

SUMMARY

Most any Christian you ask will agree (confess) that God loves us, that He is Love, that love showed itself on the Cross. In the midst of good fortune, we often hear about His blessings. During the hard times the common anthem is “He has a plan”.

While all of the above is very true, we have an opportunity to discover that these statements are actually topical – just the tip of the iceberg – if we’ll take time to further consider His Word, His explanation and demonstration of His Character. Chapter 2 introduces us to a bit more of the topic “God is Good”.

KEY POINTS

Prelude

Our Author Smith began his walk no different than any of us. He recognized God as Ultimate, confessed his own sin and need, and called on Jesus for His offer. He also, until one day, had little direct experience with God outside of a quiet Christian life. To this point in his walk, he agreed/confessed of His love. But, when real trial was visited upon him and his family, the next leg of his walk began as the Lord helped him understand a bit more of His Character and Intent. Early on, Smith discovered that there are many degrees of depth – as well as a range of opinions – on how God deals with us. But most importantly, he came away with a personal report, an experience, of God’s care for him.

This is uncomfortable, what do I need to do to make it go away?

Removing ourselves from uncomfortable situations (or placing ourselves into pleasurable ones) isn’t difficult to appreciate. Our world, from day one, is a constant reinforcement of cause and effect: If it burns my hand, move it away; If I’m cold, put on a jacket; If I’m hungry, eat; If I don’t want a ticket, don’t speed; If I don’t want to be struck in the nose, show respect. Conversely: if I don’t want to be fat, eat less; if I want to get there faster, speed; If I am in jeopardy, take preemptive measures. Our lives are replete with taking care of business and responding in some sort of action.

So, when difficulty visits us, it is natural to seek a way to avoid, or solve, or endure the situation. Pain, fear, loss, death – all of these are not what God left us with on Day Six of Creation. It’s also not what we can expect once everything is straightened out in the End. **He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Rev 21.4)**

But for now, in this Age before the Gathering occurs, we are in a place of tension. Somehow we have to reconcile a natural desire for peace and comfort v/s understanding God’s Character and Intent towards us v/s how we are to respond to trials and heartache.

Who sinned? Or, How does God see things and how should I respond?

This Chapter shares the Smith's experience following the diagnosis and the ultimate death of their daughter. He shares the responses of other Jesus followers, and the range of theology about God is sadly lacking. We also shared around the table our own experiences with responses given to us like this.

Ask 10 people to explain something abstract (as opposed to the answer to a math equation) and we can expect 10 different viewpoints. And, the more complicated the topic, the wider ranging (read: the farther from the truth) the answers might be.

Now, ask 10 people, even Christians, about an aspect of Almighty God. But wait, in His case it doesn't mean there are no definitive answers – this is why He has given and protected the Scriptures, and has given the Spirit, and deals directly with each of us personally. The answers from those 10 people will directly correlate to their exposure and experience with Scripture, Spirit and personal experience. Perhaps it is even safe to say that any number of people, if thoroughly experienced in these three things, will come to much the same conclusions about that aspect of God we've asked them about. Why? Because He is seamless, pure and consistent in His expression of Who He is. Yes, the ways He demonstrates it to us as individuals might be different, but the Truth behind the demonstrations run true to His Character.

God is Good and He loves me. This situation is terrible. Can this be reconciled?

Sink low enough into a difficulty, or spend enough time suffering an injustice, and we might likely find that our comfort in 'God loves me/He has a plan' is challenged. Have any of us ever found ourselves boxed into this problem?

1. God loves me
2. God is Sovereign and all powerful
3. This is a horrible pain/injustice/your need here

Is it possible that even the most devout Follower could come to a place where he would ask God "Why haven't you fixed this for me?" After all, He has the means to, and He says He loves me, right?

What is God working to accomplish?

At the most basic and simple human level, if I will show my love to someone it will probably revolve around their comfort and pleasure. This is the stuff of romance novels, the sweeping off of feet. But what of a love with a deeper view, perhaps something like wanting our children to learn how to handle a budget? In this case the result might sometimes be they can't immediately have what they want. Parents would likely see the degree of pain the children experience as reasonable and necessary. This parent would be loving, yet there is pain.

What is God's main, bottom line goal in Creation? That He would be acknowledged, praised, glorified, worshipped as the One and True God. What is Father's main, bottom line goal for us and Creation? In the Westminster Catechism, the answer to Question One is a common – and excellent – answer: That we would glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Both cases contribute to His goal. As we are involved in this, and as we are lacking as fallen people, and as He loves Himself and loves us, we enter Salvation to begin our training out of our wrong beliefs/actions, and into our understanding, faith and trust of Him. As a child learning to budget experiences pain (followed perhaps by financial peace through

godly obedience), should we not expect pain as Father teaches us through difficulty while keeping the End Goal in view? If so, our list might now look like this:

1. God loves me
2. God is Sovereign and all powerful
3. This is a horrible pain/injustice/your need here
4. I know and am learning He is Good and Trustworthy
5. He will even provide me comfort as I suffer His teaching trial
6. As I learn to trust Him, I too can learn to say I 'Count it all joy' (**Jas 1.2-4**)

This is why we have Jesus to lead the way, even when we would ask God "Why haven't you fixed this for me?" For He too asked Father this same question: "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." (**Lk 22.42**), and again in obedience on the Cross "And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (**Mk 15.34**)

Even Jesus, perfect, learned as a Man to trust and obey Father: "Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered." (**Heb 5.8**). Can we expect that our course would be any different than that of the Second Adam, Who we follow and have Salvation through? If Father loved Jesus, and He also loves us, then we have hope of reconciling the 'God is Good and He loves me / This situation is terrible' issue. Because, remember He also tells us:

The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms;
Deut 33:27

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, And He delights in his way.
Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; For the Lord upholds him with His hand.
Ps 37:23-34

If I say, "My foot slips," Your mercy, O Lord, will hold me up. In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul.
Ps 94:18-19

My help comes from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth.
Ps 121:2

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.
Ps 147:3

Fear not, for I am with you; Be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'
Isa 41:10

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

Isa 43:2

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

Rom 8:28

And,

Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.

Lk 12.32

The list goes on and on.

Some final thoughts.

And so, we can find reconciliation with His love and our suffering. We can say “This happened because God had a plan”, while also saying “Though this happened, God has a plan on what to do about it”.

There is much more to consider on this topic. John Piper, on the eve of his cancer surgery, scribbled out his booklet “Don’t Let Your Cancer Go To Waste”. In it, Piper makes a good argument that even ‘bad’ things are a gift from God. He reasons that as Sovereign, it isn’t possible for anything to pass Father’s notice – He can stop an event, cause an event, or let an event proceed that comes out of the fallen world. Was Piper’s cancer caused by God, or allowed by God, or not stopped by God? Piper chooses to anchor his opinion in Father’s Sovereignty and love, concluding that whatever reason He chose, He did indeed choose it. And on that, Piper thanked God for His gift of cancer. Piper saw it as deemed proper and necessary for His child John, in pursuit of God’s main goal of glorifying Himself and in helping John to see things increasingly His way. Piper counted it all joy, and we can too.