**Why Do We Suffer?**

“Man who is born of woman, is short-lived and full of turmoil.” That was the assessment of Job, a man who was, at the time he made the statement, enduring adversity that most of us struggle to even imagine. Life has abundant blessings, but there are enough problems in the mix to lend credence to Job’s conclusion. When we suffer, or painful tragedies strike our lives, we sometimes are led to wonder what it’s all about. Why is this happening? How can we make sense of suffering in a world created and ruled by a loving God? I don’t have all the answers, but the Scriptures offer some insight.

**Sin has consequences.** In the secular realm, we live in a country that provides as much personal freedom as possible. If we lived in a police state that attempted to control every detail of our lives, crime would be much lower. We suffer higher levels of crime because we value the freedoms we enjoy. In the spiritual realm, God has created us as beings with free will (Joshua 24:15) and frankly, some among us fail to take the responsibility seriously. People make bad choices every day (drug/alcohol abuse, child abuse, rape, assault, murder) and they run rough-shod over innocent victims in their paths.

God uses civil government to punish evil doers (Romans 13:4) and will hold them accountable in judgment (John 5:29). There is a spirit being who deserves the blame for this suffering and it is not God.

**Adversity builds character and perseverance.** Romans 5:3-4 says that we should “exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance and perseverance proven character, and proven character, hope…” More that anything else, God wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4) and the problems we encounter in this life pale in comparison to an eternity of joy in the presence of God (Romans 8:18). When our lives are refined by fire (1 Peter 1:7) we emerge stronger and better able to handle whatever life may bring.

**A loving Father chastises His children.** A parent who brings a child into the world only to sit back and allow nature to take its course is doing the child no favors and the results are obvious to any who encounter their neglected offspring. A parent who truly loves his or her child will provide the love, discipline and guidance that is in their best interest (Ephesians 6:4). When God disciplines us, it is evidence of the fact that we are legitimate children for whom He has the greatest love and concern (Hebrews 12:4-11). Beyond the general fact that tribulation builds perseverance, there may be a specific reason for an occasion of adversity in my life. Paul was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him from becoming arrogant (2 Corinthians 12:7). This is a difficult lesson because God is not speaking directly to us today. Just keep in mind that, when adversity strikes, a little personal soul-searching may be in order. The danger here is jumping to the conclusion, both in our own lives and in the lives of others, that whenever someone suffers, they somehow brought it on themselves. If we learn nothing else from the book of Job, it is that sometimes good folks suffer through absolutely no fault of their own.

**Adversity in my life may be serving some greater good.** Jesus told His disciples that the young man born blind suffered that malady, not because someone sinned, but so that many would believe as a result of his miraculous healing (John 9:1-2). Had the apostles of Jesus become wealthy and influential from the message they preached, it would be easy to make the case that they invented a religion to enrich themselves. I have complete faith in their testimony of Jesus’ divinity precisely because their testimony brought them nothing but pain and loss. I may not understand why “bad” things happen to me, but I trust God and I am honored that I can contribute to the cause (Acts 5:41).

**John McKee**

**West Murray church of Christ**