

# Daily Readings

*These readings deal with the existence and meaning of suffering. The Study Guide readings allow you to dig deeper.*

**Monday, August 30 — Romans 8:18-39.** This powerful passage outlines Paul's confidence in the victory of God in all things. He starts with this affirmation, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." What is your greatest challenge right now in your life? Can you trust God in this situation? Where is God in this?

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**Tuesday, August 31 — I Corinthians 15:35-58.** For Paul, the promise of resurrection and life after death was the answer to question of suffering and evil. We can not fully comprehend the spiritual nature. Therefore, we accept it on faith as the final victory of God over the things of this world. How does realizing there is a spiritual body within you change the way you look at your physical body?

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**Wednesday, September 1 — Matthew 24:3-14.** Matthew shares with us the words of Jesus about the end times. Do you see anything familiar in this passage? How is Jesus possibly describing the time in which we live? How do the words, "**Beware that no one leads you astray,**" affect you and the way you live?

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**Thursday, September 2 — Ephesians 6:10-20.** Here Paul speaks of the spiritual battle that exist between good and evil. As followers of Christ we do not fight this battle alone, but rather have the "**armor of God**" to go into spiritual battle. We are not alone in this life, God is with us. Is there something you that needs to be offered to God today? What part of the armor do most need in your life right now?

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**Friday, September 3 — Revelation 21:1-8.** The new heaven and the new earth is a beautiful image of what God has planned for all creation. The perfect creation of God is restored. All is made right. Verse 7, "**I will be their God and they will be my children,**" is a powerful promise for all who have suffered. Do you need this promise today? What do you need to be made right in your life? Are you will to hand it over to God?

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## STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, August 29, 2010

### Questions for God — Suffering

*Why is there suffering? (Week 5 of 5)*

#### **1 Corinthians 13:8-12 — The Word from the Bible (The Message)**

*Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.*

*When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good.*

*We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!*

#### **Questions for God: Here are some of the questions.**

- Why is there so much suffering in the world?
- Why do bad things happen to good people?
- Why are atrocities allowed on innocent children?
- Why did you let my good father get cancer and die?
- Why did my husband die so young?
- Looking back as an adult I see my abusive parents and ask, why did you abandon me?
- Why does it seem like the harder we try, the worse situations become?
- Is there something to learn from the death of my wife? How do I ease the emptiness in my heart?

#### **Suffering, Evil and Sin**

Theologically, when Christians confess, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth..." we affirm three things:

1. God is Father – loving and just.
2. God is Almighty – He is powerful.
3. God is Maker – He created a world, and because it was created by Him and is ruled by Him, it is good.

However, the reality is we live in a world where we find cancer, insanity, child abuse, hurricanes, wars, starvation, poverty and more ills than we can possibly list. Which leads Christians into a dilemma. When Christians try to explain the world's suffering in human terms, it usually goes one of two ways:

- God is just and good, but He's not powerful enough to stop the suffering.
- Or God is powerful enough to do something, but He's not just or good enough to step in.

Langley Gilkey, in *Maker of Heaven and Earth* says this, "...everything that Christians say about God and their life seems contradicted by this pervasive fact of evil. And yet on the other hand, it is true that everything Christians believe about God and human life provides the only force strong enough to conquer the radical power of evil over men's minds and hearts."

You would think there would be a clear answer in the Bible or in Christian thought to the question of why there is suffering, evil and sin. Throughout Christian history, many attempts have been made to explain the existence of evil, but on the whole, all the easy answers have been rejected. Some of the possible answers have ranged from just ignoring the issue of suffering, to justifying evil as a means to a good end, or to explaining evil as part of God's plan to gradually restore the perfect creation described in Genesis back to perfection as described at the end of Revelation.

## Why?

The Bible does not explain away evil. There is no clear answer to the question WHY? Instead, the Bible meets evil and suffering “head on” as a conflict between good and evil – God and Demonic powers. Immediately following the story of the good and perfect creation by God, Genesis relates the story of the Evil One and the resulting temptation and destruction that comes with sin and rebellion against God’s will. The new heaven and the new earth described in Revelation is not the climax of a gradual process; instead it is the result of a cosmic battle between God and the powers of evil. In Matthew 24, Jesus says there will be wars and rumors of wars, nation against nation, famine, earthquakes, suffering, false leaders, injustice, hatred, and persecution of the righteous.

## How do we go on when life is hard?

Human existence is in the center of this conflict between good and evil. Instead of answering the question “WHY?” the Bible focuses on the power of God to overcome evil and sin. The Bible affirms we are not at the mercy of evil and sin – instead, we are focus of God’s love.

The battle is not over. Especially in the New Testament, the affirmation is clear that even death and the worst kind of suffering do not have the last word (I Corinthians 15). Jesus is going to win, no matter what the odds or how things look.

How do we go on when life is hard? Our response is faith in the good and gracious nature of God. Our reality in this life is incomplete. In faith, we look back at the great victories of God’s presence. We live in the “between time” between Christ’s victory on the cross and His final victory over evil. Our times all seem chaotic, and yet we believe God is good and loving and our knowledge is limited. This is the affirmation of Paul in I Corinthians 13:8-12. **“Then we shall see face to face.”** (See notes below)

How do we go on when life is hard? We follow the affirmations of the Bible. The Bible calls us into fellowship with God, with each other and with those who are hurting. There is an old call to worship that goes like this, **“God is with us. We are not alone. Thanks be to God.”** These words have no meaning unless we live them as God’s gift to each other through the presence of the Holy Spirit.

## The Cross of Christ

At the heart of the reality of suffering and evil is the Cross of Christ. We believe that at the center of the Christian faith, Jesus, Son of God, is crucified on a cross. God was with us in Christ, and He was killed and for a while, it appeared as though Satan had won. Is evil so strong that it had defeated God? Had hatred overcome love? Had the darkness taken over the light? Had God’s world become Satan’s world?

No! The crucifixion was not the end of the story — and God proved himself victorious three days later with Christ’s victory over death with the resurrection of Easter Sunday. As it was then, and as it will continue to be, God will not be defeated by suffering, death, evil, sin or Satan.

Christianity is not an escape from the problem of suffering and evil – it attacks it “head on” just as Jesus did on the cross. God’s people shall not be defeated by evil, sin or death. We are the victors in Christ. (Romans 8)

## I Corinthians 13:8-12

After his description of love’s qualities, Paul fixes his thought on the lasting power of love in contrast to the fleeting gifts needed for understanding in this life. His first analogy contrasting imperfect with perfect knowledge and childish with adult behavior, seems to suggest a natural development toward spiritual maturity. These words should be understood in the context of Paul’s belief in the Biblical expectation of a new age free from the limits and suffering of this broken world. Appropriate to the age that is passing away are the partial knowledge through which Christians perceive imperfectly the ways of God. But in the coming age these things will be abolished; the need for them will vanish.

Paul’s view that this expectation is already partially fulfilled is seen in his second figure. The Message version says, **We’re squinting in a fog, peering through a mist.** Paul’s original Greek refers to this as a dim mirror, although it is uncertain what kind of mirror he has in mind – the ordinary polished metal one or the magician’s distorting mirror (like a fun-house mirror). That he places a greater value of a face-to-face encounter over the reflected image is obvious. That our knowledge – our acknowledgement – of what God is doing in this world is incomplete. We can not judge the eternal, timeless nature of God by the temporal, time-limited things of this world. God’s love is so much bigger that we can see, experience or imagine. The reality of God’s power (that is beyond our experience or understanding) is our hope.

## Prayer Focus

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying. **Remember... someone is praying for you. Have a great week!**

The following prayers are for inspiration as you pray this week. Both are lyrics to songs written about the loss of a loved one. The first is a hymn (of which we’ve included three of the verses) written by Charles Wesley (brother to the founder of Methodism, John Wesley) upon the death of his son to smallpox. We’ve included three of the verses. *Somewhere Down the Road*, by Amy Grant and Wayne Kirkpatrick, was written as a tribute to Rich Mullins, most well-known for the worship song, *Awesome God*.

### For a Child in the Smallpox

by Charles Wesley

Human tears may freely flow,  
Authorised by tears Divine;  
Till thine awful will we know,  
Comprehend thy whole design;  
Jesus wept! And so may we;  
Jesus suffered all thy will,  
Felt the soft infirmity,  
Feels his creatures sorrow still.

Life and death are in thine hand;  
In thine hand our child we see;  
Waiting thy benign command,  
Less beloved by us than thee;  
Need we then his life request?  
Jesus understands our fears;  
Reads a mother’s panting breast,  
Knows the meaning of her tears.

Jesus blends them with his own,  
Mindful of his suffering days;  
Father, hear thy pleading Son,  
Son of Man, for us He prays;  
What for us he asks, bestow;  
Ours he makes his own request;  
Send us life or death; we know,  
Life, or death, from thee is best.

### Somewhere Down the Road

by Amy Grant and Wayne Kirkpatrick

So much pain and no good reason why  
You’ve cried until the tears run dry  
And nothing here can make you understand  
The one thing that you held so dear  
Is slipping from your hands  
And you say

Why, why, why  
Does it go this way  
Why, why, why  
And all I can say is

[Chorus:]  
Somewhere down the road  
There’ll be answers to the questions  
Somewhere down the road  
Though we cannot see it now  
Somewhere down the road  
You will find mighty arms reaching for you  
And they will hold the answers at the end of the road

Yesterday I thought I’d seen it all  
I thought I’d climbed the highest wall  
Now I see the learning never ends  
And all I know to do is keep on walking  
Walking ‘round the bend, saying

Why, why, why  
Does it go this way  
Why, why, why  
And all I can say is [Chorus]

**Invite someone to worship this week. You will be glad you did.**

**God is doing great things through the ministries of Trietsch.**