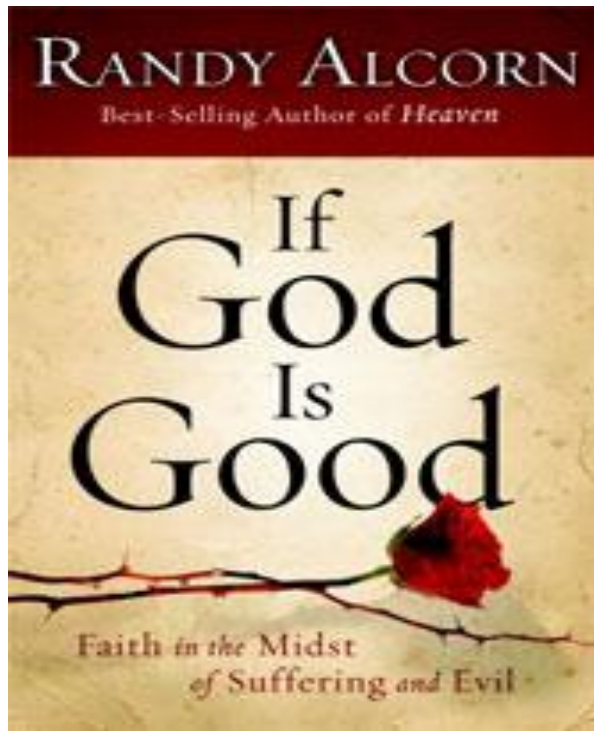




Love God. Love People. Change the World.



If God is Good.

Lesson #1

**Christian Life Assembly
Winter 2010 ABF
Jim Hoffman**

Suffering and Evil

- Seem random and unfair.
- Seem to contradict the idea of an all-powerful and all-knowing God who loves us.
- Constitute the best arguments of God's enemies and he does not seem to mind.

Understanding the Problem

- Few things are as common to the human experience as suffering.
- How we answer the “If God is good” question will have a big impact on how we view God.
- Complete this sentence; if God is good then why does he allow _____?

Understanding the Problem

- There isn't really a scripture that explains why an all-powerful, all-knowing God does not always intervene when and how we think he should.
- However, there are many scriptures that can help to shape our thinking about the problem of suffering.
- When someone is hurting, they seek for answers and resolutions and sometimes there are none - but we will not let the fact that we can't know all, keep us from knowing all that we can.

Understanding the Problem

- 1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. NIV
- “The faith that cannot be shaken is the faith that has been shaken”. Randy Alcorn

Understanding the Problem

- The problem of evil and suffering moves from the philosophical to the personal in a moment of time.
 - Your doctor says “you have cancer”.
 - You learn your child is being abused.
 - Your spouse announces they are leaving.
 - _____
- Pain is always local and has a face and a name.
 - It’s a disease
 - It’s a person
 - It’s a circumstance

Understanding the Problem

Is it possible that we do not fully acknowledge suffering until it has a face?

- In Sudan millions of children have been murdered, raped and enslaved.
- The 2004 Asian tsunami killed more than 280,000 people.
- More than 25,000 third world children die every day of preventable diseases.
- The 1994 Rwandan genocide was like having (2) WTC attacks every day for 180 days in row.

Why Talk About the Problem?

- When C.S. Lewis' wife died he said, "If I had really cared as I thought I did, about the sorrows of the world, I should not have been so overwhelmed when my own sorrow came."
- More people cite the problem of evil and suffering in the world as their reason for not believing in God than any other reason.
- It is not just a problem – it seems to be 'the' problem.

Why Talk About the Problem?

- A Barna poll reports that when people are asked “if you could ask God just one question what would it be?” the number one answer is “Why is there pain and suffering in the world?”.
- “The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. It’s distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God’s love and justice.” John Stott

Why Talk About the Problem?

- You will not get far in a serious conversation about God with an unbeliever before the problem of evil and suffering arises.
- It has become the ‘trump’ card of the of naysayers intended either to stump us or to shut us down.
- The problem of evil and suffering was considered to be “the rock of atheism” by 19th century playwright, George Buchner.

Why Talk About the Problem?

- “A faith that leaves us unprepared for suffering is a false faith that deserves to be lost.” Randy Alcorn
- Auschwitz survivor Victor Frankl wrote “just as the small fire is extinguished by the storm whereas a large fire is enhanced by it, likewise a weak faith is weakened by predicaments and catastrophes, whereas a strong faith is strengthened by them.”
- Believing God exists is not the same as trusting the God who exists.

Why Talk About the Problem?



- The last words of this book about the loss of loved ones are “no eye is on the sparrow”.

Why Talk About the Problem?

- **Suffering and evil both exert a force that either pushes us away from God or draws us closer to him.**
- **A man was admitted to the hospital with sepsis and asked how a loving God can allow this. He received these answers from a chaplain and a social worker.**
 - **I will look it up.**
 - **God is a giant who sometimes accidentally steps on the ants.**

James Montgomery Boice on being diagnosed with liver cancer.

- “A number of you have asked what you can do, and it strikes me that what you can do, you are doing. This is a good congregation, and you do the right things. You are praying certainly, and I've been assured of that by many people. And I know of many meetings that have been going on. A relevant question, I guess, when you pray is pray for what? Should you pray for a miracle? Well, you're free to do that, of course. My general impression is that the God who is able to do miracles--and He certainly can--is also able to keep you from getting the problem in the first place. So although miracles do happen, they're rare by definition. A miracle has to be an unusual thing. (continued)

James Montgomery Boice on being diagnosed with liver cancer.

- Above all, I would say pray for the glory of God. If you think of God glorifying Himself in history and you say, where in all of history has God most glorified Himself? He did it at the cross of Jesus Christ, and it wasn't by delivering Jesus from the cross, though He could have. Jesus said, "Don't you think I could call down from my Father ten legions of angels for my defense?" But He didn't do that. And yet that's where God is most glorified."
- Our challenge is reach the point where the glory of God matters more than our suffering – not just intellectually, but actually.



Questions / Comments