

Meeting the Ups and Downs of Life

Lesson One – When We Feel Like Our Needs and Expectations Aren't Being Met

Prayer – Lord God, we know that you hold all things in your hands and, even in times of turmoil, you are in control. Yet, our hearts hurt at those times. Guide us through clouds of doubt and the darkness of uncertainty with the light of your Word, so that we would hold fast to your promises, even as our lives seem to fall apart. Keep me close to you by the love of Jesus, in whose name we pray. **Amen.**

Goals

- To grow in the assurance of God's loving, faithful power in our earthly lives.
- To learn to trust that God answers prayers for the good of his believers.
- To learn to be content with God's good and gracious will for our lives.

Life example

Shawn Webster's wife drove her car out of their driveway into the path of an oncoming vehicle. She died instantly. Shawn was left to raise their one-year-old son. After five years, Shawn struggles with inner turmoil over a hope and expectation that God still hasn't filled. You see, about a year after his wife's death, Shawn began hoping for another Christian wife who would be a loving mother to his son. Shawn feels that God hasn't answered his prayers for a solution to his loneliness. Loved ones encourage him to keep praying. They tell him that they know God will answer his prayers, but he still awaits an answer. He begins to wonder if his expectations are set on the wrong things. He wrestles with the difference between eternal and temporal hope. He wrestles with faith in a God who seems to be the author of both good and evil.

Shawn's attempts to understand the will of God lead to conclusions that are common to human experience and which may often roll from our own lips. He laments that the future holds little more than day after day of the same frustration. There is no prospect of relief on the horizon and no hint that God will intervene, either to grant an answer to his desires or to change those desires so that he can once again experience contentment. He tries to believe that what God is doing is worthy, but at times it seems that God makes himself the enemy. Shawn wonders if he should find hope in the fact that since God hasn't destroyed him completely, there may still be the hope that he will restore him. He often finds himself looking for comfort in a passage from Lamentations (3:31,32): "For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love."

Reflections of faith

1. The death of Shawn's wife represents a tremendous sense of loss for him. Pinpoint some specific losses he was dealing with.
2. What are Shawn's hopes and expectations from God?
 - a. Agree or disagree: Hoping for these things from God is sinful since God never promises to give someone a spouse.
3. Put yourself in Shawn's shoes. As time passes, what thoughts run through your head?

4. Put yourself in the place of Shawn's loved ones. What are your concerns, fears, and hopes as you try speaking with him about his dilemma?

5. When we talk about the encouragement to "keep praying" (which is a good encouragement), what's an important truth about prayer to keep in mind?
 - a. What might be an even better encouragement than "keep praying"?

6. Take a moment to think about (perhaps even write down) some of the needs and expectations you are wrestling with right now. *Note: you won't be asked to share, but are welcome to do so as discussion progresses.*

7. What are some things to think about to determine whether your expectations are resting in the right things?

Light from the Word

Turn your Bibles to **Romans 8:18-28**.

8. Explain what verse 19 means—what is creation waiting for?

9. Verse 28 reminds us that God works out all things for good for those who are his. Basically, God shows his love in everything he does. Think about the frustration to which he subjected creation after the fall into sin; what might have been the loving purpose behind that?

10. Look at verse 22—creation is "groaning with birth pains." Give some examples of that groaning.

11. In verses 24 and 25, Paul emphasizes that hope has to be for something we don't have yet. Still, hope changes the way that believers deal with challenges and troubles. Explain how.

12. When we face frustrations like prayer that is not being answered the way we had hoped or something that seems good and biblical not being given to us by God, what comfort can we gain from verses 26 and 27?

Personal reflections

Shawn does not directly say that God is the author of evil, but his lament shows that he is wrestling with that thought. When we feel overwhelmed by something that seems bad, we begin to rationalize that the evil is out of our control. Since we believe God is in control, we conclude that God has permitted this evil to come upon us. Though we may not blame God—we believe that God knows what is best for us, yet, we still feel that God must bear responsibility for this evil because he has permitted it to happen to us.

This is the *suspicion* that Shawn expresses. He suspects that in some way God does not want him to fill the loneliness of his life with remarriage and a new mother for his son. God is therefore, in some way, a part of the evil of loneliness and unmet hopes and expectations that is afflicting him. Shawn does not want to have these feelings.

13. Shawn's thinking seems logical. What, however, is missing from the discussion?

14. There's certainly a nuance to reminding someone who is dealing with an unmet expectation about the eternal love and purpose of God. For instance, if someone tells me that a tragedy took place in their life and it's creating doubts in their heart about the goodness of God, my first response is likely not going to be "Don't worry, God will work this out for good," or "Stop doubting! That's bad!"
 - a. What would happen if that was the first (or even second or third) response to someone who is struggling?

 - b. What experience do you have in learning when the time is "right" to share with someone a reminder of God's eternal and good purposes?

Light from the Word

15. Turn to **James 1:12-18**. What do we learn, specifically about God's and evil, from these verses?

16. Look at **1 Corinthians 10:12-13**. God puts us to the test but also brings about the outcome that we are able to bear it (EHV's rendering; most translations talk about a "way out"). What is the only way we are able to bear all our trials? *Hint: think about what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9.*

17. In response to the tests God famously gave him, Job had questioned God. In **Job 40:1-14**, God responds to Job. What humbling message did God give Job?
 - a. In what ways is this a humbling (yet very important) reminder for us?

18. A person might have faith in God's eternal promise of heaven and yet still feel that for this life God is not meeting his expectations. Why is it sometimes easier for us to believe that God is in control in matters that pertain to eternal life than that he is in control of our future here on earth?
19. Some people might say that the message of Jesus dying for sin is so basic that we hardly need to mention it. Or at least, they fail to see the comprehensive nature of Jesus dying on the cross—it applies to every situation, including Shawn's. Why is it important to talk to Shawn about the seriousness of sin and the blessing of forgiveness?

Application

It is a challenge to pray for God to bless us in specific ways if we do not always know if our expectations agree with God's will for us. Along with the ACTS model (Adoration, Confession, Thanks, Supplication), the following might be a good model for our prayers:

- **P – Praise and thanks**
- **R – Remember your sin and your Savior**
- **A – Ask for specific things**
- **Y – Yield to God's will**

Try this prayer model on for size this week. If you aren't going through any dilemmas, imagine you are Shawn and write a prayer using the PRAY outline. Remember to look at the troubles through the lens of Romans 8:28 and everything else we talked about today.

P –

R –

A –

Y –

Closing Prayer CW 799 I Leave All Things to God's Direction vs. 1 and 3
**I leave all things to God's direction; he loves me both in joy and woe.
His will is good, sure his affection; his tender love is true, I know.
My fortress and my rock is he: what pleases God, that pleases me.
God gives me help in all temptation, his loving goal my soul to save.
Calm in the face of life's frustration, all earthly trouble I will brave.
His will be done eternally: what pleases God, that pleases me. Amen.**