

Discipleship Questions

Why is your perspective of life's challenges so important to how you handle them?

How did God create this world?

What caused the paradise God created to be lost?

What were some new realities of this fallen world?

What impact does your sin and foolish living have on the challenges and suffering you face?

What impact does others' sin and foolish living have on the challenges and suffering you face?

Why is it critical to recognize the spiritual war being fought?

What can Paul's perspective teach you about how you should view life's challenges?



Life on this earth is full of challenges: Stress, death, grief, sickness, pain, suffering, disease, financial burdens, worries, disappointments, loneliness, regret, guilt, relationship loss, change, temptations, persecutions, etc. Although we often have high expectations for what life can be (and experience moments of this), we are constantly reminded that this life will never be what we want from it. However, the better we are equipped with the proper perspective of life's challenges, the better we will be able to overcome and experience what God has prepared.

Genesis 2:7-25

God did not create life to be full of challenges! So, despite whatever struggles life may bring, recognize that God is *not* to blame. Instead, God created everything to be very good (Genesis 1:31) – a true paradise on earth that was free from suffering, pain, and death. He provided everything that was good and beneficial for His creation. However, God also created people with free will and provided a test to see whether they would enjoy His creation within the confines of their loyalty to Him or whether they would seek to become something He did not create them to be – beings with the knowledge of good *and* evil. By abstaining from the tree, they would know what is good. But, by taking from the tree, they would know what is evil. Then, God made it clear that taking from this tree would result in the consequence of death.

Genesis 3:1-9, 16-24

This chapter introduces mankind's main enemy – the devil (Satan, in the form of a serpent; Revelation 12:9). As he challenged and enticed Eve concerning the tree, she chose to rebel against God (as did Adam). This passage demonstrates how rebellion caused various types of suffering and consequences. Notice how Adam and Eve now tried to hide from God, as their relationship with God was changed (i.e. spiritual death). Then, there would be physical consequences, including physical pain, suffering, and death as they would live outside the garden paradise God had created. Today, we live in the present result of this fallen world. This means that suffering, pain, hardships, and death will be experienced by everyone (Romans 8:20). Your expectations for living in this world must then be that you will regularly experience the effects of this lost paradise. There will undoubtedly be various emotions, disappointments, stresses, worries, losses, enticements, and pains that you will deal with regularly. Rather than blaming God for these things and/or seeking a sanitized version of life that does not exist, you must learn to embrace the fallen nature of this world and learn how to respond to it in ways that honor God.

Proverbs 9:1-18

While we can do little/nothing to change the trials and struggles we face due to the fallen nature of this world, we can control whether we add to these struggles through our sinful rebellion against God's wisdom and laws. This passage demonstrates that God's wisdom is like a woman who has built her house, prepared everything, and is now inviting everyone to come and feast on what she has prepared. If you fear the Lord enough to accept the offer to learn from wisdom, you will live (v. 6, 11). While this is no promise of eternal physical life, it does demonstrate that the wise person will not bring undue harm to himself/herself. In contrast, folly is also like a woman who is calling out and enticing everyone to come to her. Although her ways often appeal to human desire, they result in more suffering and death (v. 18; Proverbs 1:24-33; James 3:13-18). In addition to the consequences of our own foolish and sinful choices, we also deal with the consequences of other people who make foolish and sinful choices.

Ephesians 6:10-13

You are at war! The sooner you recognize that you are engaged in a spiritual (not physical) war, the sooner you will be prepared to embrace and properly deal with the realities of life on this earth. War is always ugly and messy. There are casualties, injuries, and devastation all around. The same enemy who successfully deceived Adam and Eve continues to work in the world today (1 Peter 5:8-9) and he has a host of others who work with him – including spiritual beings (Matthew 25:41) and other people who have obeyed him (1 John 5:19). Just as Satan left devastation in his wake at Eden, Satan continues to leave all sort of devastation in his wake throughout this world today. Your perspective of life, therefore, must be that of fighting in a spiritual war and choosing whether you will fight on Satan or God's side!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

The apostle Paul knew what it was like to experience the challenges and sufferings of life (2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 11:22-33). However, his perspective of these sufferings kept him from getting lost in the physical and emotional pain he experienced. Rather, he focused on what God has promised to those who serve Him faithfully! This hope is for an eternal home with God in Heaven, where all tears will be wiped away because all suffering will have ended and there will be no evil (Revelation 21:4, 22-27; 22:1-5)! This perspective allowed Paul and will allow you to view even the most difficult challenges as only being momentary and light in comparison with what God has prepared for His people who serve Him faithfully (Romans 8:18-39; 1 Peter 1:3-9; 2 Timothy 4:6-8; Revelation 2:8-11)!

Conclusion

Life is full of challenges and suffering. However, the wonderful news of the gospel is that even though paradise was lost through human rebellion, there is great hope for eternal salvation and to experience the restoration of paradise in Heaven through Jesus Christ! Now, you must choose whether you will allow life to defeat you or whether you will be victorious through Jesus!

Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series

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