

GOD'S LOVE & Human Death and Suffering

Try to imagine the purest form of love, can you? No better example exists than when someone is willing to die in order to save the life of another (Jn 15:13). Such love is selfless and rare. Yet that's exactly what Jesus did when He hung on the cross to atone for the world's sin. Jesus became the ultimate expression of love and He did it on our behalf. But this was something only He could do since He was perfect and without sin. Because no matter what we may have done to restore grace with God, we could never satisfy His divine justice. So God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die in our place and the reality of this sacrificial act continues to change people's lives even today.

But God's love is much more profound than we may realize. Christ's crucifixion two-thousand years ago holds deep implications for the present world in which we now exist. Because while society struggles to explain life's meaning with their own philosophies and theories, the Bible (God's instruction manual) provides real answers and solutions to all of our problems. It tells us why we were created. How the human race failed on account of sin. What impact this had in terms of death and suffering, and how God used our massive failure to interject His blueprint for eternal redemption. But most importantly, the Bible reveals how this entire process has come to define our Creator as a God of love and mercy more than anything else in the universe.

Why is there Death and Suffering in the World?

The question of human death and suffering is perhaps the most intimidating and complex. And in some cases it cannot be answered to the complete satisfaction of the one searching to know "why". The fact is that this subject is extremely profound and for many the implications are personal and painful. And because there's no easy answer to offer, such questions help us recognize that sometimes, as much as we hate to admit it, we simply do not have all the answers. So it's encouraging to rest in the knowledge that our God is sovereign and knows why these things happen and what purpose they serve to fulfill. The Bible promises that one day, when we are taken to Heaven, we will be given all of the answers for which we seek (1 Cor 13:9-12), but for now we have to trust in God's sovereignty and foreknowledge.

Yet having prefaced the subject thus, there are many things that the Bible does provide answers for, including the question of why unpleasant circumstances exist as a fact of life.

So how does the Bible explain the cause for death and suffering? Why do earthquakes, war, atrocity, and crime exist in our universe? To fully understand the primary cause, we must go back to the very beginning of time. The book of Genesis, the world's only true record of creation, begins the most significant universal drama ever scripted. How it reveals the reasons for human suffering and death is proposed in the following facts.

Our current world is not what it was always intended to be. In the beginning, God created the world perfectly (Gen 1:31). He also created mankind and gave them freewill. The first humans, Adam and Eve, exercised their freewill contrary to God's command. Hence through man's disobedience, sin entered the world, and with it a lot of pain and sorrow (Gen 3:6; Rom 5:12). Nevertheless, God would use man's defectiveness, as a means by which to demonstrate to the entire universe His most splendid expression of love.

You see, God did not create death and suffering and He doesn't take pleasure in our anguish. Man is solely responsible for this, not God. But God did create contrast, wonderful contrast. And the sin which entered the world introducing a host of negative consequences was not to be wasted. As it were, without hate, we would not come to experience the magnitude of God's love. Without suffering, we would not know joy. Without evil, we would not know good. Can you see that? Contrast is God's intelligent method of raising the value on life. Even the daily period of darkness in Eden (Genesis 1:3-5) made it possible to define light. It gave the very first humans an opportunity to distinguish the light from the darkness so that they too would be able to contrast.

God's love is precious. And just like a diamond on black velvet, His love shines the brightest in the gloomiest darkness. In this case, the well-chosen backdrop to set it apart is the harsh and austere presence of human death and suffering. What a cruel and callous statement, you might say. But friends, even suffering and death, consequences of sin as they are, serve a necessary purpose in God's foreordained plan. No, He did not intentionally design these elements, but He has allowed them to exist in order to demonstrate His amazing love.

Famed preacher, John Piper, once gave the following explanation for the same question of human suffering and death:

“The terrorized and troubled world exists to make a place for Christ the Son of God to suffer and die for our sins... This is the world where the best expression of divine love could occur. Because the Bible is clear about the greatest and most beautiful display of love imaginable: *For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom 5:8). No one would give up His life to save a vile and evil man—yet Jesus did...Therefore evil and death now exist so that God could only love like He could in this place.”

Indeed there seems to be scriptural evidence to support Piper’s statements. God had a plan to carry out all along and therefore He allowed Adam and Eve to initiate the process of human death and suffering:

*...for of a truth in this city against thy holy Servant Jesus, whom thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, were gathered together, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy council **foreordained to come to pass**... but God, being rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace have ye been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him in the heavenly places, in Christ Jesus: and to make all men see what is the dispensation (issuing forth) of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things; **to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known through the church the manifold wisdom of God** (Acts 4:27-28; Ephesians 2:4-6, 3:9-10).*

What these scriptures reveal is that much of what God has allowed so far has been used to demonstrate His greatness to all of creation, not only in our physical sphere, but also in the celestial. And it was done to reveal to everyone everywhere the most ingenious plan of salvation ever drafted.

Suffering: the Shaper of Men’s Characters

According to the Bible, suffering is a tool that God uses to produce exceptional character (Rom. 5:3-5). Some of the most loving and caring individuals in this world are those who have suffered through hardship and pain. It is a proven fact that poor people are more likely to give charitably because they possess greater sympathy than the average rich person. Financial wealth is notorious for breeding selfish and careless individuals. And those who live in luxury will more often divorce themselves from the misery in society than those who do not.

So then suffering serves to shape men's character for the better even though it is difficult to endure.

But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold (Job 23:10).

Suffering: the Supreme Stimulator

People who endure suffering have very little attachment to this present world because they realize just how temporal it is. **In fact, it is this very kind of feeling that God uses to remind us of our need for a better place and to stimulate a God-ward desire in our hearts.** Unfortunately, when people lose interest in life they often commit suicide instead of turning to God for greater fulfillment and satisfaction.

But most importantly, suffering allows Christians to share the Good News with their fellow man. And to remind a suffering world that eternal life in heaven awaits all those who choose to place their trust and faith in the Lord Jesus. So let us remind others to look upwards and no longer keep their gaze glued to this present world.

Suffering: A Tester of Men's Hearts

Much of why God allows suffering to occur is to test men's resolve to endure it on account of their love for Him (Job 23:10; Mar 9:49; Jas 5:10-11; Rev 21:7). So do we really love God?? No test of love is greater than when it involves pain and sacrifice.

The Issue of Sin

According to the Bible, sin is the transgression of God's Law (1 Jn 3:4). Any form of disobedience to God's commandments is an act of sin. And apart from the knowledge of good and evil expressed in God's Law (Exodus 20:2-17), man is unable to distinguish right from wrong. That is why humans cannot define right and wrong by their own code of morals. Morals don't even exist apart from the Law of God.

However, the most primitive moral standard inherent to all humans is that we distinguish good from evil based on the amount of pain inflicted. We often hear people say, "Eh, there's nothing wrong with this. After all, I'm not hurting anyone." It is interesting that humans express their understanding of sin based on the element of pain. That is why rape, murder, and robbery are so abhorrent. We don't really need God's Law to realize that these actions are harmful.

Most of us are aware of the extensive mental anguish associated with them. And since they all hurt us in some way or form we deem them *wrong*. But is this the only reason why they are wrong? Say we removed the equation of pain and injury associated with them, could they then be justified? The answer is no! Because even if we were able to remove the equation of human pain in order to justify sin, we could never remove the sorrow that God experiences when we blatantly disobey His authority and defy His commandments. Inevitably, someone is always hurt because of sin, and either us or God.

Moreover, we should never forget that humans are limited in their understanding. We are “near sighted” by nature and focused only on the “here and now”. But God is omniscient, and His vision is far broader than ours. In other words, He sees well into the future. So even though our renegade actions may appear harmless to us now, they never are. Little do we realize that any tiny infraction of God’s Law will build up negative consequences which will be evident over time. And if God would allow our crimes to go unchecked, they would eventually exterminate us. That is why humans should never try to invent their own rules. It’s simply too dangerous.

But God knows all about our inability to create our own law and because He loves us He has given us the Ten Commandments so we wouldn’t need to struggle helplessly on our own (Ex 20:2-17; 34:28). So if we simply obey God’s Law and keep His commandments we can enjoy freedom from sin and freedom from its negative consequences.

Why Didn’t God Terminate Sin Right from the Start?

Have you ever wondered why God didn’t put an end to sin immediately after man’s first transgression way back in Eden? Why perhaps He didn’t offer up Christ to atone directly for Adam and Eve, thereby restoring them back to perfection? After all, didn’t He love them just as much as He loves any six-plus billion people? If we take God’s Word at face value, than we must believe He did. God loved Adam and Eve just as much as He loves you and me. So why didn’t Jesus die for sin right from the beginning? To understand why, we must take a closer look at sin and its effects. You see, sin does not immediately present its consequences. Actually, many believe they have gotten away with crime simply because the law didn’t catch up with them. But what very few realize is that sin is like a droplet of water splashing into a pool and sending ripples throughout the surface. Inadvertently, the sin of one man or woman can affect an entire population of people. Eventually, the entire world experiences change, and in this case, for the worse.

Even well after the fall of Adam, mankind did not immediately experience the direct consequences of their sin. Their progenitors, Adam and Eve, became the long-forgotten ancestors of the past. Sin would have merely seemed to them the invention of God. So they continued sinning without any initial effects. And so sin kept on accumulating. One sin on top of another as the pile of sin reached higher and higher. It was not long before the sum total of all sins added up to concoct a terrific affect. At last, the negative repercussions of sin were felt. Sin didn't appear so insignificant anymore. People began to realize the cause and affect formula that sin carried with it. The pain and suffering were tremendous!

So this is why God didn't send a Savior into the world immediately after the "fall" of mankind. He didn't want to interrupt the negative process of sin. He wanted mankind to fully appreciate sin and its affects for themselves. **To become so radically altered by their sinfulness that they would eventually understand the value of being governed by His Law.** It was not merely the small nibble from an "apple" that defined our sinful transgression, but rather our act of disobedience and our disdain for His wise council and supreme authority. Adam and Eve bit into the forbidden fruit, but the collective race of mankind experienced the dire consequences that multiplied exponentially from their initial transgression. God's purpose for setting down the rule was now obvious.

Friends, sin produces not only pain and suffering, but eventually death. But the LORD is infinitely gracious. His divine plan, if accepted, allows us to escape from the consequences of sin. Trust in Christ Jesus and *thou shalt be saved*.

Freewill & Destiny

Freewill is a God-given human attribute. It cannot be taken away. But destiny is under God's control. So how do we reconcile the two? There is a significant difference between freewill and destiny. Freewill is governed by man's choice and destiny is governed by God's. While God holds our destiny in His hands, He does not control our freewill. He does not arrange and organize our every action, thought, and desire. We do have freewill. We can respond to circumstances, temptations, hurt, and pain any way we choose. But in the end, our choices will ultimately define our destiny.

To a certain degree and only in theory, we can insert the aspects of freewill and destiny into a competitive sporting match. The world is the arena. We are the players. God and Satan are the coach masters.

But we must acknowledge from the start that God is infinitely superior to all. Remember, freewill plays, but destiny wins. In this match, God influences and motivates the participants one way, Satan another. But God's got the upper hand, since He has invented and now directs the entire match. And at times, for the sake of the game (God's divine plan), God allows Satan and His minions to manipulate the players in the arena to play the ball down his end of the court. But as players, we make the moves. We have a choice. We can allow Satan to manipulate and control us, or we can ignore his directives and play it God's way. We choose.

But what's the purpose for all of this—the match, the players, God and Satan? The entire purpose is simple when we realize that God's intention is **to locate true winners, people who will make a choice for good and champion His universal cause**. But don't worry, in this game, if you've been playing for the wrong team, you can transfer sides at anytime. God only wants willing players. Not robots of design. That's why in spite of human suffering and death, God chooses to allow freewill to take its natural course. Yet He expects us to make a difference in this world based on our own choosing.

Thankfully, in God there is no variance, “no shadow of turning.”—*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning* (Jas 1:17). This means that until the Day of Judgment (Rev 20:11-14) the rules will remain the same. God will not suddenly switch up the rules or disqualify good players (Christians).

But there are those who still don't believe God is fair. They would like for God to simply “stay out of things”. They believe He is cruel and mean just because He has power to make up the rules. And every law and command He has ever set forth is made to pass both their philosophical and psychological analysis. But bear in mind, “o man”, that no matter how unfair and cruel you may consider God to be, that doesn't change the fact that He is just, holy, and righteous, and yes, completely sovereign over the affairs of mankind. In fact, His perfect sovereignty over human affairs is best displayed in the following passages of Scripture:

Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? (Rom 9.20).

But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand (Isa 64:8).

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel (Jer 18:6).

Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding? (Isa 29:15-16).

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begetteth thou? or to the woman, What hast thou brought forth? (Isa 45:9).

Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, says the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa 55:7-11).

*For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. **So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy.** Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he still find fault? For who withstandeth his will? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory (Rom 9:15-16,22-23).*

The Depravity of Man

To appreciate the significance of God's love and the Cross of Christ we must first realize our condition as a fallen human race. The Bible teaches that on account of Adam's sin, man's nature is depraved: *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (Jer 17:9).*

Apart from Christ we are not only depraved, but evil (Mat 7:11; Luk 11:13). This is the most important realization for anyone to face if they are to understand the message of salvation. Without God's intervention and Christ's crucifixion, we simply could not save ourselves. We are incapable of self-regeneration and could never replace our evil hearts. Christ is our only hope of salvation. Only He could redeem us from sin and change our carnal character. But we can't accept salvation if we don't believe in our own depravity. What do I mean by this? It is simple really. To offer a man medicine you must first make him aware of his sickness. Once you have persuaded him that he is sick and needs help then you can introduce the cure to his ailment. This is how the Gospel works. It shows us our sinful condition and exposes our need so that the cross of Christ becomes that much more relevant and meaningful.

It is interesting that even in the Old Testament prior to the advent of Christ men were lead to understand their wretchedness in comparison to the holiness of God. Such a realization provoked the prophet Isaiah to make the following proclamation: **Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts...For we are all become as one that is unclean, and all our righteousness are as a polluted garment: and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away** (Isa 6:1-5; 64:6).

Isaiah was never confused about his human condition. He readily acknowledged his wretched nature. But what about us? Do we recognize our radical depravity? Do we truly understand why we need a Savior?

God's Mantle of Grace

*For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth **no good thing*** (Rom 7:18).

Apart from Jesus Christ the physical man is devoid of any good. This means that everything we love and appreciate in others is due to God's grace, and not because of their own human nature. Grace is like a mantle thrown over an object to give it a better appearance than what exists beneath. God's grace is almost like the clothing we wear. Without it, we would appear naked and unseemly. For this reason we can't take credit for the goodness that exists in any of us. When we begin to appreciate this concept and truly believe it, we are presented with a radically different set of lenses than the ones provided by secular society. We start to notice our inward self, not just the carefully tended outward image.

Our ugliness is then revealed and brought to light. For the first time in our lives the monster lurking within is exposed. All of our sophistication, arrogance, vanity, and the preconceived ideas about who we think we are melt away. We are stripped clean of our self-importance and pride. And that is the whole point of nurturing a proper outlook of man in comparison to God, realizing that we are only as good as His grace present in our lives.

You see, even unbelievers are covered by God's grace, though they may be more at risk of shedding it. Christ's words are so true then when He says, *apart from me you can do nothing* (Jn 15:5). None of us are capable of anything without a good dose of grace in our lives. But what if that grace was suddenly withdrawn? What would happen?

Perhaps we would instantly turn evil and Satan would promptly manifest His darkest and most twisted character through us. Have you thought of that? Could this be why all men justly deserve hell? Only God keeps us from manifesting our complete capacity for evil. So the next time you reach out to embrace one of your loved ones, realize that you are only drawing satisfaction from the grace of God enfolding them, and from nothing else.

When we reach the point in which we realize how repulsive and degenerate we are compared to Jesus, we begin to deeply appreciate His unmerited love toward us. The Bible says that while we were in our deepest condition of sin, Jesus died for us: *But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom 5:8). It is at the point when we see ourselves just as repulsive as the child molester on the evening news and cease to hold ourselves as any better than we are able to fall more fanatically in love with our maker.

“She Loved Much Because She Was Forgiven Much”

The story of the sinful woman is described for us in Luke 7. Christ was especially impressed with this woman because she spent an entire flask of perfume anointing His feet with all the love in her heart. His words concerning her actions perfectly capture the concept of love thus far expressed: *Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little* (Luke 7:47).

Do you see why this woman was able to love so much? Why she qualified for Christ's forgiveness? She was able to love Christ and receive His forgiveness because she realized exactly how much of it she desperately needed.

The same applies to us. If we don't feel like such bad people in need of special forgiveness, we are simply too sterile to experience any emotion toward Christ's sacrifice. Our self esteem is far too high. We are lost! God needs us to be pliant and pitiable—a broken people who humbly recognize our lowly and destitute condition. He cannot save us if we have already conformed ourselves around our own agenda of self-betterment. For this reason God can more easily utilize a dirty, but newly regenerated sinner, over a self-righteous Christian "creep". It's much easier to work with someone who recognizes their insufficiency, as opposed to the person who thinks too much of himself/herself. That's why it's so important to contrast our total wretchedness along side God's pure and undefiled nature. This is why Christ's gospel contains the greatest message of hope, because unconditional love is applied to those who least deserve it .

The True Meaning of the Cross

What does the cross of Christ really mean? Is it simply the physical pain and anguish that Jesus endured on the cross? No! Not at all. But quite sadly, many believe that it is because numerous Christian ministers choose to focus almost exclusively on Christ's physical pain. And they do so in exactly the kind of graphic detail you would expect from Mel Gibson's, "Passion of the Christ". Their sermon line goes something like this: "God loved us so much that He sent His Son Jesus to undergo the most excruciating pain on our behalf. Imagine what Christ must have felt when He was beaten, bruised, flogged, and crucified....". Isn't this the message of the cross often presented? You see friends, focusing on the cross by demonstrating what a painful experience Christ's physical sacrifice must have been, will never provoke any of us to love God and appreciate the magnitude of Christ's real emotional heartbreak.

The sad fact remains that many preachers and teachers of the Faith are themselves ignorant of the true nature of Christ's sacrifice. You see, what we need to realize is that Christ wasn't sweating bloody tears over spiky nails and a wooden cross, not too diminish His physical torment in the least.

So what really happened on the cross? What did Jesus have to endure to keep the Father's righteous and indignant wrath from descending upon mankind? In order to understand the answer, we must first come to realize that Jesus did not ask the Father to "let this cup pass from me" (Mat 26:39) as a reference to the physical pain He would soon endure. But rather the "cup" that Christ was about to drink would make Him appear so repugnant, so hideous, that it would force His righteous Father to have to look away. The act of the Father turning away from Him was simply too much to bear.

Imagine for a moment that God the Father and God the Son (Jesus) existed together throughout the infinite ages in an awe-inspiring relationship. But what do I mean by this? Simply that the Father manifested the Son for the express purpose of beholding His infinite purity and perfection in the face of His mirror image —Jesus Christ. And likewise the Son was content to behold His sovereign and omnipotent attributes in the person of His colossally majestic Father.

Finally, the epic moment of a universal drama unfolded. The Father lovingly extended His only begotten Son to the earth, Jesus, the world's greatest gift in disguise. The Father then watched to see what would happen. Would men reject this wonderful gift, as His omniscient side was promising, or would they somehow identify it for what it was—the only begotten copy of Himself given freely for their redemption?

No, as it was to be, evil men rejected Christ and affixed Him to a wooden cross. For the first time in history, the Father's loving gaze was torn away from His Son's beseeching eyes —the divine connection was severed. The pure, spotless, and innocent Lamb of God was crushed horribly beneath the enormous weight of mankind's accumulated guilt and shame. Our loving Savior, Christ Jesus, who knew no sin, died of a broken heart.

Where's the Justice in an Innocent Man Paying the Penalty for the Guilty?

Was Christ's sacrifice a fraud? Did He die in vain? After all, where's the justice in an innocent man paying the penalty for someone else's crime? Good question.

Forcing someone to bear the penalty on behalf of a guilty individual is truly unfair. But what if a man or woman chose to do so **willingly**? For instance, a set of parents might decide to bear the full financial responsibility incurred by their teenager's vandalism spree. Could they do so by choice? Yes, of course. And in the same exact way, Jesus chose to bear our penalty so we could be spared divine judgement and receive the Father's forgiveness.

Make no mistake friends, Christ Jesus not only **willingly** accepted the full punishment meant for us, but He also did so **eagerly**.

The Love of God

Over and again, the Scriptures describe God as being the very source of love: ...**for God is love** (1 Jn 4:8).

It is interesting that pagan cultures portray their gods as being cruel and vindictive, quick to rain fire on any who don't satisfy them with a special token of sacrifice. Yet the God of the Bible is totally different. Unlike the many pagan deities, the Father reaches out to all of His creatures seeking to become our dearest and most intimate friend. We have the privilege of becoming the great Almighty's personal companions! Notice:

*...Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness:
and he was called the Friend of God (James 2:23).*

You are My friends if you do whatever I command you . "No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain... (John 15:12-14).

You see, the Bible is really nothing more than a vast chronicle of God's historical concern with mankind. His righteous dealings with the human race. His innumerable pleas for repentance. And His intimate love affair with a nation, whom He calls His bride:

*Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; Thine eyes are as doves behind thy veil. Thy hair is as a flock of goats, That lie along the side of mount Gilead. How fair is thy love, **my sister, my bride!** How much better is thy love than wine! And the fragrance of thine oils than all manner of spices! (Song of Solomon 4:1,10).*

So then how privileged we are to serve such a devoted and caring God. How amazing it is that in spite our disinterest with Him, God is still willing to come down to our level in order to remind us of His ever-present nearness just as He did with His servant Moses:

And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, the LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness and truth (Exodus 34:5-6).

Essentially, God was telling Moses, "look at me! Here I am! I can show you the way! I'm merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness and truth! You can really trust me!"

But God's love doesn't end there, friends. Even when we "grow up and forget about Him", God is still willing to find us and lead us back home like little children:

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son. And I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms, but they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with ropes of man, with cords of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. And I bent down and fed them. How could I give you up, Ephraim? How could I hand you over, Israel? How could I make you like Admah? How could I set you like Tseboyim? My heart turns within me, all My compassion is kindled. I shall not let the heat of my wrath burn, I shall not turn to destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man, the Set-apart One in your midst, and I shall not come in enmity" (Hos. 11:1-9).

Conclusion

It is clear from the above passages and the content of our study that God is truly a loving God and that He desperately wants to become our Friend (John 15:12-17), our Father (Luke 15:11-32), our Redeemer (John 3:16), and our Lover (Song of Solomon 4). In fact, God even desires to dwell within us (John 15:4). Yet it is also clear that the suffering we witness all around us today cannot be blamed on God, because it is due to our own sin and rebellion. Nevertheless, God has chosen to use it to create beautiful contrast. And even more importantly, God uses suffering to refine our character and bring us closer to Him.

So let's not forget that all of life's trials and pain are there to serve a divine purpose and will benefit us in the long run:

"If I had not felt certain that every additional trial was ordered by infinite love and compassion, I could not have survived my accumulated sufferings." - Adoniram Judson

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 8:39).

Your servant in Christ Jesus,
John Aziza