



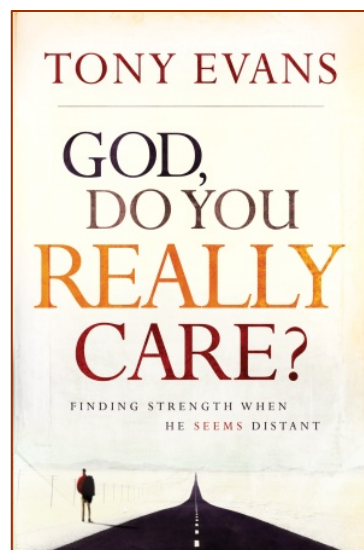
DEAN WELCH - TEACHER

WHY ME? WHY NOW? WHY THIS?
[GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I QUESTION YOU?]

WEEKLY SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JUNE 29, 2008

LESSON #5 FROM THE *MASTER WORKS* SERIES STUDY OF:



WHY ME? WHY NOW? WHY THIS?

[GOD, DO YOU REALLY CARE ... WHEN I QUESTION YOU?]

Charlie Brown is on the pitcher's mound looking pretty unhappy. **Charlie Brown:** Nine home runs in a row! Good grief! What can I do. We're getting slaughtered again, Schroeder. . . I don't know what to do. Why do we have to suffer like this? **Schroeder:** "Man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward." **Charlie Brown:** What? **Linus:** He's quoting from the Book of Job, Charlie Brown, seventh verse, fifth chapter. Actually, the problem of suffering is a very profound one, and . . . **Lucy:** If a person has had bad luck, it's because he's doing something wrong, that's what I always say! **Schroeder:** That's what Job's friends told him. But I doubt it. . . **Lucy:** What about Job's wife? I don't think she gets enough credit! **Schroeder:** I think a person who never suffers, never matures. Suffering is actually very important. **Lucy:** Who wants to suffer? Don't be ridiculous! **Schroeder:** But pain is a part of life, and... **Linus:** A person who speaks only of the "patience" of Job reveals that he knows very little of the book! Now, the way I see it... **Charlie Brown:** Good grief! I don't have a ball team. I have a theological seminary!

In a single comic strip Charles Schulz summarized volumes of theological thinking about the issue of human suffering and why God does what He does. While we spend our lives searching for answers, Schulz brought it down to earth in a simple way: how children learn to lose. It started with a baseball game—one of several hundred that Manager Charlie Brown would lose over the years. And the bottom line is both good and bad things happen to the just and the unjust, according to Charlie Brown and more importantly to God's Word in **MATTHEW 5:45 (NLT):** *"... For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike."* (HAND OUT "PEANUTS" COMICS STRIP)

Today, as we continue Week Five of our Bible study from Dr. Tony Evans' book, *God, Do You Really Care*, we come face to face with the toughest question of all—"God, do you really care ... when I question you?" Have you ever wanted to question God? I'm not talking about having questions for God, like "Did you really create the earth in six of our 24-hour days" or is "light

energy or particle?" No, I'm talking about coming with some tough questions for God - maybe even doubts and challenges. The kind where you, in short, believe God has "*blown it*" and ought to make things right?

Our study for this series, as you know, is from **JOHN 11**—the events surround the death of Lazarus, the concerns of his sisters, Mary and Martha, and the ultimate resurrection of Lazarus by Jesus—after four days in the grave. As we've seen in our study for these past five weeks, both Mary and Martha had all kinds of questions for Jesus. The real tough ones, like, where were you? And, if you'd been here, our brother would not have died. It was so emotional that, as we saw last week, Mary didn't even come out to meet Jesus when he arrived in town. Do you ever do that? Sulk and get angry with God for something YOU wanted or EXPECTED Him to do? Why?

I was talking to a friend the other day from another church and he was describing to me one of the members in his church. "This member is a modern-day Job," he told me. Why do you think he described one of his members as a "modern-day Job"? I'm sure it's because of all the problems that man had. That man used to be an airline pilot. But then, for no reason, he began to have anxiety attacks. And as you can probably figure out, anxiety attacks and flying airplanes don't go together very well, and so he lost his job. He began to have terrible back aches, just out of the blue – he would have to lay on his back for hours and stretch, just to make the pain go away. And then his child became terribly sick, and so in between stretching his back and looking for a job, he would be at the hospital seeing how his sick child was doing.

That man is a "modern-day Job." If you were to give a definition to the term "modern-day Job," what would that definition be? How about this – a "**modern-day Job**" is a child of God (not an unbeliever, but a faithful child of God) who suddenly experiences bad things for no reason. A "modern-day Job" is someone who seems to have a legitimate reason to complain to God.

Have you ever felt like a modern-day Job? You're a child of God. But then suddenly a bad thing happens to you, out of the blue. You start to feel frustrated, and you feel that you have a legitimate reason to complain to God. Don't you wish sometimes that God had a complaint department? At one of my client's offices, I see that there is a little suggestion box and a notepad next to it – you can drop your suggestions into the box. Don't you wish that God had a complaint box? I bet each one of you has a number of things that you would put into that box if you had the chance. As we discussed throughout this series, though we don't understand WHY things happen, we know, bottom-line, that God is good! But, think on that as I tell you a true story I heard about Scott and Janet Willis.

Scott was a minister in Illinois and he and his wife, Janet, had nine children — 3 of which were married. Scott had just bought a brand new mini-van for his family and decided to drive over to Michigan to visit one of their married children. It began as a wonderful trip—good family time together. Apparently, however, as they drove over a railroad crossing, a piece of metal flew up and made a tiny puncture in their gas tank. Not long after that, the gas tank caught fire and burst into flames. Scott and Janet immediately rolled out of the front doors into the grass. One of their children jumped out and ran also. The other five never left the van. Scott and Janet watched them burn.

Tell Scott and Janet that God is good and that He's enough. Two days later, Scott and Janet held a news conference. The story, naturally, made headlines all over. At the news conference, listen to what Scott said: *"You need to understand that we see things in the long term, and we see life in that light. We know our children are with the LORD, and we'll join them one day."*

One week later, an editorial appeared in THE CHICAGO TIMES, not considered to be one of the conservative, Christian newspapers of America. The article quoted Scott Willis when he said, *"God is good and we praise Him."* The editorial commented that Scott and Janet could have chosen despair, but instead they

chose FAITH, and that they set the example of how we all should respond. What does that say to the adversary? Where do we stand and will we say that God is enough? God is all we need! When we submit to Him, we will never again need to search for spiritual food or nourishment. He is all of the spiritual food and drink that we will ever need. JESUS is the source and the supplier of all of the spiritual sustenance for all of the people in the world.

Let's look at a few verses from our study this week to put things back into perspective. Turn to **JOHN 11: 33-39 (NASB)** and follow along. Mary has just confronted Jesus and was so emotional, she couldn't control herself. Picking up in verse 33: *³³When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled, ³⁴and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵Jesus wept. ³⁶So the Jews were saying, "See how He loved him!" ³⁷But some of them said, "Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?" ³⁸So Jesus, again being deeply moved within, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹Jesus said, "Remove the stone." Martha, the sister of the deceased, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there will be a stench, for he has been dead four days."*

As we discussed last week, Martha openly confessed her belief who Jesus was in verse 27, saying He was the Christ—the Son of God. And yet, here in verse 39, what does Martha say? [LORD, HE STINKS, SINCE IT'S BEEN FOUR DAYS!] Why? Martha was thinking practically about Lazarus' body—Yet Jesus asked her to do something absurd—open the grave! Sometimes God asks us to do things that don't make sense in earthly terms. Did you complete the graph on Page 54 in Day One of your study this week? Were you honest in responding to the question: How much of your life is driven by an earthly sense as opposed to Jesus' kingdom sense? A great memory verse we've used before for this situation is **COLOSSIANS 3:2 (NASB)**: *Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.*

Dr. Evans says that it's hard to think **spiritually** in a world that operates exclusively on an earthly level. But, why is that? People often question us because of our faith in Jesus. How do you react to being questioned? When bad things happen all around us, we know what it's like to question God. You can relate to those who have been through tough experiences that have made them question God and their faith. It's the mother and father whose son was killed by a drunk driver. It's the family whose father committed suicide. It's the small business owner whose business has taken a nosedive, and the pressure of the payroll is killing him.

Many times, we read the newspapers and say, "How could God allow that to happen?" Just a few days before Christmas, a woman was driving a van with her 10-year-old daughter, 13-year-old son, and 10-year-old niece. They somehow hit an SUV, and all four were killed. I know you can say this sort of thing just happens, but why? Could God have prevented it? How could something like this happen to a family? What about the story of the pastor, Scott Willis, that we just told?

So some of us don't really have a history of questioning God. For others of us, it's a constant struggle. My question today is this: how do you handle questions and doubts? Do you deny them? Stuff them down? Does it reveal a character flaw in you that has to be dealt with? What is the right thing to do when we have doubts?

What did Mary and Martha do? It's easy for us to look critically at the story of John 11. We get to see how the story turns out and then can look back on the events that led to Lazarus' resurrection. Mary and Martha didn't have that luxury. They simply saw God act in a step-by-step manner. After Martha challenged Jesus about opening the grave, what did Jesus do? Look at **JOHN 11:40 (NASB)**, *⁴⁰Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"* How do you describe yourself when it comes to obeying God?

Bottom-line question for us this week and today: IS IT OK TO QUESTION GOD? Absolutely! But the problem arises in what happens AFTER the questioning. Don't forget that Jesus flat-out questioned His Father in the Garden of Gethsemane that night before His arrest. But, He also submitted to the Father's Will when the Father did not grant His plea to let him out of the ordeal He faced. It's a matter of faith and trust in God—the Father.

Many of you have heard of the Christian singer/songwriter Steven Curtis Chapman. Just a few weeks ago, on May 21, 2008, Maria Sue Chapman, the five-year-old daughter of Steven Curtis Chapman and his wife, Mary Beth, was accidentally struck and killed by a car. On learning the details, I shifted to a more accusatory question: How could you allow this, God? Some of the Chapman children witnessed the accident in the family's driveway. The driver who accidentally hit Maria was her 17-year-old brother. Their mother, Mary Beth, has struggled with depression. From my perspective, God should have stopped the car. Is that question OK to pose to Almighty God?

Christians often respond to situations like this with statements like, *"God has a purpose and a plan for everything."* A Christian naturally responds with absolute faith, they say, quoting from **ROMANS 8:28** that *"all things work together for the good of those who love Him, to those called according to His purpose."* Some people even cite the story of Job and tell us that Job NEVER QUESTIONED GOD! So, many people seem to feign faith in these circumstances, doing their best to express the trust and faith that we think all Christians possess.

Don't misunderstand the point we're dealing with here. It's OK to fall on your face before a just and righteous God, beating the floor as we saw Beth Moore do in our prior study, and cry out, *"Why, God? Why?"* Have you read the life of Job recently, like I mentioned last week? He in fact questioned God! Early in his suffering, Job wishes he'd never been born. This desire is surely a question about God's will and plan, since God gave Job life. Job becomes increasingly accusatory. Let's look at a few verses to

remind us of what Job actually said and did, remembering that this book clearly reveals that God never turns away the questions of a sincere searcher.

First, turn to **JOB 3:20 (CEV)**, *“Why does God let me live when life is miserable and so bitter?”* Now, look down at verse **23 (NIV)**, *²³Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?* Now, look down at **JOB 7:1**, as we see Job asking questions similar to mine and yours: *“Why is life so hard? Why do we suffer?”*

Continuing in **JOB 7**, let’s read verses **20-21 (NIV)**, *²⁰If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? ²¹Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more.”*

Life is tough. As we said last week, life is certainly unfair—but we can’t lose sight of the fact that God isn’t. He is a just and righteous God. When I was in radio here at the beach in the late 60’s and early 70’s before going off to law school, I remember using a popular phrase: AND THE HITS JUST KEEP ON COMING! Today, I view that phrase totally differently. Hits now are problems—not top records or songs. Today we have small hits: The car won’t start. You lose something valuable. It’s raining on your five-hundred-person outdoor event. And then there are big hits: She’s diagnosed with cancer. You’re being laid off. They’re getting divorced. The story of Scott and Janet Willis or the tragedy of Mary Beth and Steven Curtis Chapman’s five-year old daughter—killed by one of their children. Yet, regardless of the magnitude, each trial causes us to ask, “Lord, do you really care?”

Let’s look at Job again. Turn to **JOB 10:2-7 (NIV)**, *²I will say to God: Do not condemn me, but tell me what charges you have against me. ³Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the*

wicked? ⁴Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as a mortal sees? ⁵Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a man, ⁶that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin— ⁷though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand?

Job argued with and questioned God. Moses bargained with and questioned Him. Jacob wrestled with and questioned Him. Nehemiah questioned Him and changed His mind. David throughout the Psalms questioned God in one lament after the other. What does it tell us about God if He is willing to be questioned, persuaded, cajoled, bargained with and wrestled? It tells us He created us like Him so we could participate in a relationship with Him that means something in terms of integrity. It's no small thing for God to be swayed by a puny human being, but such is the wonder of His will. We are to lay it all at the foot of the cross. We are to be real, not feign faith. Remember what **JAMES 1:6-8** tells us? Listen to how Eugene Peterson paraphrases those verses about faith from his *The Message*: ⁵⁻⁸*If you don't know what you're doing, pray to the Father. He loves to help. You'll get his help, and won't be condescended to when you ask for it. Ask boldly, believingly, without a second thought. People who "worry their prayers" are like wind-whipped waves. Don't think you're going to get anything from the Master that way, adrift at sea, keeping all your options open.*

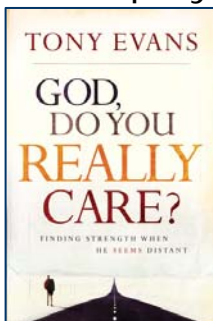
Now, if you want to know how God answered Job, read His reply starting in JOB 38. We have to understand and recognize that God created us and He loves us—no matter what happens in this sinful world. The wages of sin IS DEATH. But, listen to these majestic words by David, the psalmist, as he recognized this about God, from **PSALMS 8:3-8 (NLT)**: *"When I look at the night sky and see the work of your fingers—the moon and the stars you have set in place—what are mortals that you should think of us? For you made us only a little lower than the angels, and you crowned us with glory and honor. You put us in charge of everything you made, giving us authority over all things—the sheep and the cattle and all the wild animals, the birds in the sky,*

the fish in the sea, and everything that swims the ocean currents."

In other words: What's the big deal here? **We're the big deal.** Does this bring us glory? Yes, but that only brings Him more. That He would create us with this much power and authority says a lot about our Creator and what He created us for. He created us with intelligence and emotions. He created us like Him so He could relate to us and we could relate to Him. And He gave us the right to refuse Him, accept Him, argue with Him, badger Him, question Him—even tell Him to get lost if that's what we want to do. Think about that. Even unbelief has integrity. What kind of God would create a being that might not even believe in Him? A God who wants a relationship with him when he does believe.

That's why the very next verse of this Psalm reads, "*O Lord, our Lord, the majesty of your name fills the earth*" (Psalm 8:9)! We are part and parcel of God's glory. That He would do it this way—that He would create a world, people it with beings like Him, and then give them authority over that world—even the opportunity to believe Him or not—says as much about Him as it does about us. You and I are a big part of God's glory. And that's without even trying.

Let's pray!



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MATTHEW 5:45 (NLT), "... For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike."

