



DEAN WELCH - TEACHER

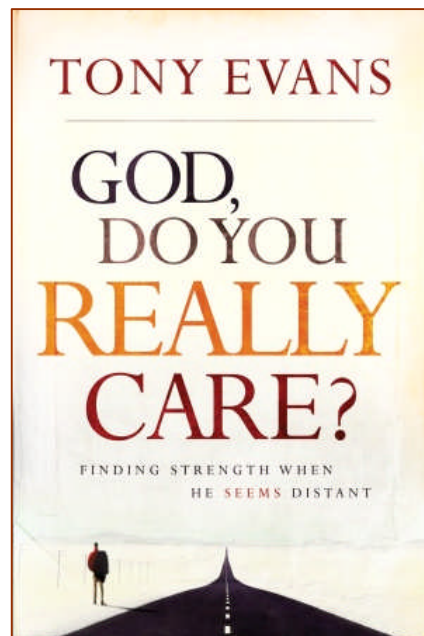
THUMP-THUD, THUMP-THUD

[DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I'M HURTING?]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 15, 2008

LESSON #3 FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



THUMP-THUD, THUMP-THUD

[DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I'M HURTING?]

A police officer pulled a man over for speeding and asked to see his driver's license. Calmly, the driver responded: *I don't have one. I had it suspended when I got my fifth DUI.*

Officer: May I see your registration?

Driver: It's not my car. I stole it.

Officer: The car is stolen?

Driver: Yeah – But, now that you mention it, I think I did see the registration in the glove box when I was putting my gun in there.

Officer: There's a gun in the glove box?

Driver: Yes, sir. I put it there after I killed the lady who owns this car and stuffed her in the trunk.

Officer: There's a BODY in the TRUNK?!?!?

Driver: Yes, sir.

Hearing this, the officer immediately called his captain. The car was quickly surrounded by police, and the captain approached the driver:

Captain: Sir, can I see your license?

Driver: Sure. Here it is.

It was valid.

Captain: Who's car is this?

Driver: It's mine, officer. Here's the registration.

Captain: Could you slowly open your glove box so I can see if there's a gun in it?

Driver: Yes, sir, but there's no gun in it.

Sure enough, there was nothing in the glove box.

Captain: Would you mind opening your trunk? I was told there's a body in it.

Driver: No problem.

The trunk was opened; no body.

Captain: I don't understand it. The officer who stopped you said you told him you didn't have a license, stole the car, had a gun in the glovebox, and that there was a dead body in the trunk.

Driver: No kidding? I'll bet he told you I was speeding, too.

Today we continue with Week Three of our bible study of Dr. Tony Evans' book, *God Do You Really Care?*, as we deal with the question all of us have asked often. *"God, do you really, really care when we are hurting?"* That's the problem faced by Mary and Martha in dealing with the sickness and ultimate death of their brother, Lazarus.

When a potter bakes a pot, he checks its solidity by pulling it out of the oven and thumping it. If it *"sings,"* it's ready. If it *"thuds,"* it's placed back in the oven. The same when you're looking for a cantelope or watermelon at the grocery store. Haven't you ever picked one up and thumped it to see if it's ripe or ready? Guess what? The character of a person is also checked by thumping. Been thumped lately? Do you ever wonder where God is when that is happening—when you're hurting? How do you respond when you're thumped? Do you sing? Or do you thud? It tells us something about our faith and our walk with God, I think.

As we start this morning, I want you to stop listen to these words from **Psalm 50:15**. When our class began this study two weeks ago, I gave them this as a memory verse to memorize. Listen carefully as I read from the New Living Translation. **Psalm 50:15** says: *"Trust me in your times of trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."* (Psalm 50:15 NLT)

PRAYER:

Father, if you don't speak, there's no reason for me to open my mouth,
And if you don't soften our hearts to listen, we have no reason to incline our ears.
So, please speak.
Please nourish our hearts.
Please soften our hearts to receive the seeds of truth that you have declared today.

We ask you Father to forgive us of our sins which are so many.
Help us to see your purpose in our life—what you have put us on earth to do.
To Jesus we offer this prayer.

Our study this week focused on the question so many of us have asked: “Does God really care when I’m hurting—when I am face to face with the loss of a loved one, or a dear friend, or maybe a dream or a goal I’ve set for myself?” Did you hear about the death of the four Boy Scouts killed suddenly this week by a 135-mph tornado at a scout camp in western Iowa? Tragic—but did you wonder why it happened? What about the death on Friday afternoon of NBC’s Tim Russert, a 58-year old TV journalist who was a deeply religious Irish Catholic from Buffalo—a man who was known for his devout faith and belief in God—a man making a difference in the lives of so many people. We can go on and on, but the question is always the same, isn’t it? It gets down to a three-letter question—WHY? And also, “God, do you really care?”

So, where is God when it really hurts? Recall with me the incident on October 2nd, 2006, when Charles Carl Roberts, a milkman, entered a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. He lined up eleven young girls from the class and shot them each at point blank range. The gruesome depths of this crime are hard for any community to grasp, but certainly for the Amish — who live such a secluded and peaceful life, removed even from the everyday depictions of violence on TV. When the Amish were suddenly pierced by violence, how did they respond?

The evening of the shooting, Amish neighbors from the Nickel Mines community gathered to process their grief with each other and mental health counselors. As of that evening, three little girls were dead. Eight were hospitalized in critical condition. (Two more girls died later.) According to reports by counselors who attended the grief session, the Amish family members grappled with a number of questions. But one question they asked might surprise

us outsiders. **What, they wondered, can we do to help the family of the shooter?** Plans were already underway for a horse-and-buggy caravan to visit Charles Carl Roberts' family with offers of food and condolences.

Reporters from every major country swarmed the hills of Pennsylvania, looking for an angle. They came to report on evil and instead ended up reporting on the church. The Amish were not asking, "Where is God when it hurts?" They knew where God was. With their long history of persecution, the Amish weren't for a minute surprised by an outbreak of evil. They rallied together, embraced the killer's family, ministered to each other, and healed wounds by relying on a sense of community strengthened over centuries.

It's unusual; here I am two years later standing in the pulpit at the First Baptist Church of Myrtle Beach telling this group about this incident in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania once again. Why? Your hurts and your pain have a purpose. Your problems, struggles, heartaches, and hassles cooperate toward one end—the glory of God. Recall the opening verse I read from Psalm 50:15. Listen to the words again. *"Trust me in your times of trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory."* (Psalm 50:15 NLT) Not an easy assignment to swallow. Not for you. Not for me. Not for Mary and Martha in our lesson this week. Let's pick up our story in **JOHN 11**, beginning with verses 1-6:

¹Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ²This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now laid sick was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. ³So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick."

⁴When he heard this, Jesus said, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be

glorified through it." ⁵Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.

Jesus friend Lazarus becomes ill and his sisters send news to Jesus. As we've noted before in the account over the past few weeks, they don't actually **ask** Jesus to come but judging by their reaction they expected him to come. Not only did they expect him to come they expected him to come and heal their brother. That much is evident in Martha's words in **John 11:21** (NIV) *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* and the words of her sister in **John 11:32** (NIV) *"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."* Now that's pretty much laying it on the line, isn't it?

Now you would think that with expectations like that and knowing Jesus the way we know him that he would have rushed to be with the sisters or knowing that he wouldn't have made it in time did a God thing and zapped Lazarus back to health long distance.

Look back at **JOHN 11:5-6** (NIV), *⁵Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days.* Now I don't know why Jesus waited two days, and I'm not going to pretend I do. What we do know is that when Jesus heard the news his friend was already dead and ready to be buried.

And then he came. But Lazarus had already been in the grave for four days. And even though it would appear that Martha had reprimanded Jesus for not being there sooner, she tells him *"It's not too late because even now you can perform a miracle."*

Could you do that? Standing next to your brother's filled-in grave, could you express that type of faith in God? You see her statement was not so much saying that she believed that Jesus could raise her brother, but she would **trust him** even if he didn't. *A woman was talking to her friend whose young son had cancer and she made this comment: "Perhaps God will be good*

and heal your son" the reply from the mother was "God is good whether he heals my son or not." That is what Martha was saying. Even now I believe that you can do anything.

But the story doesn't end there, because Jesus goes to the tomb. Let's read John's account of what happened—after all he was there. **John 11:41-44** (NIV), *⁴¹So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴²I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go."*

Did you hear that? Read the first few words of verse 44 again — **"The dead man came out."** Again. **"The dead man came out."** Listen as I re-read it s-l-o-w-l-y. "The ... dead ... man ... came ... out." Can I ask a question? What's wrong with this picture? Answer: Dead men don't walk out of tombs.

Question: What kind of God is this?

Answer: The god who holds the keys to life and death. The kind who rolls back the sleeve of the evil trickster — Satan — and reveals death for the temporary trick it is. The kind of God you want present at your funeral. You see, it is the reality of what the Angel Gabriel told Mary in **Luke 1:37**, *"For nothing is impossible with God."* And Jesus summed it up when he said in **Luke 18:27**, *"What is impossible with men is possible with God."*

So, where is God when it hurts? Right here with us—just as He promised. He will never leave or forsake us. Although we don't know the reasons WHY very often—there is a key truth on which we can stand. Turn to **PSALM 25:7-8 (NCV)** and listen to these words: *"You are good, LORD. The LORD is good and right."* And, listen to these words from **PSALM 34:8 (NIV)**, *"Taste and see that the LORD is good."*

God is a good God. We must begin here. Though we don't understand his actions, we can trust His heart. God does only what is good. But how can death be good? Some mourners don't ask this question. When the quantity of years has outstripped the quality of years, we don't ask how death can be good.

But the father of the dead teenager does. Did you hear about Bryan and Sam Cox's son, T. C. Cox—killed last Saturday in a car wreck near Wachesaw Road. He was only 19. What about the Boy Scouts? What about the infant child dying of sudden infant death syndrome? How can death be good?

Part of the answer may be found in **ISAIAH 57:1-2**, *"Good people are taken away, but no one understands. Those who do right are being taken away from evil and are given peace. Those who live as God wants find rest in death."* Did you hear that? Death is God's way of taking people from evil. From what kind of evil? An extended disease? An addiction? A dark season of rebellion? We don't know. But we know that no person lives one day more or less than God intends. I love the words from **PSALM 139:16**, which say, *"All the days planned for me were written in your book before I was one day old."*

For a great example of someone who questioned God, go back and read the story of Job. Then, look at God's response when He finally responds to all of Job's questions—in Job 38. Listen to these words from verses 1 and 2: **JOB 38:1-2 (NIV)**, *¹ When the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: ²"Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?"*

You know there are just some things that we DON'T know. The **secret things**, according to God's word. God does reveal some things to us, but some He does not. Listen to these words from **DEUT 29:29 (NIV)**: *²⁹The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.*

The things He has revealed to us are meant for us to study, ponder, teach and share—though even then with discretion and wisdom regarding our hearer’s capacity to handle them. The **secret things**, however, belong to God—for instance, exactly, why planes hit buildings, tsunamis hit cities, and children get cancer.

While leading the Beth Moore Bible study at my house recently called *Stepping Up*, I gleaned some help for this problem about hurting and how I am to respond? Beth Moore told about the time her daughter, Amanda, called her sobbing and told her that a friend of hers from high school had been killed in a car accident along with her one year old baby. The most baffling part of all, said Beth, was the fact that several years ago, the parents of Amanda’s friend had lost another adult daughter and her baby in a car accident. Follow me here: two children and two grandchildren lost to the same set of parents. What on earth?

Beth said she had no words for her daughter. In fact, she told her that she would have to get off the phone and call her back a little later. She hung up the phone and fell face down on the ground and cried uncontrollably. She beat the floor with her fists. She did everything but scream ugly words. But she couldn’t get any words to come out of her mouth, she said, at all. She just kept crying, *“Ohhhhh! Ohhhhh!”*

The point of this point from Beth Moore’s study is this. She says the primary reason we are sometimes at a loss for words is that we SHOULD be at a loss for words. We’re in over our heads and silence is our best option. And when the time for words does come, we’re wisest to say what is true. *“I just don’t know why things like this happen, but I am so sorry.”* And later, when no one is around, we can deal with our own confused hearts.

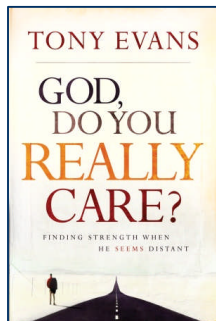
According to Beth Moore, this is the way she handles it when she’s alone: **First**, she feels free to fall on the floor in the privacy of her own floor in the privacy of her relationship with God and have a respectful fit.

Second, after she gets over the initial shock, she tries to rehearse what she DOES KNOW about God and His Ways. Through the process she is helped by what she DOES NOT know.

Third, she often recalls God's own description of Himself in **Exodus 34:6-7 (HCSB)**, *"Yahweh—Yahweh is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and rich in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving wrongdoing, rebellion and sin."*

Over and over Scripture attests that God can do no wrong. It also blatantly assures us He is sovereign and could stop an ill. How can I make those ends meet? I can't...but God can and one day will. Lean on his promises when you're hurting. He will step into the middle of your pain and grief over death and do something miraculous.

Let's pray!



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