

Meeting the Ups and Downs of Life

Lesson 1.2 – When We Feel Like Our Needs and Expectations Aren't Being Met

Prayer

Lord Jesus, life is hard. We want so badly to be in control of all things and, when we aren't in control, we quickly feel helpless and hopeless. Remind us of your great love and compassion for us. In all things, fix our eyes on you and your cross, where all your promises stand fulfilled. Remind us that this life is not all there is to live for, so that we would eagerly await the joy you have waiting for us in heaven. In your holy name we pray. **Amen.**

Recap from last week

We were introduced to a man named Shawn. Shawn's wife (we'll call her Leah) had died in a tragic car accident, leaving him to raise their one-year-old son on his own. After a year, Shawn has begun to pray that God would give him a new wife and mother to his child, thus filling the void of loneliness that had been left by the sudden loss of Leah. Fast forward another four years and God has still not granted that request. Pastors and loved ones alike encourage Shawn to keep praying, but Shawn wrestles with a lot—*Is God the author of both evil and good? What is the difference between hope in this world and eternal hope? What are the proper expectations to have in a situation like this?*

Even if we haven't been exactly in Shawn's shoes, we have wrestled with similar questions, especially when it comes to needs and expectations. So, last week, we touched on the different aspects of loss that Shawn had gone through and how that loss was affecting his relationship with God; we discussed the fears, concerns, and hopes you might have as a friend ministering to Shawn—things such as, "What if I say the wrong thing?" or "I hope I can help so that he does not lose his faith." We also looked at Romans 8:18-28 as a way to help us recall the promises of God. Let's start in Romans 8 and answer some of the questions we had left over from last time before we launch into the new material for today:

1. Look at verse 22—creation is "groaning with birth pains." Give some examples of that groaning.
2. 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.
3. 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.

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

5. 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!" What would happen if that was the first (or even second or third) response to someone who is struggling?
 - a. 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

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

7. 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.*

8. 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?

9. 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?
10. 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. For what reasons 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 826 From God Can Nothing Move Me vs. 4-5

**Yet even though I suffer the world's unpleasantness,
and though the days grow rougher and bring me great distress,
that day of bliss divine, which knows no end or measure,
and Christ, who is my pleasure, forever shall be mine.**

**For thus the Father willed it, who fashioned us from clay;
and his own Son fulfilled it and brought eternal day.
The Spirit now has come, to us true faith has given;
he leads us home to heaven. O praise the Three in One! Amen.**

Upcoming Topics

- When our anger holds on longer than we want it to
- When we want gratification, and we want it now
- When we receive financial blessings
- When the devil tries to dull our conscience
- When a loved one is diagnosed with terminal illness
- When we recover from serious illness
- When a loved one gets married
- When a loved one dies suddenly
- When we outlive our relatives

If there are other "ups" or "downs" you'd like to talk about in this class, let me know (email, catch me after class, stop into the office, etc.). I'll be happy to dig into them and add them into the schedule, as possible.