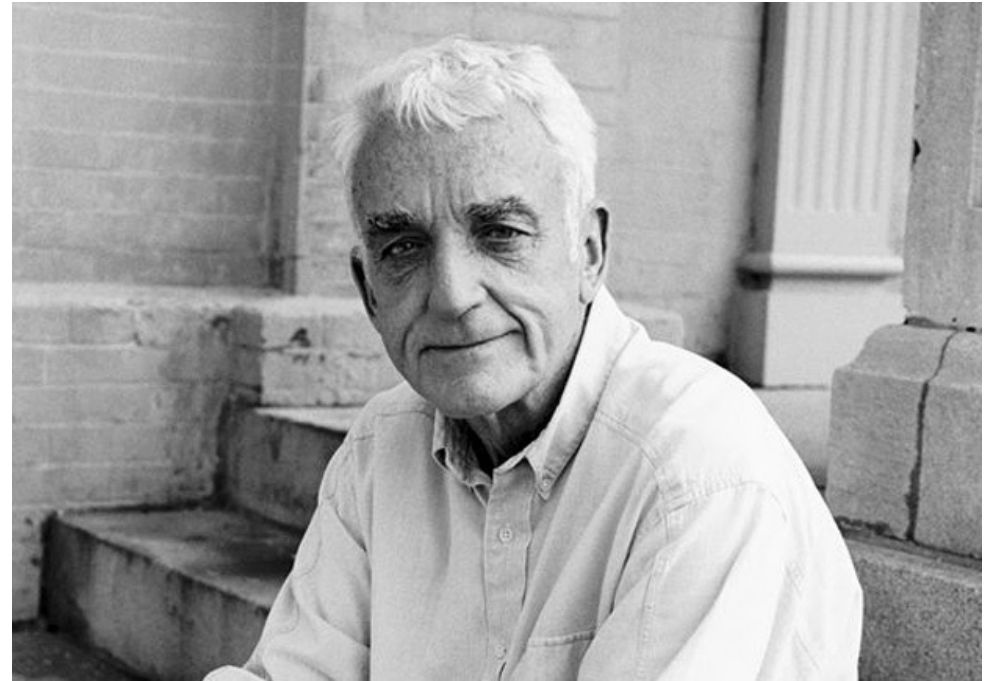
**Philip Yancey**

American Christian Author  
14 million books sold worldwide

“As a Christian trying to fathom what God is up to in this world, I have learned a great deal. My anger and bitterness against God have subsided as I’ve come to realize why He allows this bleeding world.”

# Conclusion

“Against insurmountable obstacles and without a clue as to the outcome, the trusting heart says, ‘Abba, I surrender my will and my life to you without any reservation and with boundless confidence, for you are my loving Father.’”



**Brennan Manning**

1934-2013