



# God Has a Story, Too

## *Reflections on Suffering & Evil*

### Schedule/Topics

Jan 14 – Defining the problem, framing a solution  
Jan 21 – Suffering & evil from a non-Christian perspective  
Jan 28 – Suffering & evil from a Christian perspective

Feb 4 – Suffering & evil in light of the cross  
Feb 11 – Suffering & evil as a mirror  
Feb 18 – Suffering & evil does not get the final word

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**Audio Recording: "God Has a Story, Too" by Dr. Gay Hubbard** (you can listen on my website at <https://goo.gl/BfDzRL>)

### Rehearsing the Story

**Week 1** we stated that the purpose of this class is to strengthen our confidence in God's love and goodness so that outrage and resentment toward suffering and evil are disarmed by our trust and hope in God. Observing distinctions between natural evil and moral evil, the religious problem versus the intellectual problem, we attempted framing a solution through the lens of God's meticulous sovereignty and mystery. **Week 2** outlined 4 non-Christian views of suffering and evil, and we offered an argument for God's existence from suffering and evil. **Week 3** emphasized that God uses suffering and evil in the lives of believers as redemptive instruments to shape and mold us into the image of the suffering and glorified Christ. **Week 4** turned our focus on the cross. We proposed that when the light of the cross shines on suffering and evil, then meaning and significance begin to emerge. It is from the Lamb who was slain that the Lion of Judah appears to illuminate our path and inspire our journey through pain and affliction. We risked a thought experiment in **Week 5**, using mirror as metaphor to enlarge our vision of God's care. Though our moral and cognitive limitations are reflected by the mirror of pain and suffering, affliction also serves to sharpen our moral intuition and promote a longing for shalom and rest. This final week offers hope as we embrace one simple yet profound truth, namely, that our story is part of a much larger and richer storyline to redeem everything in creation. Even though we cannot be certain *how* God uses suffering and evil, we can be sure *that* he does so, because God has a story, too!

### Revisiting the Meticulous Providence of God

Not only does God permit and redirect evil toward his purposes, he also restrains it. Consider just a snapshot of God's careful and wise control:

- ✓ Abimelek was kept from having relations with Sarah, because God promised to fulfill his redemptive plan via Abraham's offspring (Gen 20:1-7).
- ✓ Haman's wicked plan to destroy the Jewish population was overruled by God's providential orchestration to promote Esther in the Persian empire (Esther 4:14; 9:1-4), thus preserving a people from whom the Messiah would come.
- ✓ God confines the evil of Nineveh by providing Jonah as a prophet to preach a message of repentance (Jonah 1:2; 3:10), although a few generations later God destroys the Assyrian capital for her recalcitrant idolatries (Nahum; see also Is 10).
- ✓ Even inexplicable disaster and seemingly gratuitous evil are not lost on God's story, but serve a purpose in the overall blueprint (Gen 37:28; 45:5; 50:20; 2 Kgs 19:25; Is 14:26-27; Jer 25:9, 12; Ez 14:9; Lk 13:1-5; Eph 1:11).

### The Legitimacy of our Hope

Our present identity and our future reality is fundamentally tied to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

**Because Christ is raised, we can be certain that...**

1. The world is not a closed system of impersonal cause and effect principles, routine physical laws of nature, or random social interaction among morally compromised humans. Instead, the world is an open system where miracles of God are not only possible but actual in history!
2. God's power to transform history's greatest injustice (the crucifixion of Christ) into the greatest glory of the entire universe has been definitively demonstrated.



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Listen to me! The greatest display of God's power was not in the past at creation nor is it in the present sustaining of the universe. God's power was comprehensively and supernaturally displayed at the cross of Jesus when he overcame the final enemy known as death. In profound irony, it is by Christ's death that he conquered death. Once and for all, Christ atoned for our sins and opened wide the doorway to forgiveness and reconciliation with God. It is the cross of Christ that turns hell on its head and defies all suffering and evil! But, God's story does not end there.

Jesus's resurrection and exaltation are heaven's triumphant declaration that all suffering and evil, all pain and affliction have an expiration date! The resurrection of Christ shows not only God's ability to reconstitute your material body thus demonstrating his power over your **mortal** life (Rom 8:11), but also shows God's power to completely refashion the immaterial order of the universe, thus demonstrating his power over your **moral** life as well. This is so important for us to realize that Paul asserts "death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin...But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Cor 15:54-56).

And so, God makes his appeal to us ...

"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits at God's right hand in the place of honor and power. Let heaven fill your thoughts. Do not think only about things down here on earth. For you died when Christ died, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your real life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory" (Col 3:1-4, NLT).

The same power that raised Christ from the dead is present in you right here, right now to live the life God has called you to live and to walk every day with a spring in your step and a hope in your heart (cf., Eph 1:19-20)! Suffering and evil, therefore, do **not** and **cannot** get the final word; Christ does! Our story has forever been re-scripted and we can confidently and loudly proclaim **God has a story, too!**

\*I'm indebted to and have referenced many others who have written so well on the problem of evil and suffering. Some of those include, Clay Jones, Craig Blomberg, Eleonore Stump, N. T. Wright, Doug Moo, John Feinberg, D. A. Carson, John Wenham, J. P. Moreland, William Lane Craig, Paul Helm, Doug Geivett, Paul Moser, A. E. Wilder-Smith, Alvin Plantinga, Henri Blocher, C. Stephen Evans, Oscar Cullman, Steven Boyer and Christopher Hall, and Douglas Groothuis.