

God, Do You Know Where I Am?

By Dr. Joe Martin

My wife and I walked into the bedroom of a young mother who had just lost her 15 year old son. “Now where is your God?” she demanded. Born just weeks after her husband had suddenly dropped dead in his office; Jeff was a gift from the Lord. He brought some degree of comfort in the midst of her gut wrenching pain at the loss of her young husband. In a senseless accident caused by a drunken driver, her beloved son was taken from her

I searched for some kind of answer to the agony that gripped her. “It was not God who took your son’s life but a drunken driver who was so filled with his own selfish desires that he drove a car when he should have known better. Sin was at the bottom of your son’s death. Not your son’s sin. Not your sin. It was the sin of the drunken driver.”

Her feelings of pain and betrayal were so deep, it was three years of counseling until she was finally able to re-enter the church she had attended since childhood. As a counselor and pastor for 40 years, I’ve encountered countless events similar to this mother’s despair. In almost every case, people wonder where God is when pain and suffering invade their lives.

My wife and I have watched our daughter suffer with debilitating rheumatoid arthritis for almost three decades. Sometimes the pain is so severe that she cries out to God, asking him what she has done to deserve this kind of treatment. Both of her boys were in elementary school when she first became ill. How often Shirley and I have asked God where he is in her life. *Can you not heal her? What have we done so wrong that our daughter must suffer such pain?* The questions and frustration go on and on. Why does God heal some people and not others? What have others done that we are not doing?

When my younger brother was diagnosed with cancer, my parents could hardly stand to see their musically talented son dying. Living in West Virginia, Shirley and I spent hard weekends traveling to Georgia as often as possible. Dad asked me to call Oral Roberts ministries and ask them to pray for Jim. He asked me to call a person in Pennsylvania who was mentioned in an AARP magazine and ask her to pray. She asked us to join with a team of prayer warriors every Thursday morning at 9:00 a.m. surely the power of our combined prayers would result in my brother’s healing.

Following Jim’s death, my wife was afraid that we had not prayed hard enough, or consistently enough.

Can God heal? Does God heal? I would answer yes to both questions. However, the bigger question may be *when* does God heal and *how* does God heal?

The role of sin in the world.

I want to make this as short as possible while covering the basic principles of God's creation, the beginning of sin in the world, and its impact on God's role in human relationships, especially as related to healing.

Genesis chapters one through three is a synopsis of the beginnings of human history. In the first chapter we have the creation of earth and the introduction of mankind into the world. Chapter two is the re-statement of the creation of man with the introduction of the woman as a complementary person in the human story. The third chapter sets the stage for the entry of man's free will in making personal choices and dealing with the consequences of those choices.

Let me point out one thing that helps me understand the connectedness of the man and woman. Too often we separate them to the point we blame the woman for the fall almost exclusive of the man. However in Genesis 5:2 we read, "*When God created the man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created he called them man.*" Who sinned first, the man or the woman? Even if one took the fruit just moments prior to the other, they were both present and guilty because they were both called *man* and God did not distinguish any difference in their choices and functions until after the fall. If the woman took the first bite and then turned to her husband, Adam and he also ate of the fruit, why didn't Adam in his great wisdom and leadership stop her and remind her of what God had said about the 'tree of life'?

Following the temptation of the serpent, Adam and Eve both took of the fruit and the entire world has lived with the consequences of that choice to the present time. Sin entered into the world at that moment. Everyone is under the penalty of that sin. There are no exceptions. Now back to the story. When the two ate the fruit, they realized they could no longer stand in the presence of the God of Creation in their present condition of disobedience. They tried to find a way to cover up their disobedience but to no avail. Look at their behavior in Genesis chapter three. The man and woman did their best to prepare themselves for another daily meeting with God. They attempted to cover themselves to hide their newly discovered nakedness (body nakedness was the least of their worries) from the eyes of God and his disapproval.

When they "*heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He answered, 'I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.'* And he said, *who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?*" (Genesis 3:8-11.)

Here is the beginning of all our troubles in the world today. It is the age old problem of man wanting his own way, to make his own decisions, 'to do it my way.' The culmination of this encounter with God was the common everyday method of trying to put the blame on someone else. "*The woman you put here with me – she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.*" "*The serpent deceived me, and I ate,*" (Gen. 3:12-13). Ultimately they both pointed at God and said "it is your fault."

As God dealt with the man and the woman, he clarified the new roles they would now play because they chose to listen to the voice of Satan. Man will work the rest of his life to wrest

a living out of the earth. The woman will have pain in child birth which ultimately has little to do with the birth process itself but more to do with the pain associated with being a mother.

Where did sin come from? Where do the consequences of sin come from? What was the role of mankind in the entrance of sin into the world? What is the role of God in dealing with the sin of mankind? Is God punishing mankind for their disobedience or is the result of their disobedience a consequence of their own behavior?

Genesis 2:16 says, “***You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.***” Who made the decision to eat from the tree? Were they forced to make that decision? Did they have a choice? Why did they make the wrong decision? What are the consequences of their fateful decision?

Why are we prone to blame God for all of the bad things that happen in our lives? Why do we constantly expect God to bail us out when we make wrong decisions and continue to make them in spite of the power of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us by God?

Is there hope? God did not stop with the radical statements of despair and hopelessness for the man and the woman. He immediately began the redemptive process by making clothing for Adam and Eve from the skins of an animal. I picture God bringing his Singer sewing machine out of the sky and stitching together the first pieces of clothing. They did not ask for his grace but he freely gave it.

Similarly, he reminds us looking at this story thousands of years later that this is the beginning of the struggle between good and evil. In the midst of this first struggle, God drove the man and woman out of the garden to a new home where they were free to begin a new life. Only now there was a significant difference. There is no further mention “**of the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the evening asking, man, where are you?**”

The story continues with Adam and Eve having a sexual relationship in which she becomes pregnant. She named her first son, Cain. Soon she had another son and called him Abel. We see the continued result of man being able to make decisions based on his own free will. Adam and Eve’s clothing, made from the skin of an animal, provided the first covering for their sin. Years later, the two brothers brought a sacrifice before God. Cain was a farmer who worked with the soil to bring forth crops. ***He decided*** to bring an offering to God based on the works of his *own hands* even though he knew that wasn’t what God required. He easily could have exchanged grain for a lamb from his brother Abel, ***but he refused and did it his way.***

The Lord looked with favor on the sacrifice of Abel who brought a lamb from his flock as an offering. When Cain brought his offering of *the works of his own hands* God did not look with favor on his offering. Cain chose to be angry and his face was downcast. In the dialogue that followed, God reminded Cain that he had a choice, he could choose to do what was right or he could allow the sin that crouched at his door to control him. Cain chose to follow his own desires to the point of killing his brother Abel. This was totally a result of Cain’s decision to follow his own will and not to submit to the will of God.

This is the first concrete example of a person knowing what is right yet choosing to take the life of his younger brother rather than admit his wrong thinking and behavior. His sin was far more demeaning and damaging than that of his parents. *They set the stage for sin to enter the world. Cain was the first and primary example of what was to follow throughout the rest of history.*

Where was God when Cain was killing his own brother? Why did God allow this to happen? What purpose did this killing fulfill? The final verses of Genesis chapter four illustrate the ultimate results of sin. Here is the record of the first man in the Bible who had two wives. Where did this idea come from? Did God allow Lamech to have two wives? Or was this another evidence of mankind following the desires of their own hearts?

In chapter four we read that Adam and Eve had another son whom they called Seth. Seth had a son named him Enosh. ***“At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord,”*** (Gen. 4:26b). The two sons of Adam and Eve were following two separate paths in life. Lamech (line of Cain) took to himself two wives, stating that if Cain is avenged seven times then I will be avenged seventy-seven times. What arrogance is seen in this statement?

The contrast continues. One group of men followed their own desires while the sons of Seth are calling on the name of God. Jump to chapter six for the emerging of two threads into a single piece of cloth. ***The sons of God (descendants of Seth) saw that the daughters of the sons of men (descendants of Cain) were beautiful and they married any of them they chose.*** Here is the personal choice of man coming into play again. Verse five reads, ***“The Lord saw how great the wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”***

Because of the sinfulness of mankind, God was going to wipe out his own creation. Had it not been for Noah, the then known world would have ended. However, even in the face of such pain, God in his grace saved Noah because he was blameless and walked with God. The remainder of the Old Testament is the story of God reaching into the history of Israel and trying to point them toward a life of trust and faith. Yet time after time, man pulled away from God. God sent a variety of different kinds of messengers to interact with people, pointing them to truth and the reality of his redemptive love.

In conclusion, God does not directly allow bad things to happen to good people. He allows man to live under the law of the world which he himself brought into existence by his first selfish choice. In essence man said, “I want to be like God. I want to know the difference between good and evil. I will eat the fruit in order to determine my own destiny.”

The heart of God was clearly revealed when he sent Jesus Christ into the world. ***“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him,”*** (John 3:16-17).

Jesus Christ stands as an option to all of mankind. We can continue to follow our own selfish desires and live according to our wants and wishes. Or we can determine to accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior knowing that in him the “original sin penalty” has been canceled. Death will not be victorious over us. We have eternal life in Jesus Christ and will spend eternity with him.

What about the 15 year old boy and his mother? Jeff actually experienced the ultimate healing. Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, ***“So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord”*** (NKJV).

Does this mean that those of us who are left behind do not suffer pain and agony at the loss of someone we love and cherish? Of course not! What we can, and need to do is understand that grief is a normal process. We look to Jesus Christ and allow God’s Holy Spirit to minister to us in our grief. We come to a cognitive awareness that life and death are normal. All of us will go through this same experience at some time with other people in our lives and eventually in our own lives.

What is our confidence?

Note the position in our present situation. While we are home in the body we are absent from the Lord. We walk by faith not by sight. What are we looking forward to? We have confidence, we are pleased, because our promise is that when we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord!

What about Starley? How often has she been hurt by others who do not understand why a young person has gained so much weight? Why doesn’t she exercise? Why does she eat so much? If she can walk around her van to get her electric scooter from the back, why can’t she walk into the store? When she goes to church, why does everyone seem to welcome her and then eventually appear uncomfortable with her very presence? The pain of her illness is only part of the pain in her life. As her parents, our hearts ache for her.

Psalms 42:9 -11 states, ***“I say to God my Rock, “Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? “My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, “Where is your God?” Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God,”*** (NIV).

Does this take away her questions? No! Does it solve our hurt for her? No! But at some level we know that her life of suffering and pain has given her opportunity to be one of the most effective and compassionate counselors I have ever met. With all of her infirmities she pushed on with her life and completed a Masters Degree in Social Work. As a counselor, she sees 15 to 20 clients per week. What client is not encouraged to see a person so wracked with pain and accompanying disabilities show compassion and caring for them in their needs? She has a love

beyond that of many so-called healthy therapists. She lives with pain all the time and is an over-comer!

What about the death of my brother? While I was hurt and angry with God, it opened my eyes to the reality of death and empowered me to work with people in all kinds of situations. While I was determined to quit my job in West Virginia and move to Albany to be there for Jim's children, Shirley and I realized this was unrealistic. I had my call from God as a college professor and counselor. I was responsible to follow his will, and not my own desires. Within a year, Jim's wife married an outstanding individual who became an excellent role-model for Jim's children. I learned that without my intervention, God works in his own way and at his discretion and time.

Death in my family has helped me come to grips with the importance of living every moment for Jesus Christ in every way possible. This concept inspires me to move ever forward in seeking to know and understand the will of God in my life and in my relationships beginning with my wife, children, grandchildren, and now a newly minted great-grandchild. It is a motivating force in my ministry. As the poem says, we only have one life and it will soon be past. We need to know that only what is done for Christ will last.

Does God know where I am? He is not only a "Father," he had a Son that suffered unbelievable pain and suffering for no well identifiable reason except the selfishness and sinfulness of mankind. Mankind could not deal with his love and compassion because he did not meet their needs in the way they wanted him to. In spite of man and his evil ways, God not only allowed his son to suffer and die, he sent the Holy Spirit to bring strength and comfort to all of us. Does God know where you are? The answer is a resounding YES!!!

JESUS CHRIST IS THE ULTIMATE DEMONSTRATION OF THE LOVE OF GOD TO MANKIND.

1 Corinthians 15:55-58

"O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.

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