

# Accepting Adversity and Tragedy

## Lesson 2

### Dangers to Our Faith – A Study of Psalms 73

#### Background and Review

In lesson 1 we listed and discussed a series of difficult questions that are often asked as we face the inequities of life, and the adversities and tragedies that often result. For the most part these questions are appropriate ones; questions that come naturally to mind as we contemplate a seemingly meaningless tragedy or an unfair circumstance. But they are also dangerous to our souls if they cause us to begin to doubt the goodness and concern of God.

In his book, When God Doesn't Make Sense, Dr. James Dobson notes a process of questioning God by believers that leads all too close to a point he calls the Betrayal Barrier. When a crisis comes and our prayers are not granted, Dobson describes the process *"in a matter of moments the world can fall off its axis. Panic stalks the soul as life and death hang in the balance. A pounding heart betrays the anxiety within. 'But where is God? Does He know what is happening? Is He concerned? Why have the heavens grown dark and silent?' Then as frustration and fear accumulate, the human spirit recoils in distrust and confusion."*

Warren W. Wiersbe put it this way in Why Us? When Bad Things Happen to God's People, *"It isn't the normal demands of life that break us; it's the painful surprises. I'm not talking about 'reaping what we sow', because most of us are smart enough to know when and why that happens. When life hands us these painful surprises, we start to ask questions. We wonder if we've been cheated. We begin to doubt that life makes any sense at all. Bad things do happen to God's people; and when these bad things happen, our normal response is to ask, 'Why us?'"*

As Christians, we must prepare ourselves in advance for the tests of our faith. In the end, as hard as it is to understand at times, nothing is more tragic than the loss of our faith. The hymn – Day by Day, refers to faith in times of tribulation as a sweet consolation; one we need to be careful not to lose:

*Help me then in every tribulation  
So to trust your promises, O Lord,  
That I lose not faith's sweet consolation  
Offered me within your holy word*

To begin our study on how to deal with pain and adversity and with the questions that ensue, we will examine Psalms 73. In this Psalm, Asaph the Psalmist raises many of the concerns we will examine throughout this class.

#### Psalm 73

Asaph was a man who questioned God and appears to have had his faith nearly shattered. But he also came to a deeper understanding, one that will help us repeatedly in our study.

1. Casually read the entire Psalm through once and then read it carefully at least one more time.
2. How did Asaph describe his condition at the beginning of this Psalm (vs. 2)? Note also his description in vs. 21-22.
  
3. What had he observed that troubled him? Be specific.
  
4. What doubts were created by his observations (vs. 13-15)?
5. Was he initially able to understand and make sense of this (vs. 16)?
6. What was the turning point in his understanding?
  
7. What did he come to recognize about God and about the wicked?

### **Emotions or Revelation**

Like Asaph, we may find ourselves having nearly slipped, having almost stumbled, but the key is to gain a proper perspective (Psalm 73:18). What is to be the source of this understanding? Where do we turn when confronted with questions we cannot answer? Unfortunately, once a tragedy has occurred, many people rely almost exclusively on their emotions. It is what they feel that drives their conclusions about God and about his fairness or his concern.

I remember the comments of a local woman when the bombing occurred at the Federal Center in Oklahoma City some years ago. She stated her newfound belief that a good God could not exist if he allowed such a tragedy to happen to innocent children (remember there was a child-care center in the destroyed building). Clearly, she based this new belief on her emotions of the moment; otherwise she could have easily concluded the same thing from any number of events in history. Innocent children have died at the hands of evil men for as far back as we have recorded history. The Bible even records such events (cf. Matthew 2:16-18). But this specific tragedy had struck near to home, and in her understandable grief and anguish, she had drawn unwarranted conclusions about God.

It is vital we find the right source of information about God and about his character and his purposes before we find ourselves in the midst of deep sorrow or difficulty. Satan will use such an opportunity to whisper to us that God doesn't care; that He is far away or even that he does not exist. The only reliable source of information about God and the nature of the world he has created is God himself. Unless He chooses to reveal to us his ways, there are things we will never understand. The Bible is clear on this point, and, in this class, the assumption is made that you have concluded the Bible is a revelation from God to man. Consider then what it says about God and our source of knowledge of Him:

1. Read I Corinthians 2:6-12.
  - a. How is the wisdom of God described (vs. 7)? Who can know it directly (vs. 11)?
  - b. Has God chosen to reveal things about Himself? How?
  - c. Read Ephesians 3:3-5 for the connection between this revelation from the Spirit to man and the Bible.
2. Read Isaiah 55:8-9. How different are the thoughts of God and the thoughts of man?

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in a sermon on Psalms 73 had the following to say about this passage from Isaiah:

*“Half our trouble arises from the fact that we do not realize that that is the basic position from which we must always start. I think that many of us get into trouble just because we forget that we are really dealing with the mind of God, and that God’s mind is not like our mind. We desire everything to be cut and dried and simple, and feel that there should never be any problems or difficulties. But if there is one thing that is taught more clearly than anything else in the Bible it is that that is never the case in our dealings with God. The ways of God are inscrutable; his mind is infinite and eternal, and his purposes are so great that our sinful minds cannot understand. Therefore, when such a Being is dealing with us, it ought not to surprise us if, at times, things take place which are perplexing to us.”*

But we must be careful when we are perplexed that our perplexity does not lead to despair and sin. This same chapter in Isaiah calls on us to *“seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near”* (Isaiah 55:6) and assures us of the efficacy of God’s word (vs. 11). We will examine in our next lesson what the Bible has to say about the character of God. We must establish a true picture of God as he has allowed us to understand him. Such an understanding will serve us well when we find that we cannot answer all of the difficult questions of life, because we will still have confidence in God and may even come (as we should) to accept his will when he is silent, and no answers are to be found.