

Philippians 10-03-26a

This is Friday, the 26th of February, 2010. We continue our detailed study on the subject of suffering and theodicy, which is the relationship that God is thought to hold relative to human suffering. We have a larger strategy of which this is a part, and that is looking at Bible challenges.

And in that regard, we've chosen one of the foremost proponents of alleged challenges, Dr. Bart Ehrman, and so we find ourselves midway through his book, *God's Problem*, how the Bible fails to answer our most important question, why we suffer. So we'll pick up with this and look at some Biblical statements, Biblical principles, doctrines, and promises related to suffering this evening, which I think go a long way toward rebuttal of this allegation that the Bible fails to address this question. And so that's where we'll pick up as soon as we ask God's blessing on our study.

Father, it is such a privilege to be part of a fellowship of believers who love You and appreciate Your Word and reflect that appreciation by consistently dedicating time and energy to assembling and fellowshiping together in that truth. We thank You for the gift of Your Word and the Holy Spirit who enables us to understand it, even though we are flesh and mortal and slowly fading in terms of existence, yet we know that there lies before us an eternal weight of glory and the testing and the experiences of this life are preparing us for a greater future. We pray that our study this evening will enable us not only to be prepared for that future, but also to live the days that remain to us in this life in a way that is pleasing in Your sight.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, we have tackled at some length, I think, the parameters of the discussion.

How can there be a loving God and yet be horrendous suffering? Okay, maybe you can make a case that sometimes suffering looks bad, but it ends up being good. You learned a lesson and you're a better person for it. I touched my finger to the stove and burned it and it raised a blister and I suffered, but now I am much wiser and I won't hurt myself much worse because I'm careless with hot things.

And this is classified as a meaningful sort of suffering. If you strive for excellence in a sport, you typically suffer. I cannot think of a sport where you suffer more.

I'm sure there are many where you suffer as much. Marathon running comes to mind, but I think there is certainly no sport I've ever attempted that inflicts as much suffering on your body as crew. Getting into a boat with other people and rowing as hard as you can until you're too tired to row anymore and then continue endlessly.

I have seldom witnessed the level of exhaustion that varsity crew athletes experience at the end of a race because you're using nearly every muscle in your body. You're rowing your body weight plus one-eighth of the weight of the boat plus one-eighth of the coxswain plus whatever it takes to make you go across the water faster than every other boat, hopefully. And it's incredibly draining.

I know there are other endeavors that are the same, but even practicing for that sport, they have this thing that ought to be in some dungeon museum along with the rack and the ball with the spikes on a handle and all that called an ergometer. My roommate bought himself one. He's got one in his dungeon-like basement of his very own where he can go down there and suffer.

But it's suffering. It's intense. But yet we say, well, you practice on this thing.

You build up your endurance. The end result is good. That is not so much the suffering that people like Dr. Ehrman have trouble with.

As we talked about last week, it is gratuitous suffering, suffering that seems to have no purpose. Children starving, abused children. Children, of course, anything that happens to them is horrifying from our perspective because we have a built-in, instinctive, almost mindless, proactive stance toward children.

If you think objectively, children are not that great. I'm accepting my own. But I mean children in general, well, they're just little prototypical human beings.

They're not good for much. They can't do much work. They create all kinds of trouble.

They're a lot of work. They eat and make messes and are just generally a drain on productivity if you think about it objectively. But nobody does.

Nobody thinks it because they're cute. The reason they're cute, I learned this in art class, is because their heads are abnormally large for their body. You look at it, this is why people think the Precious Memories and Charlie Brown, why do people think those are cute? Because their heads are too big.

It's just a syndrome and puppies and kittens, their heads are too big. That's why people love them. Any small thing with a big head, people love it and think it's cute.

That's why babies, you laugh, but it's true. And we're built this way. It's an innate survival mechanism.

Children objectively are just not that great. But we think they are and God bless them. And of course we love them to death and I do as much as anybody.

I'm just pointing out that if you can step back for two minutes and be objective, you'll realize what a tremendous pain children are. Especially the smaller they are, the more painful they are. They come into the world in pain.

They create all kinds of suffering for the rest of your life. This is why God said to Eve, in sorrow you will bring forth children. It's a biblical concept.

But see, that's objective and we're not objective. We're subjective and we foolishly love and can't get enough of our children. And God made that as well.

But the reason I bring that up is this is a suffering that we're happy to go through. You lose all kinds of sleep over babies. You agonize when something happens to your child.

They skin a knee. God forbid if something worse goes wrong. And you agonize, you grieve, you suffer for that.

But it's part of the system. It's part of the way God made things. This is what gets the next generation launched.

Did you ever stop and think, I've suggested this one time before in Bible class. I'm going to do it again because if one is good, two is better. Why God arranged us in generations.

Why didn't we just have one big generation? Everybody shows up. Everybody is in their late teens or early twenties. They live for 900 years and then everybody dies and you have the judgment.

Why are we serially, sequentially repopulating the earth generation by generation? Why? God didn't have to. That's an invention. I don't think angels are in generations.

Jesus said the angels in heaven are neither married nor given in marriage. And I am guessing that that means there aren't any little naked cherubs flying around like we have in the baby decor. They all seem to be, as I described, a single generation of creatures that I assume are probably all about the same age if there is such a thing where they are.

Why are we serialtim? Why do we get born? We are like the flowers. We grow. We bloom.

We look great for a few years. And then we just start wrinkling, shriveling, pruning, bending over, getting all crippled up, and then we finally collapse and die. And that's what life is.

I spend more and more time now looking at old people, imagining them young. I never used to do that. When I was young, it just didn't occur to me that they weren't always that way.

You know, you look at your 75- and 80-year-olds, and they just seem to have had some sort of perpetual old existence. But you have to suffer a lot to get that old and that gray and that wrinkly. You earn those wrinkles.

You earn those gray hairs by surviving. And your badge of honor, your Olympic medal for running the long race and getting to the end of it is you look horrible. You feel horrible.

And you're still staggering along because God hasn't taken you home yet. It's suffering. So this is the subject.

Why? Why do we do this? Wouldn't it be great? It wouldn't be great, but hypothetically, from a human perspective, it would be great if God had us wake up like you see in the movies, you know, clones come out in adult form, and they wake up, and they're 22 and gorgeous or 22 and handsome, and they finally wander around and find some scrubs to put on and escape the clone factory. And, you know, they magically learn how to talk and think and see and put together a 3-D perspective. And everything that it takes us 10 or 12 years to learn as children, well, they pick it up, you know, in 7 1/2 minutes of plot time in a movie.

But they're suddenly here. They got here without any suffering, without any skinned knees, without any bumped heads. And why couldn't we be that way? Why couldn't God wake us up? We're 22, and at the full peak of our powers, we spend maybe 10 or 15 years tops.

I think most of us are pretty good to 37 or so. And, you know, just at your peak, get all your challenges and temptations and everything out of the way, and then we all go line up at the judgment and go to glory. And you don't have this degradation and disintegration and just turning into a shambles and falling apart and suffering, you know, in some cases for months, years, decades.

And it just is a constant. The older you get, you know, you think the less able you are to handle that, and yet you get more piled on every year. You don't get to your 40s and go up.

You get to your 40s and you go down. You go down hard. You go down fast.

The elevator cable is cut. And it's a bumpy ride to death. So people ask themselves the question, why? Why this suffering? Why, if there's a loving God, does he put us through this? And so we did the explanatory stuff last time in laying a framework and a background for this, and what I want to do is go through the scriptures that tell us the answer, because this is Ahriman's contention, that this is a big problem for God, that there's so much pain, so much suffering that's meaningless and pointless.

We're not all learning great lessons because thousands of children are starving to death in some far-off country. We're not gaining any benefit when someone is tortured. We're not gaining any benefit when someone is buried in the rubble in Haiti and it takes them five days to die, and they're never found.

They're just suffering in there. It doesn't do them any good. It doesn't do the rest of the world any good.

It's gratuitous, unnecessary, pointless suffering. And it's horrible and horrifying to think about. Why? It's a problem for God, according to Dr. Ahriman.

Well, what does the Bible have to say about God and suffering? The concept that we've given this name, actually Leibniz gave it the name Theodicy. What does it mean? What are God's

purposes in it? Why does he allow it? Let me begin by pointing out, and I've been encouraging my daughters and anybody else I could get to listen. They have to listen, whether they want to or not.

But it's so important to try to develop critical thinking skills and to exercise genuine logic. Logic is a great thing. It enables us to build from what we know into the realm of what we don't know, what we can conclude.

And this is what we as Christians practice as a skill all the time. Faith is the substance of things that are insubstantial, that are just hoped for. It gives them substance.

It gives them a reality, even though they're not real and substantial yet. But they become real and substantial to us by faith. It is the evidence of things not seen.

A scientist will tell you, if I can't see the evidence, you've got no evidence. You say there's a God. You say you pray.

You say you feel the presence of the Spirit. You say that you've got a spiritual life, that you are comforted. I can't see that.

I have no way to weigh it. I can't evaluate it. I can't measure it.

There's no scientific way to get a handle on that, so it does not exist. The Bible says faith is the evidence. Faith is the evidence of invisible things, what can't be seen.

And how do we get there? Well, it's not an irrational, emotional thing. It's both rational and logical. And there is a difference, by the way, between logic and reason.

Logic is a tool of reason. Logic is not all of reason. And that's another thing science doesn't fully understand.

There's a lot more to reason than just logic. Logic is one tool. You use your reason, reach out with logic, and there are certain things you can accomplish with logic, and there are certain things you can't.

There's inductive logic. There's deductive logic. There are many different things that you can accomplish, but your reason has other options.

Your reason does other things. Reason, for example, is the seat of your perception. How do you perceive what I'm saying right now? Your reason has frame of reference.

You're equipped with vocabulary. You assign meaning, denotation, and connotation to the words that I'm using. You weave those together.

You bounce them against your frame of reference. You decide how much weight to assign to

them. You evaluate.

All of that is a function of reason, and that's not a function of logic. So what does the Bible say about God's role when it comes to the existence of suffering, theodicy? Well, first of all, God permits suffering. It is not an accident.

It isn't something that got away from him before he could get a good grip. It's not an escaping balloon that nobody tied a knot in. He designed it.

It's a part of his purpose. He purposes suffering. He permits suffering.

We have, of course, Job 2, verses 6 and 7. The Lord told Satan, Job is in your hand. You think about this. That is one of the scariest statements in the Bible.

God said to Satan, Sam is in your hand. God said to Satan, fill in your name here, is in your hand. Say that to yourself a couple of times.

The Lord said to Satan, your name is in your hand. God commits you personally into the hand of Satan himself. Not a 15th level demon.

Not a 7th level bureaucrat. Not a tertiary functionary. Satan himself is paying personal attention.

He's got you in his hand. God did that. God committed Job into Satan's hand.

Job 2, verse 6. He is in your hand, but spare his life. That's not a request. That's a command.

We talk about how Satan is rebellious against God, disobedient to God, has departed from God, and so on. But you notice, when God said, spare his life, was Job's life spared? What does that tell you about the ultimate control God has, even over Satan himself? If Satan rebelled, did Satan just find a way to get past God, or did God allow it? There are things that God permits and things that God allows as functions of free will, but he has an overriding word. He has an overriding control.

This far and no farther. And so, right next to the scariest statement in the Bible, if you will, the Lord commits a believer, a growing, faithful, healthy, righteous man, believer, into the hand of Satan, but right next to it, but do not take his life. Spare his life.

And Satan really has no choice in that matter. He cannot take Job's life. It's not possible.

God has delimited that as the boundary. So there is Satanic inflicting of suffering, but it is limited, hard limited, by God. You look at verse 13 and you see the fulfillment of this.

Job's friends come and sit down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights. That's a long time. Seven full days, seven full nights.

Nobody spoke a word. Servants came and brought food. Men got up briefly to take a break and come back.

But they sat with him, coming and going, and in his presence nobody spoke a word for a solid week. Why? They saw that his grief was very great. Where did this grief come from? Disasters, calamities, great losses and suffering inflicted by Satan with God's permission.

His grief was very great. So we know from the Bible that this is not some sort of a fresh discovery here where Aaron says, you know, God's really got a problem. There's suffering in the world.

God says, look, there is suffering. It's a part of his plan and purpose. He permits it.

He designs it. And he also sets its limits and its boundaries. Assigns its agents.

There are times when God himself will be the agent of suffering. Other times, even the enemy, Satan himself, is the agent of suffering. God will use different agencies.

So we find that just from looking at Job 2. Job chapter 5, verses 6 and 7. Affliction does not come from the dust, nor does trouble spring from the ground. Yet man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Nobody in the history of mankind has lit a wood fire that generated sparks and those sparks didn't go up.

That's how it works. The physics of a fire are such that sparks fly upward. Even so, man being born has that same level of inevitability when it comes to suffering.

Birth itself is a sign. And this is the answer to my earlier question. Why does God organize us in generations instead of creating us all in a big batch and doing everything in a parallel fashion? I remember being the antique old fossil that I am.

I remember when our printers were all serial. And when they first came out with parallel printers, at least for personal computers, it was a big deal because they could get the data so much faster. Instead of stringing each bit one after the other like a long little railroad train, it would come eight at a time.

They were in parallel. They were all next to each other, elbow to elbow. And parallel printers produced a significant increase in speed.

And oddly enough, now all of your printers are serial again. But they're really, really fast serial. That's your USB.

The S in USB stands for serial. And so they've conquered the problem of pushing the little bits through in a little skinny stream. But why does God sort of serialize the generations? Well, birth.

Birth is a part of the trouble that is in the world. Nobody was born until after the fall. There was no

childbirth.

I suspect there would have been no childbirth had there not been the fall. I suspect that there were many things right after that expulsion from the garden that came as great shocks and surprises to Adam and Eve. New bodily functions, including childbirth.

It may not have been a total surprise if they watched the animals reproduce. But for whatever reason, human reproduction did not take place until after the fall. And God prefixed it with sorrow.

In sorrow you shall bring forth children. It's inevitable. And the very birth process, being painful, is a harbinger.

It's symbolic. God could have made birth a different way. It wouldn't have to be this very stressful physical event that it typically is for women.

In any sort of natural childbirth, there's no way to do that comfortably. It's not possible. Why? Why couldn't you suddenly get kind of a lump that just started growing and gets big enough, you carry it around in a basket, pretty soon it just disconnects and there's your baby.

Painless. God didn't do it that way. He could have.

We could have undergone division like flatworms. You kind of get a headache one night, you lay down, you wake up in the morning, there's another one just like you laying right next to you there. God could have done it.

Reproduction didn't take place any more. Why did he do it this way? It's a sign. It is a reminder.

The serial coming and going of mankind. Every generation gets to see death. Every single one of us has seen death.

Every one of us will see death. And barring the return of the Lord Jesus, every single one of us will die. It's necessary.

It's a necessary part of our experience. So, unlike the Israelites who went into the land with Joshua and never saw slavery in Egypt, all of us see the effects of slavery to sin. We see the degeneration.

We see the debilitation. We see the disintegration. We see the corruption and the destruction.

We get old and fall apart because of sin. It's not personal sin. If you're a big sinner, you're going to wrinkle up and die sooner.

Or if you're a golden, hardly ever sinned person, you're going to live to be 110. It is the intrinsic sin that is in the world. It is the fallen, out of balance, tilted axis of the earth sin.

It's environmental. We're conceived in iniquity. We're on the road to destruction as soon as we're conceived.

Conceived in iniquity. Born in sin. Headed downhill even as we reach our prime.

So, Job 14.1, Man who is born of woman is a few days and full of trouble. It just sums it up. Man born of woman is a few days and full of trouble.

It's the divine design. Now, it doesn't mean that it's God's best will, in terms of optimum. Optimally, no angel and no human would ever choose to sin, would ever choose to depart from God.

And the demonstration of God's dealing with sin would not be necessary. But free will, again logically, almost necessitates allowing rebellion, allowing the fall. So, man who is born of woman is a few days and full of trouble.

Leaving the book of Job and going to Psalms, Psalm 42.10, David says, As with a breaking of my bones. Some of you all have had broken bones. Some of us have been fortunate not to break a bone.

I've certainly seen people with broken bones. It's a bad sound. It's a bad sight.

It's certainly a bad experience. Break an arm. Break a leg.

Multiple compound fractures. It just gets uglier. As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me while they say to me all day long, Where's your God? Why doesn't your God do something about this? Doesn't this sum up the cover of this book, God's Problem? How the Bible fails to answer our most important question, Why we suffer? There you have it.

David asked this question 3,000 years before Dr. Ehrman. Where is your God? At least he records the question. Solomon can't get through the first chapter of Ecclesiastes without bringing up this same subject.

Ecclesiastes 1.8 All things are full of labor. Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

You get to chapter 2. What does man get for all of his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? All his days are sorrowful. His work is burdensome. Even in the night his heart takes no rest.

This also is vanity. His days are sorrowful. His work is burdensome.

His nights are not restful. You go a few chapters forward in 5.17 of Ecclesiastes. All his days he also eats in darkness, and he has much sorrow and sickness and anger.

You tend to get cranky when you're suffering. People in pain have a hard time being cheerful and bubbly. It's hard to be bubbly when you're hurting seriously.

And finally, in Ecclesiastes 7.14, Solomon says, In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider. Surely God has appointed one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing after him. And I'm not going to go through the translation and the interpretation that we did when we went through that book, but the main point here is God has appointed both.

So, Bart Ehrman notwithstanding, this is a topic that is fully introduced and fully addressed in the Scriptures. The Scripture doesn't ignore human suffering. It expounds upon human suffering.

There is a huge amount of Scripture about suffering. Go to the New Testament, Matthew 4.24. When Jesus was going around through Syria, this is the northern part of Israel, they brought to him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics and paralytics, and he healed them. Well, it's great that he healed them, but how long had they been suffering? How did the people of God in the nation of God, in the promised land, end up with all of these diseases, torments, demons, epilepsy, paralysis, withered arms and hands, blindness, deafness, and all the rest? Why did God allow that? Over and over again, all through the Gospels, it talks about those who were suffering and who were sick.

In the Bible, you find that not only does God permit suffering and allow it, and we see examples of it all through the Old Testament and the New, but God will actively send suffering. Sometimes he allows other agencies, the agency of disease, of bacteria or germs, or the activity of Satan. He will allow the weather to destroy and maim and wound and take away people's possessions.

That's permission. You could say, well, God does not actively cause those. Well, the Bible says God causes suffering as well.

Genesis 3.16, the verse I've been quoting, to the woman he said, I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception. In pain you shall bring forth children. I will multiply your sorrow.

I, God, will build sorrow into the conception and birthing process. Exodus 4.11, when Moses is at Sinai, and he says, I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue. God says to him, Who made men's mouth? Who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? There's a lot of people that are missing, what do they say? They're alternately enabled? What is that? Differently abled.

Yeah, God makes the differently abled, if you will. Psalm 55.17, remember that memory verse of ours? Evening, morning, and at noon, while I pray and cry aloud, He will hear my voice. Well, two verses later, Psalm 55.19, God will hear when you pray about your enemies, and all their no-good-doings.

God will hear and afflict them, even he who abides from of old. Because they do not change, therefore they do not fear God. And those who do not fear God, God will afflict personally.

Psalm 66.10-12, You, O God, have tested us, You have refined us, as silver is refined. You brought us into the net, You laid affliction on our backs, You have caused men to ride over our heads. This doesn't mean riding above your head, this means riding over your head.

I was reading some anecdotal family history last night. I was shuffling through some pictures, looking for something. In the pioneer days, when some of my couple of generations back ancestors were coming out here to Oklahoma and Texas and Arkansas, one of the little boys got to playing and horsing around and didn't mind and ran afoul of one of the wagons and fell and the wagon ran over his head.

Fortunately, the ground was sandy, but it was really funny, I wish I had that note to read to you, the way it's worded, the event itself I'm sure was not funny, but the way it was worded was funny because they said thankfully the ground was sandy and little Elmo was fine, although he had a crease in his head and couldn't see out of one eye for the rest of his life. But they said he was fine, except he had this crease and couldn't see out of one eye. And to them, fine was not having a worse, it kind of made me smile.

I'm sure it wasn't nearly so humorous back in the day, but people were just made of sterner stuff back then. Oh, he's fine. He can't see out of one eye, he's got a big crease in his head, he's fine.

They just had a lot more sand in their crawl than we do. Psalm 88, 15 through 18, and these are just representative, there's dozens more scriptures that we could bring to bear here, but the psalmist in 88, 15 says, I have been afflicted and ready to die from my youth. I suffer your terrors.

I am distraught. Your fierce wrath has gone over me. Your terrors have cut me off.

Your terrors? He's talking to God. They came around me all day long like water. They engulfed me altogether.

Loved one and friend, you have put far from me and my acquaintance into darkness. Everybody that knows me, that could comfort me, you've separated from me. God did this.

So, not only does God permit suffering, God, in some cases, actively causes it, creates it, sends it, produces it, is the agent of it, on purpose. Why? Well, this is the question of the hour, and there's no one single answer, because he's God, because he can, because he feels like it is superficial. There are a number of reasons.

Why do you work? If you're a man, why do you hold a job? Why do you have a job? Is there just one simple answer to that question? Normally, there are multiple reasons. One is to make a living, to earn money, but that has multiple facets to it. Why do you want to earn money? Well, for

a variety of things.

I want to pay bills, I want to have a place to live, I want to survive when my wife goes shopping. But there are other reasons. We get fulfillment from our work.

We feel useful. We make a contribution. We hope we leave things better than we found them in our work.

There is a satisfaction in working that you don't find when you're not working, and you're idle, and idleness wears on us. It's like laying around and not getting up. After you've been sick for three or four days, and you just get to feeling really bad, well, for a man who is designed to work, not working just is unnatural, and it's unhealthy.

It just makes you crazy, normally. So, there's a multifaceted answer to the question. In the same way, why is there suffering when God is in His heaven? Why does God permit it, or allow it, or send it? For a variety of reasons.

One of those reasons, scripturally, is teaching us, and refining us. It is a teaching tool. It is a betterment tool for us.

We already saw the verse I talked about. He puts us through it like the refiner refines silver. And that great picture of taking impure, precious metal and heating it so that when it's hot enough, its specific gravity is going to be different than the impurities.

And the impurities, if they're lighter, which in the case of gold, they almost always are, they're going to float. You skim them off. You heat it up a little more, the more liquid it gets, the more easily the impurities can rise to the top to be removed.

You can't remove impurities from gold in any way that I know of without heating it. It has to be purified by fire. Otherwise, its impurities will always remain.

It will never be as good as it could be if you don't heat it. And if I were gold, I would find it very unpleasant to be heated up and liquefied. But to get rid of the impurities, it's worth it.

So, Deuteronomy 8.5, You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. And this implies, this assumes, a good man. There are men who beat their kids because they're frustrated or they're insecure or they've got some other psychological problem.

But a good man chastens his son because he wants the best for him. He wants to teach him the right way. He wants to beat foolishness out of the heart of his child.

The rod of correction, drive it far from him. And as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you. He chastens you because he loves you, because he wants the best for you.

He's trying to refine you and correct you and improve you. Same thing in Job 5.17. We saw the quote from Job 5, 6, and 7 a little earlier. Job 5.17 and 18, Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects.

And by the way, a lot of these, you remember when we went through Job and we saw the different dialogues, and we're quoting from various, some of these are from Elihu, some of them are from Bildad, some of them are from various speakers in the book. But you remember one of the great things we learned in that book is all of the speakers are reflecting accurate divine truth. It's not the statements that they make, it's the application.

Do they apply? I can give you lots of truths, reminds me of some of the trickier story problems we used to get where they would give you a lot of information, but it doesn't necessarily all pertain. They throw you some red herring numbers that you don't even need to solve the problem. And sometimes they give you two numbers that you have to work together to get the number that you need to solve the problem.

And it's kind of opaque. It doesn't rise to the obvious when you first read the problem, and you're trying to figure out, well, now, I thought distance equals rate times time, and you didn't give me a time. Well, indirectly, they've given you the time, and you solve for that.

But they may have also given you the price of the Coke the guy bought while he was waiting at the station, and that doesn't enter into the calculation at all. Well, the chastening of God, as it's depicted in the book of Job, is the topic. The three friends are sitting there trying to figure out why is Job suffering.

Everything they say is true about God's correction, about the rebuke and correction in the case of sin, and so on. But it's such a sophisticated book. I think several places in the Old Testament in particular have been so badly underestimated.

The book of Ecclesiastes is one, and the book of Job is another. And you remember that there's great, substantial truth in that book, and they're wrestling and unable to get to this higher truth that God is demonstrating in Job. These are all mature believers.

They've got lots and lots of truth, and you wonder, where did they get it? There was no written scripture. But all of this profound truth, and it's great. All of it's good.

You can quote almost any part of the book of Job and be on solid ground. It's all good. But when you look at it in the context, they're saying things that don't apply to Job.

And Job keeps saying, you know, good point there, Bill, Dad, but that's not me. That doesn't apply to me. You say, you know, not all suffering is chastisement for failure.

I'm suffering, and I'm not being chastised for failure. I must be suffering for one of these other

reasons. So Job 17 and 18 of chapter 5, Happy is the man whom God corrects.

Do not despise the chastening of the Almighty, for he bruises, but he binds up. He wounds, but his hands make whole. And it's a beautiful statement there that God wounds, but his hands make whole.

When you have to experience the wounding of God, the healing comes from his touch. It brings God close enough to touch you. His hands do the healing.

And you would think, you know, it would almost be worth being bruised to have the touch of the Creator's hand. Job 36, 8-10, Those who are bound in fetters, held in the cords of affliction, then he tells them their work and their transgressions, that they have acted defiantly. He also opens their ear to instruction.

Sometimes we have to be smacked before God gets our attention, just like a willful or a highly distracted child. Sometimes it takes an attention-getter. He opens their ear to instruction and commands that they turn from iniquity.

So God will teach us and refine us through suffering. There are many other passages. Daniel 11.35 is a great one in this regard.

Some of those of understanding shall fall. Daniel is talking about the latter days. He says mature believers, some of those who get it, are still going to fall.

Fall in the wake of these cataclysmic events. To refine them, to purify them, to make them white until the time of the end, because it is still for the appointed time. It's all for the appointed time.

They're being purified and refined and prepared for the appointed time. When you're mature and when you're advanced, sometimes it takes a whopping big test. Sometimes the only way to teach you anything more is to fall.

Some of those with understanding will fall to be purified and refined. Well, we've just touched the tip of the iceberg. We'll continue and try to cover as many of the rest of the scriptural categories and the scriptural answers, the alleged non-answers that scripture doesn't provide, are going to be so numerous that I don't know if we're going to be able to finish them tonight.

But we'll get as far as we can when we come back from the break.