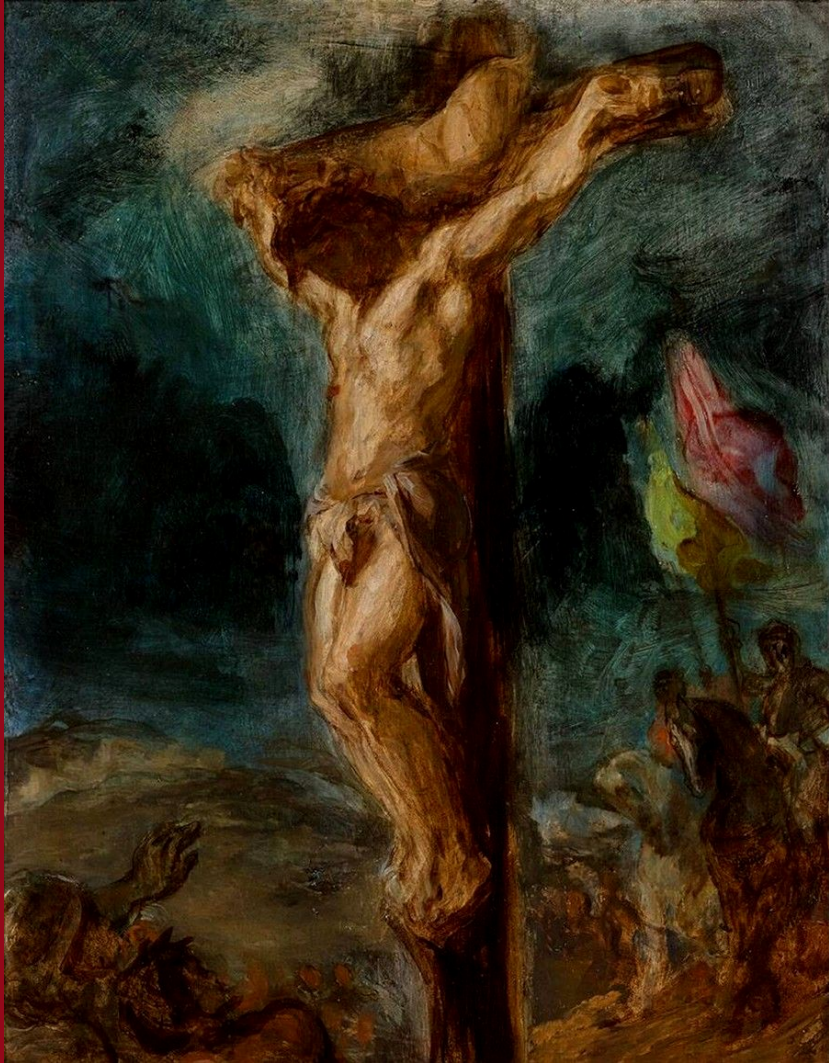


Sharing



Christ's Passion

to know the Person, Power & Passion of Jesus Christ



Discipleship
Course

Sharing Christ's Passion

The Problem Of Evil

The Origin of Evil
Satan's Stealth Tactics

The Results Of The Fall

Sin, Suffering & Separation

God's Answer To Evil

Why Jesus Died
The Reality of Jesus' Resurrection
The Guarantee of Resurrection Life

Sharing Christ's Passion

From Witnesses to Martyrs
Christian Persecution
Christian Bereavement & Grief
Assurance of Eternal Life

Sharing Christ's Compassion

The Love Cycle of Mission
The History of Christian Missions
Sharing Christ's Love With the Hurting
From Tragedy to Triumph

Session 1: The Problem of Evil & Suffering



Nazi guards herding new arrivals to the gas chambers at Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp

 Jewish Virtual Library

If God is a God of love, why does he allow all the evil and suffering in the world?

If God is all powerful, why doesn't he do something about it?

These two sentences are a classic statement of the problem of evil and the reason given by many for rejecting the idea of a God of love. On the surface they appear to be a devastating argument against any belief in God. After all, why do babies die of genetically inherited diseases, why do millions die of malnutrition or famine, why do earthquakes and tsunamis kill hundreds of thousands in an instant, and why are tyrannical leaders and governments allowed to torture and execute thousands of citizens with apparent impunity?

The Need for a Biblical Perspective

The problem of evil and suffering is only a problem for those who believe in a loving God, who is both all-powerful (*omnipotent*) and all-knowing (*omniscient*). The Bible shows people wrestling with the problem in the Old Testament books of **Job** and the **Psalms**, where we read the following:

Job 42:2-3 *"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.*

Psalms 22: 1-5 *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest? Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises. In you our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.*

Psalms 62:11-12 *Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, and that to you, O Lord, belongs steadfast love. ESV*

Questions

What is the classic formulation of the problem of evil?

What does Job realize after all his suffering as a righteous man?

What do The Book of Job and the Psalms teach us about evil and suffering?

Types of Evil

The Bible describes three kinds of evil:

- **Natural evil** - natural disasters and suffering resulting from living in a fallen creation
- **Moral evil** - the result of sin by me against others and by others against me
- **Satanic evil** - evil organised and directed by forces controlled by supernatural agents of Satan

A. Natural Evil

Natural disasters and suffering can be traced back to Adam and Eve's disobedience and their handing over control to Satan as the Prince, or Ruler, of this world. It includes suffering from natural disasters such as pandemics, genetically inherited diseases, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and plagues. It includes some famines caused by climatic conditions outwith the control of humans.

B. Moral Evil

Moral evil and suffering falls into two categories:

(a) Suffering caused to others resulting from my sin against God's laws and other human beings.

Under this heading we can include harm caused to someone else by my sin: for example, death or injury caused to another by my driving while drunk or under the influence of drugs; loss of a limb or physical capacity resulting from medical negligence; domestic violence against a spouse or children; addiction resulting from sexual abuse of a child; murder; etc.

(b) Suffering caused by others' sin against God and me

This includes emotional, mental or physical harm suffered by me resulting from behaviours like those above committed by others that have caused me to suffer.

The majority of suffering in the world can be viewed as the result of man's inhumanity to man. But behind this is a third type of evil, the Bible says, initiated and orchestrated by Satan himself.

C. Satanic Evil

This includes the effects of occult and satanic practices, *both* involuntary suffering the effects of others' sin, *and* voluntary, or personal, involvement in idolatry, occultism or satanic practices.

Some suffering is the result of generational iniquity in a family, where there was idolatry, divination, witchcraft or sorcery. The Bible talks of the need to confess and repent of the sins of the forefathers to remove the effects of generational iniquity. Personal involvement in idolatry, including Freemasonry, divination, sorcery or witchcraft brings curses pronounced by God on those who practice such evil.

Questions

What three kinds of evil and suffering are there?

How would you classify the following kinds of suffering?

- sexual abuse ● famines ● child cancers ● earthquakes ● domestic abuse ● genocide

Why did Jesus quote the first and last lines of Psalm 22 when dying on the Cross?

What do Psalms 22 and 62 suggest we need to realize when talking about evil?

Session 2: The Satanic Origin of Evil - Rebellion in Heaven



The Fall of Satan Engraving by Gustave Dore, 1866

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Satan - The Personification of Evil

The Bible states that behind all evil and suffering in the world is the personification of the depths of evil called the **Devil**, or **Satan** - the **Adversary** and **Accuser of the Brethren** (**Job 1:6; Zechariah 3:1-5**) - a Fallen Angel, who rebelled against God and was banished from heaven to earth, together with a third of the angels who joined the rebellion (**Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-19; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:4-9**). In **Genesis 3** he is shown continuing his rebellion against God as **Tempter**, by seducing the first humans into disobeying God's instructions. His hatred of God, God's creation and God's children is total and he is depicted as a **roaring lion** just waiting to devour the unwary (**1 Peter 5:8-9**).

Satan: Before & After The Rebellion in Heaven Isaiah 14:12-15; Ezekiel 28:12-19

BEFORE THE REBELLION	AFTER THE REBELLION
You were in Eden, the Garden of God, adorned with precious stones.	Your heart became proud because of your beauty
You were anointed as guardian cherub. You were on God's holy mountain and walked among the fiery stones	I drove you in disgrace from the mountain of God and expelled you, guardian cherub, from among the fiery stones.
You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created until wickedness found you.	I threw you down to the earth cf LUKE 10:17-19

The Satanic Origin of Evil - Rebellion on Earth



The Fall of Man Painting by Hendrick Golzius, 1616

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Satanic Stealth Tactics in Genesis Chapter 3

The Bible says when God had finished creating the world and everything in it, he looked at it and declared that it was good...in fact perfect. In **Genesis 3** we discover that this perfect creation was desecrated when Satan persuaded the first man and woman to disobey God's instructions not to touch or eat the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. When Eve took the first fatal bite of the apple and persuaded Adam to do the same, their eyes were suddenly opened to the reality of their nakedness before God, with whom they had enjoyed unfettered fellowship.

The tactics Satan used to deceive Eve are the same he uses today to persuade human beings to rebel against their Creator.

Step 1: Cast doubt on what God says: *"Did God say...?"*

Step 2: Distort what God said: *"...you can't eat the fruit from any of the trees?"*

Step 3: Deny the truth of what God said: *"You will not die!"*

Step 4: Sell the lie: *"God is just a killjoy and not good. You can be God."*

He told Eve four lies which he is still telling people today, because Jesus called him the father of lies:

"When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (John 8:44).

Lie # 1: You will not die - the basis of Atheism and Reincarnation

Lie # 2: Your eyes will be opened - Occultism & Eastern Mysticism

Lie # 3: You will be like God - New Age teaching to find the god within

Lie # 4: You will know good and evil - the basis of moral relativism and scientific rationalism

The ultimate goal is to persuade human beings to surrender to the 'Prince of this World', as Jesus called Satan, and to rebel against God by seeking to find the god within them by going their own way rather than God's.

Questions

Read **Genesis 3:1-19**

Where did the rebellion against God begin?

How did Satan manage to persuade Eve to disobey God's instructions?

What three things did Eve see in eating the apple? (v6)

How does John describe these in **1 John 2:16** ?


What for lies did Satan use to persuade Eve to disobey God?

What forms do these lies take today?

Session 3: The Results of the Rebellion & Fall of Man



The Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden Painting by Michaelangelo

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The results of Adam and Eve's disobedience were disastrous for the human race.

In **Genesis 3:8-24** we read that when Adam and Eve rebelled against God, three things happened.

- **SIN** involving rebellion against God and **DEATH entered the world** where it was unknown previously
- **SUFFERING** physical pain & emotional anguish were experienced where before there was *shalom*
- **SEPARATION** from God and **banishment** from God's presence.

God cursed Satan in his form as a snake by saying there would be enmity between him and the human race. He would bite human heels, but would also be crushed by a human being, pointing to the eventual victory over sin, death and Satan by the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ to free human beings from Satan's bondage.

In addition to feelings of shame and guilt, God said Adam would suffer from having to work the land and Eve would bear children in painful childbirth.

Loss of Intimacy & The Origin of Addictions

The most devastating consequence was the loss of intimate fellowship with our Creator, who has loved us with an everlasting love (**Jeremiah 31:3**). It is the origin of our attempts to find love without reference to God, leading to looking for alleviation of the pain of 'love-hunger' through some other god, some other person, some other activity or through an anaesthetic pain reliever, such as drugs or alcohol.


Questions

What three disastrous results happened when Adam and Eve rebelled against God's instructions?
God pronounced three curses. What were they?
What were the emotional effects of their disobedience?

Session 4: Why Jesus Died - God's Answer to Evil & Suffering



Jesus' death on the Cross was no accident

 Pict Rider, Adobe Stock

The Crucifixion & Resurrection of Jesus Were No Accident

The Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus were not an accident, but all part of God's plan to reverse the disastrous consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden.

"Just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned.....For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!." Romans 5:12 and 17

"For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man."

1 Corinthians 15:21

The Death & Resurrection of Jesus Reverse The Results of The Fall of Man

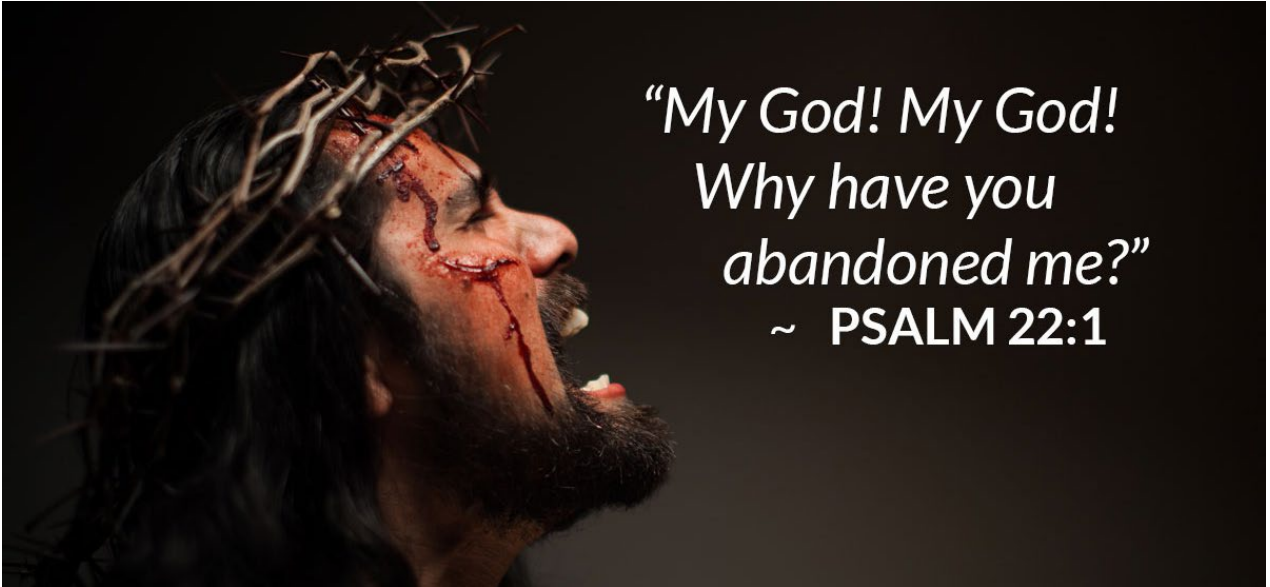
Paul is highlighting the fact that Jesus' death and resurrection reversed the disastrous results of Adam and Eve's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. This can be summarised in the table below.

RESULTS OF THE FALL	RESULTS OF THE CROSS
SIN & DEATH	FORGIVENESS & ETERNAL LIFE
PAIN & SUFFERING	HEALING OF BODY & SOUL
SEPARATION FROM GOD	RECONCILIATION TO GOD

Questions

Paul contrasts the life of Adam with the life of Christ. How?
How are the Cross and Resurrection essential to God's plan of salvation?
What two results of the Fall of Man does the Cross reverse?

A Prophetic Picture of Jesus' Crucifixion: Psalm 22



Jesus' death on the Cross was no accident

📷 Pearl, Lightstock adapted

Read Psalm 22

PSALM 22 is a prophetic picture of a crucifixion written by King David about 1000 BC, hundreds of years before crucifixion was invented as a cruel form of execution by the Persians about 400-300BC.

Jesus quoted the first and last lines of it as he was dying on the cross. Below is an outline of the psalm.

A. An Anguished Cry of Dereliction vv 1-10

"My God! My God! Why have you abandoned me?" The cry of a person who feels abandoned by God, but reminds himself that God is faithful.

B. A Prophetic Picture Of Crucifixion vv 11-21

These verses contain a detailed picture of what the crucified person is feeling as he dies on the cross.

C. A Triumphant Shout of Resurrection vv 22-31

In these verses the crucified man utters a shout of triumph that God will raise him to life and vindicate his death, ending with the words in verses 30-31:

"Our children will serve him; future generations will be told about the LORD; they will come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that He Has Done It!"

Jesus' Final Shout Of Triumph: *"Mission Accomplished!"*

In John 19:30 we read that Jesus utters a final shout of triumph as he dies.

"When he had received the drink, Jesus said, 'It is finished.' With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. "

Questions

- When was this psalm composed and by whom?
- What makes it such an amazing psalm?
- Why does Jesus quote just the first and last lines of the psalm?
- What is the main message of the psalm?
- In what way does the psalm echo the message of Isaiah 52:7?
- How is it related to Isaiah 53?

Session 5: The Reality of Jesus' Resurrection



The Empty Cross & The Empty Tomb Are God's Answer To Evil

Kevin Carden, Lightstock

God's Answer To The Problem of Evil

The problem of evil and suffering challenges the ideas of a God who is all-loving and also a God who is all-powerful.

The Cross demonstrates God's love by entering into all human evil and suffering

"God shows his love for us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." **Romans 5:8** ESV

The Resurrection demonstrates God's omnipotence (all-powerful) and omnibenevolence (all-loving).

"[Jesus] was declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead" **Romans 1:4** TLB

"Christ rose from the dead and will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him."

Romans 6:9 TLB.

"God raised us up with Christ and has seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus."

Ephesians 2:6 NIV

The Holy Spirit Is God's Guarantee of Resurrection Life for All Believers

The proof of Jesus' resurrection is also to be seen in every believer's experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit, when s/he has been born *anthen*.

"When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession." **Ephesians 1:13-14**

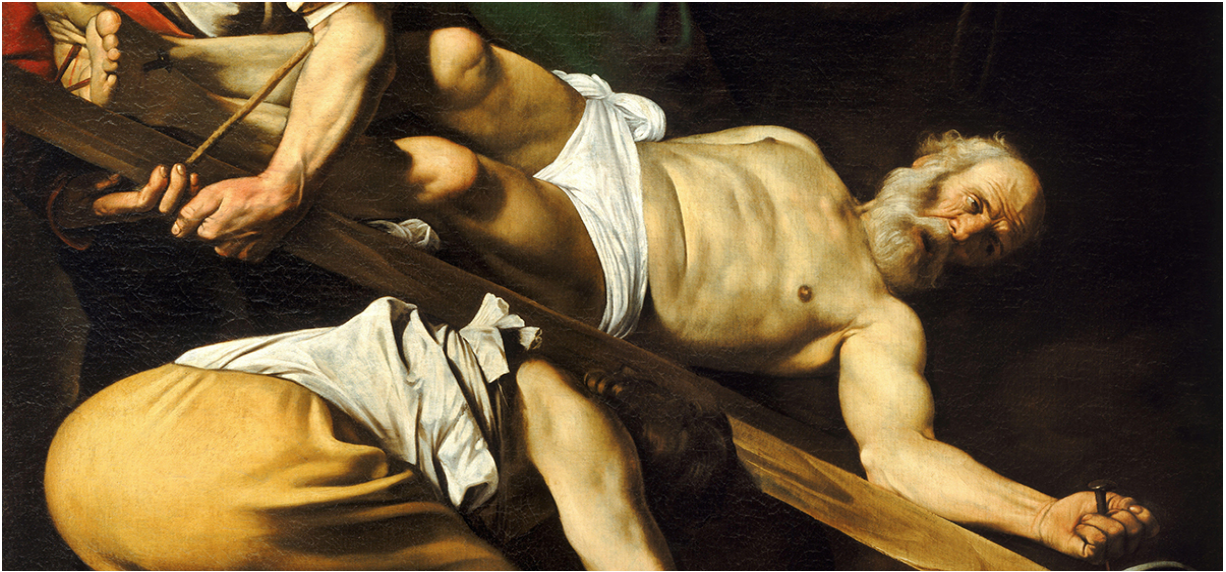
Believer's Baptism in Water is an outward and visible sign of a person's repentance for going his/her own way and a guarantee of God's forgiveness of their sins.

Baptism in Spirit is the experience of being overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit to receive God's affirmation that s/he is a child of God and to empower him/her for Christian life and ministry.

Questions

How do the Cross and Resurrection of Jesus answer the problem of evil and suffering?
How can I know that Jesus really is alive and has conquered sin, death and Satan?

Session 6: Sharing Christ's Passion: From Witnesses To Martyrs



The Crucifixion of Peter upside-down Painting by Caravaggio c 1600

 Wikimedia Commons

The Call To Be Witnesses

Before his return to heaven Jesus called the apostles together and gave them some instructions.

“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command:

*‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit..... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my **witnesses** in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’*

The word in Greek Jesus used for ‘witnesses’ is the word *μαρτυρες*, from which we get the English word ‘martyrs.’ All the apostles except John were martyred for claiming that Jesus Christ is LORD and the only way to get right with God.

The Stoning of Stephen

Stephen, who was called to be a deacon, was the first Christian to be martyred for his faith in Christ. He had testified in front of the Jewish Council, *The Sanhedrin*, that Jesus was the Messiah, whom the Jews had been waiting for and whom they had crucified. Below is part of what happened when he spoke.

“When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

“Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed,

‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’

Then he fell on his knees and cried out,

‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’

When he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul approved of their killing him.” **Acts 7:54-8:1 NIV**

Questions

What did the Greek word ‘martyr’ originally mean?

Why was Stephen martyred? How?

Who witnessed Stephen’s martyrdom and was eventually martyred himself?

How many of the apostles died as martyrs for their faith in Jesus Christ?

Persecution of Christians Over The Centuries



To be a Christian in many countries is to be persecuted

 Rob Birkbeck, Lightstock

Persecution of the followers of Jesus broke out in Jerusalem with the stoning to death of Stephen, led by Saul the Pharisee, who had held the cloaks of the men who had killed Stephen. Later Saul, who became Paul the apostle, and Peter were executed in Rome for sharing the Good News of Jesus' death and resurrection. Indeed, all the apostles, except John, died martyr's deaths for their faith.

The History of Persecution Down The Centuries

The early Christians experienced vicious persecution on the order of Roman emperors because they refused to say 'Caesar is Lord' and take part in emperor worship. As a result they were seen as a threat to the state. But in spite of persecution the Church grew and spread throughout the Roman Empire, confirming the saying by Tertullian that *'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.'*

Persecution of Christians by the state, other religions and by different denominations within the Church of Jesus Christ, has continued down the centuries to the present day. As a result a number of Christian organisations have been set up specifically to support persecuted Christians throughout the world.

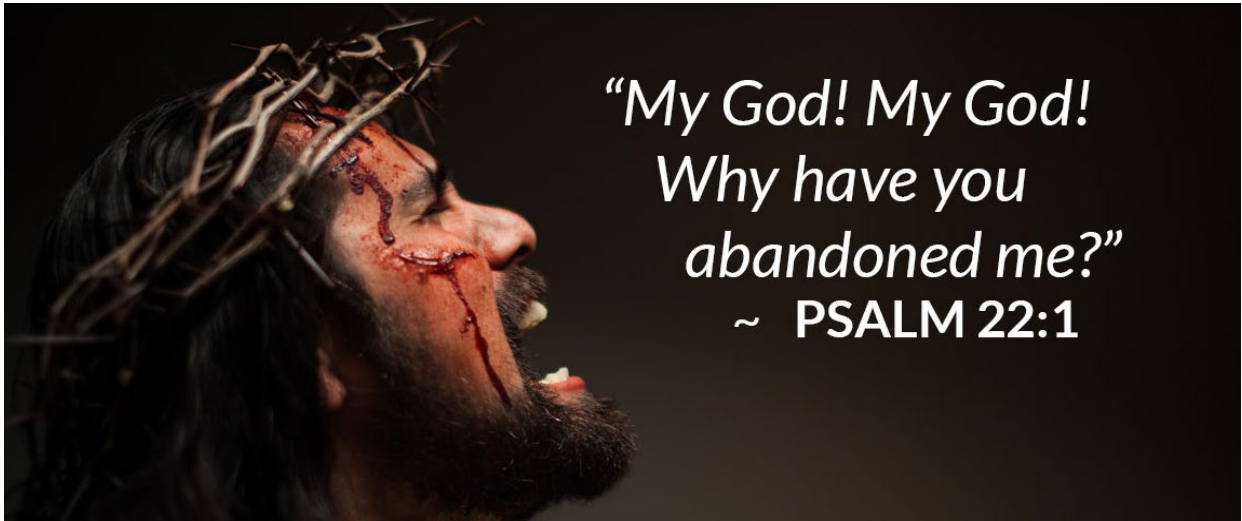
Below are some of the organisations that support persecuted Christians worldwide. To see more information about each, go to their website.




Questions

Choose one of the organisations above and research its history and where it operates.
Whereabouts in the world is persecution of Christians most severe?
How can churches and individuals support our persecuted brothers and sisters?

Session 7: Christian Bereavement & Grief



 Pearl, Lightstock

Grief Is Universal & Unique

Grief at loss is a universal experience for every human being, but unique to each person. It is a strange human emotion. No one can tell beforehand how s/he is going to react to the death of a friend or loved one. In some cases we may be surprised how deeply or little we are affected by a person's death.

Although grief is a unique and intensely personal emotion, there are universal features of it that help us to see how to grieve in a healthy way.

GRIEVING MY OWN MORTALITY at the prospect of my own death

Research by Dr Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and others has shown that there is a pattern to the way individuals respond to the realisation they are dying involving five stages or elements in their emotional response.

- Denial - I deny the fact that I am dying
- Anger - I am angry at the idea I will cease to exist
- Bargaining - I try to bargain my way out of the situation eg I will be more loving if I am allowed to live
- Despair - I realize that the situation is hopeless and that death is inevitable
- Acceptance - I finally accept the situation and determine to make my peace with God and others

Although this pattern is to be seen in the way people approach their news of their own death, it is not a linear sequence of stages and individuals may repeat the different stages before finally coming to accept the inevitability of their death.

Dr David Kessler, who worked with Dr Kübler-Ross, has added a sixth stage to the model of dying -

- Finding meaning in death

He is not an impersonal observer of the pain of grief, having suffered the loss of his son David in 2016 from an accidental drug overdose. He points out that *"Our hearts know how to grieve, but our minds work against us."* He argues that finding meaning is an important part of the messiness of grief at loss.

Questions

Have you experienced or witnessed the pattern of grieving one's own mortality outlined by Dr Kübler-Ross?
In what way(s) might being a Christian make it easier to face the prospect of my own death?

Grieving the Loss of a Loved Person, Position or Possession

The Waterfall of Grief in the River of Life

Grieving the loss of someone else, a relationship, a job, a limb, a pet or some other treasured possession involves a different kind of grief. The pattern of this has been likened to a river flowing over a waterfall into a turbulent whirlpool, which gradually subsides as the river flows on to its end. There are several stages.

Stage 1: DENIAL: A sense of shock, numbness & unreality

I don't believe it; there must be some mistake; it's all unreal. The need here is for practical help with funeral arrangements and emotional support for the bereaved person to begin to accept the reality of the death.

Stage 2: THE WHIRLPOOL OF EMOTIONS

Suddenly the feelings start flooding over me: anger; deep, deep waves of sorrow; worries about money and whether I will be able to cope; depression; "if only....."; sometimes mixed feelings about the person who has died, leading to feelings of guilt; helplessness; despair; at times I feel as if I'm going crazy. Friends and family need to be willing to let the person express their emotions and not tell the person it's time s/he pulled himself/herself together.

Stage 3: ACCEPTING THE REALITY OF THE LOSS

Gradually the truth sinks in - s/he is not coming back; I need to accept that and begin to get my life back into some sort of routine. This is a time for friends and family to gently help the person to find ways in which to reconnect with the world around him/her. It may help to look at photographs and reminisce about happy times in the past, although for some this will be too painful or inappropriate.

Stage 4: MOVING ON & MOVING OUT

This is when I can begin to move on, enjoying old friendships and exploring the possibility of new relationships, whilst treasuring the memory of the person who has died. Friends, family and work colleagues can provide an environment for re-engaging with the world and realising there is life after a death.

This pattern is to be seen across cultural and social groups, irrespective of their religious beliefs. So, it is normal for Christians to find themselves going through a similar process.

A Christian Approach to Death & Dying

In **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** Paul says that being a Christian means we do not need to grieve the way the rest of the world does, that has not hope.

"We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do, who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the LORD, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the LORD, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the LORD himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we, who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air, and so we will always be with the LORD. Therefore encourage one another with these words."

Questions

- What experience of loss have you had?
- In what way(s) is it different from grieving one's own mortality?
- What is meant by the 'Waterfall of Grief'?
- What sorts of emotions are experienced in the 'Whirlpool of Emotions'?
- Is it OK for Christians to grieve the loss of someone or something precious?
- In what way is grieving the loss different for Christians, according to Paul?

The Assurance of Eternal Life



Adobe Stock Photos

In **John 3:5** Jesus tells Nicodemus the only way to get into heaven is by being born *anōthen* by the Spirit. Later in **John 11:21-27** Martha meets Jesus four days after her brother Lazarus had died and says to Jesus:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."

Jesus said to her,

"Your brother will rise again."

Martha said to him,

"I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."

Jesus said to her,

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall not die for ever (KJV perish). Do you believe this?"

She said to him,

"Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Jesus promised his disciples he would not leave them as orphans, but would send the Holy Spirit - the Comforter - to comfort them by living in them, when he returned to heaven and they would not see him again until he returns to bring in the kingdom of God on earth. **John 14:18** and **John 16:7-8**

For 'born-again' Christians grieving the loss of a loved one, Jesus promises the reality of resurrection life in the power of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to be with us to comfort us in our grief.

How Can We Be Certain Of Eternal Life?

The Christian hope of resurrection life with Jesus in heaven is based on two things:

- **Jesus' Promise** to those who have been born *anōthen* by the Holy Spirit and who believe in him
- **The Holy Spirit's Guarantee** Paul mentions in **Ephesians 1:13-14** and **2 Corinthians 2:2**

*"In [Christ] you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance** until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." **Ephesians 1:13-14** (emphasis added)*

*"It is **God** who establishes us with you **in Christ**, and **has anointed us**, and who **has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.**"*

1 Corinthians 2:22 (emphasis added)

The Greek word for *guarantee* is *arrabon*, which also means *an engagement ring* like the one here.



Questions

Grief is a normal reaction to the loss of someone or something we have loved.
Why does Paul say we should not grieve like the rest of the world?
What two guarantees does God give all who have been born *anōthen* by the Spirit?
What does the Greek word *arrabon* mean?
How can we *know* we are going to be with Jesus when we die?

Session 8: Sharing Christ's Compassion



 ollis_picture, Pixabay

The 'Love Cycle' of Ministry

In **2 Corinthians 1:3-7** the apostle Paul describes the 'love cycle' of ministry involving God's use of wounded healers.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort."

Paul says the cycle consists of -

- Our experience of God's love for us
- Our response to God's love
- God call us to share his love with others
- Our reaching out to others with God's love in us
- Others coming to experience God's love for themselves



God Uses Wounded Healers

Just as we are healed through Christ's death on the cross for our sins (**Matthew 8:17** quoting **Isaiah 53:5**), so God uses wounded healers to bring his love and healing to others who are suffering.

Questions

- What is meant by the 'love cycle' of mission?
- What is the starting point of the cycle?
- Why does God use wounded healers to reach out with the Gospel?
- How did you come to experience God's love?
- What experience have you had of God using your woundedness to reach others?

The History of Christian Missions: The Book of the Acts of the Apostles 8:1-28:31



The Stoning of Stephen

Painting by Rembrandt van Rijn: Musee des Beaux Arts de Lyon – Wikipedia

Note: Saul is seated at the top of the picture holding the clothes of those stoning Stephen to death for blasphemy.

From Jerusalem to Samaria

The history of Christian missions starts with the scattering of the disciples as a result of the persecution that broke out in Jerusalem with the stoning to death of Stephen, witnessed by a Pharisee named Saul.

While the apostles remained in Jerusalem, those who were scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip the deacon went down to a town in Samaria, proclaiming that Jesus was the Messiah. His preaching was accompanied by signs and wonders to the great joy of all those who heard him.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had accepted the gospel, they sent Peter and John down to investigate. They discovered the converts had been baptized in the name of the LORD Jesus, but had not received the Holy Spirit. So, they promptly laid hands on them and they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Samaria to Ethiopia

In **Acts 8:26-40** we read that Philip received instructions from an angel to go out the Gaza road that led to the desert. In spite of the strangeness of the order, Philip obeyed and immediately met the entourage of the Ethiopian Chancellor of the Exchequer, who was on his way back home from worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem. He had attended the Feast of Tabernacles, when God-fearing Gentiles were allowed to enter the Court of the Gentiles.

To Philip's amazement he was reading the passage in Isaiah Chapter 53 that describes the suffering of the promised Messiah but did not understand it. The Ethiopian invited Philip into his chariot to explain that Isaiah's prophetic picture of a suffering Messiah had been fulfilled by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection in Jerusalem only months earlier. The result was he asked to be baptized in water, when they came to an oasis, and was baptized by the Spirit, who whisked Philip off to Azotus, while the Ethiopian went on his way rejoicing.

Questions

What commission had Jesus given the apostles in Matthew 28:18-20?

What was the initial motivation for mission?

In what way(s) is this true of Christian witness in the world today?

Session 9: The Gospel Spreads To The Gentiles



Saul's Conversion on the Road to Damascus Detail from Painting by Caravaggio

 Wikimedia Commons

The Gospel began to spread to the Gentiles through individuals, who had been converted and filled with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. In **Acts 11:19-24** we read:

Now those who had been scattered by the persecution that broke out when Stephen was killed travelled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, spreading the word only among Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene (in North Africa), went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord.

From Saul the Persecutor To Paul the Apostle to The Gentiles Acts 9:1-30

Meanwhile God was preparing to spread the Gospel even wider by stopping a zealous young Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus in his tracks, as he was on his way to Damascus to arrest Christians and take them to Jerusalem to be executed. His dramatic encounter with the Risen Christ resulted in him being blind for three days and healing and baptism in water and Spirit at the hands of an old disciple named Ananias. When the apostles in Jerusalem heard the news, they sent Barnabas to fetch Saul from Damascus and bring him to Jerusalem. But when Hellenistic Jews tried to kill Saul, the disciples took him down to Caesarea and sent him back to his home town of Tarsus in Turkey until things calmed down.

Questions

- How did the church spread to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch in Syria?
- What was Saul doing when he encountered the Risen Christ?
- Who took Saul under his wing and introduced him to the apostles in Jerusalem?
- What was the disciples' first reaction to the appearance of Saul?

The Gospel Spreads to Europe



Paul's Three Missionary Journeys & Final Voyage to Rome

ConformingtoJesus.com

Paul's Missionary Journeys to Asia Minor & Greece

In **Acts 13:1-3** we see the first mention of a Christian fellowship sending out missionaries, or 'sent ones.'

While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (v2)

This is Paul's **First Missionary Journey** to Cyprus and some of the towns in southern Asia Minor. He was accompanied by Barnabas and his nephew John Mark.

Paul's **Second Missionary Journey** saw him travel with Silas to Pamphylia again and to Lystra, where they met Timothy, who joined them on their mission, after Paul had circumcised him. From there they travelled through the Roman provinces of Phrygia and Galatia, before ending up at Troas near the entrance to the Black Sea. During the night Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia, beckoning him to go there. After sailing across the Aegean, they eventually reached the city of Philippi, where a vibrant church was planted, before moving down to Athens and the city of Corinth. Here a church was planted that became famous for its operation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as well as for problems, which were the subject of several of Paul's letters.

On his **Third Missionary Journey** Paul revisited the churches he had planted in Greece and Asia Minor, before being taken to Rome as a prisoner for the gospel. He was eventually executed c. 64-65AD.

Questions

- Where did the idea of 'missionaries' being sent out by the local church start?
- What happened before Paul and Barnabas were sent out?
- What accompanied the preaching of the Gospel in the cities they visited?

Session 10: Sharing the Love of Christ with the Hurting Across the World



Global Mercy passing through the Suez Canal on 28 August 2021

📷 Mercy Ships



Charting the History of a Christian Missionary Organisation

The Vision:

In 1978 Don and Deyon Stephens had the vision for a liner transformed into a hospital ship that could visit ports across the world offering free medical care for the poorest in the world.

Vision Statement:

Mercy Ships is a predominantly Christian interdenominational missionary organisation, "bringing hope and healing to the forgotten poor, following the 2,000-year-old model of Jesus." The organization treats all patients free of charge, without regard to their religion, race, or gender.

Beginning:

A 522-foot nine-deck vessel was transformed into the hospital ship *MV Anastasis* (meaning "Resurrection") over four years, equipped with three operating rooms, a dental clinic, an x-ray machine, a laboratory and 40 patient beds. The 350-member crew included Mercy Ships founders Don and Deyon Stephens, who lived on board the ship with their four young children for ten years. Mercy Ships was originally part of YWAM (*Youth With A Mission*) and staffed by professionals, who offered their services free and a host of volunteers. The *Anastasis* entered service in 1983 and remained in service until 2007.

Development:

Over the years other vessels have been purchased, providing free surgeries and medical care. The latest vessel to join the fleet is the 37,000 tonne *MV Global Mercy*, built in China, consisting of six operating theatres, 9 hospital wards for 200 patients, a laboratory, general outpatient, ophthalmology, and dental clinics. The ship has space for up to 950 persons in port including 641 crew, comprised of volunteers from around the globe. It completed its sea trials debt free, thanks to donations from individuals and organisations across the world.

Since its foundation *Mercy Ships* vessels have visited 594 ports, covering 55 developing nations. Its volunteers have provided services and materials in developing countries valued at over \$1.6 billion. *Mercy Ships* has delivered services to more than 2.8 million direct beneficiaries and *Mercy Ships* volunteers have performed more than 105,500 free surgical procedures, such as cleft lip and palate, cataract removal, burn contracture release, and orthopaedic and facial reconstruction. They have:

- Performed 488,000 dental procedures for over 186,500 dental patients.
- Trained more than 6,600 local professionals (including surgeons), who in turn have trained many others.
- Trained over 49,000 local professionals in their area of expertise (anaesthesiology, nursing, sterilization, biomedical engineering, surgery, trauma, leadership).
- Taught over 252,000 local people in basic healthcare.
- Completed over 1,110 infrastructure development and agriculture projects.


(Sources: Mercy Ships and Wikipedia adapted)

Choose a Christian missionary organisation you or your fellowship support & conduct a study of how it began and its development since its inception.

Session 11: From Tragedy to Triumph



God is able to turn tragedies into triumphs

 Josh Sorenson, Pexels

All Things Can Work Together For Good - Even Tragedies

In **Romans 8:28** Paul writes: *"We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*


For someone who has just been diagnosed with cancer or has suffered the appalling trauma of being raped, this statement can seem at first sight like a sick joke. But the gospel account of Jesus' death and resurrection and the history of countless Christians down the centuries has shown it to be true.

A Modern Example of Tragedy Turned to Triumph: Joni Eareckson Tada



Joni Eareckson Tada was an athletic young seventeen-year-old in 1967, when she dived into Chesapeake Bay and broke her neck, which left her a quadriplegic from the shoulders down. She was not a Christian at the time and was so desperate she wanted to take her life, but found could not even do that.

One day a friend suggested she should ask Jesus into her life to help her cope. With the help of friends and medical professionals, she began to learn to paint using her mouth to hold the brush, write books.

 Joni and Friends

In 1979 Joni set up a Christian ministry organisation called *Joni and Friends* to reach disabled people across the world with the message of the gospel of hope. In 2010 she was diagnosed with third stage breast cancer, which was successfully treated and she was declared healed in 2015. Just two years later a malignant lump was found on her chest which required radiotherapy, and again she was treated and declared cancer-free in 2019.

Joni and her husband, Ken Tada, have been married since 1982 and enjoy serving the Joni and Friends ministry together. On July 30, 2017, Joni "celebrated" 50 years of living well in her wheelchair, a remarkable testimony to God's sustaining grace and the truth of Paul's words.

Questions

What experience have you had of God turning a tragedy into a triumph of his grace?
Look at other examples of the truth of Romans 8:28

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The 3:10 Discipleship Course

Sharing Christ's Passion



Discipleship
Course