

FIVE ANCHORS IN THE STORM OF SUFFERING

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Helping Suffering Families

What Do You Say To People Who Are Suffering?

1. *Job's Friends.*

- a. They came to him and sat in silence as comforting agents (Job 2:11-13).
- b. But no one wants friends like these (Job 6:14-17).

2. *Guidelines for Comforting Sufferers.*

- a. Be There and Be Silent.
- b. Listen and Permit Lament.
- c. Express Words of Love and Sympathy.
- d. Express Your Love Through Action.
- e. Don't Interpret.

3. *What Can We Say?*

- a. God Loves.
- b. God Listens.
- c. God Understands.
- d. God Reigns.
- e. God Wins.

Anchor One: God Loves Me During the Storm
The Unrelenting Love of God

1. *The Love of God in Creation.*

- a. Creation is God's gracious act to include others in his community of love (John 17:21-26; Isaiah 43:7; 45:18).
- b. Even in our sinfulness, God took the initiative to redeem (Ephesians 1:3-5).
- c. This community is bounded by God's holiness and gathered by his love: God yearns for a people (Genesis 17:7-8; Exodus 6:7; Leviticus 26:11-12; Jeremiah 31:33; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Revelation 21:3).

2. *The Love of God in the History of Israel.*

- a. God creates Israel and pursues them out of love (Deuteronomy 7:7-11; 9:6-7; Malachi 1:1-4 ; Isaiah 49:14-15; 54:5-8).
- b. God is often pictured as the loving parent (Hosea 11)
- c. God is often pictured as the loving spouse (Hosea 1-3; Ezekiel 16).

3. *The Love of God in Christ.*

- a. The love of the Father sends the son (John 3:16; 1 John 4:7-12).
- b. The love of the Son is demonstrated in his self-humiliation (Philippians 2:1-11; cf. Romans 5:6-11).
- c. The love of God is experienced through life in the Son (Ephesians 3:14-21).

Conclusion: God Loves (Romans 8:28-39)

Anchor Two: God is Present with Me in the Storm
The Inviting Presence of God

1. *The Brokenness of the Fallen World.*

- a. Creation and Fall is the backdrop of the story of Scripture (Genesis 1-3).
- b. The Curse (death) is present in the world as the consequence of sin (Romans 5:12-21; cf. the future removal of the curse, Revelation 22:3).
- c. Falleness is the futility of the present world (Ecclesiastes; Romans 8:19-21).

2. *The Reality of Lament in Scripture.*

- a. Scripture reflects the lament of God's people (Job 3:20; 7:20; 10:18; 13:24; Isaiah 63:17; Lamentations 5:20; Habakkuk 1-2)
- b. The Psalms express the lament of God's people (Psalms 10:1; 13:1-2; 42:9; 44:23-24; 74:1,10-11; 88:14; 89:49; 119:82).
 - (1) The Psalms model the experience of lament (Psalms 13; 77; 143).
 - (2) We cry for God to listen (Psalms 102; 54:1-2; 55:1-2, 17; 61:1; 77:1; 86:1; 120:1-2; 130:1-2).
- c. God himself laments.
 - (1) God laments over the wicked (Genesis 6:6; Isaiah 16:9).
 - (2) God laments over Israel (Psalm 78:40; Isaiah 63:10).
 - (3) God laments in Jesus Christ (Matthew 27:46 quoting Psalm 22:1).

3. *Divine Response to Lament.*

- a. God reveals himself in the Exodus (Nehemiah 9:9-15).
 - (1) God hears the cries of his people (Exodus 2:23-25).
 - (2) God acts in response to lament (Exodus 3:7-12).
 - (3) The Exodus offers the people of God a model of his responsiveness (Psalm 107).
- b. God reveals himself in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 5:7-10).
- c. God is present to comfort lament (Psalm 119:50,76; Lamentations 3:22-26; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Romans 15:13)

Conclusion: God Listens (Jeremiah 29:12)

Anchor Three: God Suffers with Me in the Storm
The Caring Empathy of God

1. *The "Emotional" God?*

- a. Theology often pictured God as a stoic, static, unaffected and detached judge of creation.
- b. However, the biblical story pictures God as a passionate, dynamic and engaged parent who yearns for his people (Jeremiah 31:20).
- c. We are "emotional" creatures who image God in our emotions and passions.

2. *The Empathy of God in Israel.*

- a. God is sympathetic with his people.
 - (1) He grieves over fallenness (Genesis 6:6).
 - (2) He intended something different than fallenness (Isaiah 65:17-18).
- b. God is empathetic with his people.
 - (1) He is the empathetic parent (Hosea 11).
 - (2) He is the empathetic spouse (Hosea 1-3)
- c. God experiences the pain of fallenness in his own life; God himself weeps.

3. *The Empathy of God in Christ.*

- a. The reality of the incarnation is God's empathetic act (Hebrews 1-2).
 - (1) It is an act of self-humiliation to share our fallenness (Philippians 2:5-8).
 - (2) Through it, God experiences our frailty, suffering and pain (Gospels).
 - (3) His empathetic act testifies to his love both in terms of his willingness to share and his intent to redeem (Hebrews 2:10-18).
 - (4) We must not underestimate the reality of this empathy.
- b. God's empathy had no stopping point.
 - (1) God understands fallenness.
 - (2) God understands the alienation of sin; he experienced it in his own life for us (Matthew 27:46; 2 Corinthians 5:21).

Conclusion: God understands (Hebrews 4:15)

Anchor Four: God Can Calm My Storm
The Unlimited Sovereignty of God

1. The Reign of God.

- a. God does whatever he pleases (Psalm 115:3).
- b. God is sovereign over all the earth, including evil (Revelation).
- c. God acts to serve the ends of his goal – to have a people for himself.

2. The Purpose of God.

a. Contextualizing Suffering in God's Story.

- (1) God intends to share his holy community of love with others.
- (2) God values freedom as a necessary precondition of authentic love.
- (3) God risked rejection/pain for the sake of authentic love.
- (4) God permits the full revelation of radical evil.
- (5) God unrelentingly pursues us across every barrier at every cost.
- (6) God is more interested in our faith than he is our pleasure.

b. The Jobian Drama (Job).

- (1) God is sovereign in the drama.
- (2) God engages in a cosmic risk: does anyone serve God for nothing?
- (3) Job, embittered and discouraged, senses the trial; he faithfully endures.
- (4) God graciously encounters Job so that he is comforted.
- (5) A cosmic victory is won as God's purpose is fulfilled in relation to Job.

3. The Actions of God.

- a. Punishing (Amos 3:6).
- b. Testing (Genesis 22:1).
- c. Educating (Hebrews 12:7)
- d. Gifting/Equipping (2 Corinthians 1:3-7).
- e. Redeeming (Genesis 45:7-8; 50:20; the Exodus; the Resurrection).

Conclusion: God Reigns (Romans 8:28-30).

*Anchor Five: God Will Bring Me to the Shore
The Ultimate Victory of God*

1. *Old Testament Expectations of Victory.*

a. God will host a banquet (Isaiah 25:6-10).

(1) God will swallow up death forever (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:54).

(2) God will wipe away every tear (cf. Revelation 21:4).

b. God will renew the earth (Isaiah 65:17-25; cf. Revelation 21:1-4).

(1) God will create new heavens and new earth (cf. 2 Peter 3:13).

(2) God will reverse the curse (cf. Revelation 22:3).

2. *New Testament Eschatology: The Resurrection of Jesus.*

a. Christ reigns till the last enemy, death, is destroyed (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

b. Christ is the first fruit; we are the harvest (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

c. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a preview of the end of history; it is the Christian hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

3. *The Cosmic Victory: New Heaven and New Earth.*

a. God will redeem his earth along with our bodies (Romans 8:18-24).

b. God will remove the curse from his people (Rev. 22:1-5).

c. God will establish us in his dwelling place (Rev. 21:1-4).

Conclusion: God Wins (Revelation 1:17-18).