

Is God Really In Control?

Series: Understanding God Helps You To Understand You.

Is God in control when everything around seems out of control?

Anne Frank's Story

Where was God in the life of this young woman who suffered during the Holocaust?

What Does The Bible Say?

Of all the ways to address pain and evil in the world. God gives us two books:

Lamentations

Job

Two books of poetry. Really?

Job's Story

2 “If my misery could be weighed and my troubles be put on the scales, 3 they would outweigh all the sands of the sea. That is why I spoke impulsively. 4 For the Almighty has struck me down with his arrows. Their poison infects my spirit. God’s terrors are lined up against me. (Job 6:2–4 NLT)

2 “I have heard all this before. What miserable comforters you are! 3 Won’t you ever stop blowing hot air? What makes you keep on talking? 4 I could say the same things if you were in my place. I could spout off criticism and shake my head at you. 5 But if it were me, I would encourage you. I would try to take away your grief. (Job 16:2–5 NLT)

So many times, we spout theology to help, but does it?

God answers Job with questions rather than answers.

Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind: 2 “Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? 3 Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. 4 “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much. 5 Who determined its dimensions and stretched out the surveying line? 6 What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone 7 as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? (Job 38:1–7 NLT)

Apparently, God doesn't want us to know why bad things happen to us because He does not explain Himself.

How Can You Obey?

Therefore, we have a choice to make.

We can be like Job's wife

9 His wife said to him, “Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die.” (Job 2:9 NLT)

Or We can be like Job...

Then Job replied to the Lord: 2 “I know that you can do anything, and no one can stop you. 3 You asked, ‘Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?’ It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me. (Job 42:1–3 NLT)

6 I take back everything I said, and I sit in dust and ashes to show my repentance.” (Job 42:6 NLT)

Even though God has not given us all the answers, He is not silent.

God has given us Scripture passages such as Psalm 23, Lamentations 3, Romans 8:28, and so many more.

1 The Lord is my shepherd;

I have all that I need.

2 He lets me rest in green meadows;

he leads me beside peaceful streams.

3 He renews my strength.

He guides me along right paths,

bringing honor to his name. (Psalm 23:1–3 NLT)

28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (Romans 8:28 NLT)

Even when we don't have all the answers to why bad stuff happens, we can still go to God for comfort, hope, healing, peace, and most importantly, salvation.

God is in control; however, seek His comfort, not Your comprehension.

Additional Notes:

If you would like to use your home to disciple others, check out our training at www.crosswaveschurch.com/host. Cross Waves has produced short videos to train you how to use your home to reach others for Christ. So please check it out.

Notes:

This series is originated from the book, Thurman, C. (2017).

The Lies We Believe About God: Knowing God For Who He Really Is. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

Explore:

God Is Just

When people do wrong and hurtful things, we want to see them brought to justice. We want to see those who commit immoral acts get what they deserve (as long as it isn't us, of course). The flip side is how angry we get when someone is found guilty of something he or she didn't do and is unjustly punished. The majority of us have a strong desire for things to be made right, justice to prevail, and rewards or penalties to be handed out fairly.

God always responds to people's behavior equitably, fairly, and rightly. At the same time, there are instances in which God doesn't give people what they deserve. When we talk about God being just, we have to be careful not to think this is the only attribute He possesses. God is just, but He is also gracious, forgiving, and compassionate. God is all of these things and so much more. All of these attributes work together in perfect harmony, one never coming at the expense of the others. As much as we might struggle to understand this, God is not being

unjust when He is gracious and doesn't punish a person for a wrong committed.

If God is not just, He isn't God and can't be in control of everything. If God ever once unfairly disciplined or punished a person, it would disqualify Him as God and mean that He is not in control of everything. We see miscarriages of justice all the time here on earth, but there is never a miscarriage of justice with God. We can never honestly say to God that He didn't handle something fairly or right.

Thurman, C. (2017). *The lies we believe about god: knowing god for who he really is*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

Explore:

Human Freedom and Individuality

Another hallmark of the modern era is its emphasis on the individual. As David Tracy writes, part of the "turn to the

subject” involves emphasizing individual rights and freedom. While premoderns relied on tradition and authorities like the church or the king for what they should think and do, the modern era involves a throwing off of all authorities in favor of the individual and what he or she deems appropriate. After all, the demand that one only has a right to believe that for which one has sufficient arguments, evidences, and reasons means that no one should have to follow another’s views just because they said so. Each person is encouraged to decide on the basis of argument and evidence what is right to believe and do.

This emphasis on freedom and individuality did not stem solely from these epistemological doctrines, for it was also a logical implication of science’s view of the nature of things. The world was seen as composed of discreet things that exist in isolation from other things. Those discreet bits of matter do causally interact with one another according to physical laws, but what they are in themselves doesn’t depend on their relation to other

things in the universe. As applied to human beings, these doctrines encouraged individualism and concern for self-interest.

Politically, the emphasis on individual freedom gave rise to modern democracies. Societies are composed of individuals who have priority over the collective group. In fact, according to the social contract theory of government which had many followers during the modern era, individuals are equal with one another before they enter a society. People enter a society out of self-interest. They cede certain rights in order to gain other rights and privileges (e.g., protection by a society's military forces).

All of this places emphasis on individuals, not the community as a whole. The most notable exceptions to these general social and political theories were found in Hegel and Marx. For Hegel, nothing exists in isolation, and to understand what something is, one must see it in its relation to others. Marxist collectivism follows these notions and applies them to both politics and

economics, but the predominant mood in the modern era politically and economically has been to move to democracy and capitalism (or if socialism, at least a socialism that recognizes and rewards individual effort).

In the modern era human individuality and creativity are deemed virtues of the highest order, and their full and free expression must be a central feature of any society. As Joe Holland writes, “The modern world freed technology, politics, economics, and culture from nearly every restraint.” While this emphasis on individual rights and freedoms has encouraged and allowed many people to develop and use their abilities in ways unthinkable in premodern times, it has also fostered an attitude of self-sufficiency and self-reliance, isolation from community, and a belief that one may believe and do (in morals and religion) whatever one wants, so long as no one else’s freedom and rights are abridged. We see repeated examples of such attitudes in our day. Rugged individualism and isolationism that go along with

the privatization of religion destroy a sense of community. Coupled with a mechanistic view of the universe and the problems of modern industrial urban cities, modern life can be very bleak in spite of all the freedom. One thinks of T. S. Eliot's portrait of modern life as a wasteland, in his famous poem by that title. But even before Eliot and the twentieth century, the bleakness and desperation of modern life is portrayed in literature. In Charles Dickens's novels one gets such a picture, but perhaps the most depressing picture comes in the work of a Victorian writer, James Thomson. Thomson's poem "The City of Dreadful Night" is a portrait of modern life in an urban, industrial setting. It is written nearly a century before Eliot's "Wasteland," but its mood is far more somber and its message considerably more depressing and pessimistic than that of "The Wasteland." In the city of dreadful night there is no God, no hope, no meaning, and suicide is the only escape from this lonely, depressing condition.

Feinberg, J. S. (2001). *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (pp. 91–92). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

Explore:

Job begins with two introductory chapters, in the form of a narrative or prologue, that set the stage for the rest of the book. Chapters 3 through 37 form the main body of the book. These chapters are poems in the form of dramatic dialogues between Job and his friends. Four additional chapters containing God's response to their arguments are also written in poetic form. The book ends with a final narrative or epilogue (42:7–17) that tells what happened to Job after these discussions had ended.

This prologue–body–epilogue format was used often in writings in the ancient world. The author of Job was a literary craftsman

who knew how to bring words together in dramatic fashion to drive home his message.

The story of Job opens with a brief description of the man, his possessions, and his family. “Blameless and upright” (1:1), he owned thousands of sheep, camels, oxen, and donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters. In simple terms, Job was considered a wealthy man in the tribal culture of the ancient world. But Satan insists that the integrity of this upright man has never been tested. He accuses Job of serving God only because God has protected him and made him wealthy. God grants permission for the testing to begin.

In rapid fashion, Job’s sons and daughters are killed and all his flocks are driven away by his enemies. Finally, Job himself is stricken with a terrible skin disease. In his sorrow he sits mourning on an ash heap, scraping his sores with a piece of pottery while he laments his misfortune. This is when Job’s

three friends—Bildad; Eliphaz, and Zophar—arrive to mourn with him and to offer their comfort.

But instead of comforting Job, these friends launch into long lectures and philosophical debates to show Job the reason for his suffering. Their line of reasoning follows the generally accepted view of their time—that misfortune is always sent by God as punishment for sin. Job argues just as strongly that he is an upright man who has done nothing to deserve such treatment at the hand of God.

Finally, after Job and his friends have debated this question at length and have failed to arrive at a satisfactory solution, God himself speaks from a whirlwind. He does not enter their discussion about why the righteous suffer; He reveals Himself as the powerful, all-knowing God. God's message to Job is that He does not have to explain or justify His actions. He is the

sovereign, all-powerful God who always does what is right, although His ways may be beyond human understanding.

Job is humbled by this outpouring of God's power, and he learns to trust where he cannot understand. This leads to his great affirmation of faith, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (42:5). Then the book closes with the birth of more sons and daughters and Job's rise to a position of even greater wealth and prominence. Job lived out his additional years as a happy, contented man: "So Job died, old and full of days" (42:17).

Youngblood, R. F., Bruce, F. F., & Harrison, R. K., Thomas Nelson Publishers (Eds.). (1995). In Nelson's new illustrated Bible dictionary. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Explore:

Lamentations consists of five chapters, each of which is a distinct poem. These poems adopt a mournful tone of lament in

response to the Babylonians' destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 587/6 bc. They vividly describe the ruin of the city, the suffering of its people, and the inhabitants' theological struggle to understand this crisis. Lamentations has a long history of liturgical use by Jews during the observance of Tish b'Av (the ninth of Av), which commemorates the destruction of the second temple in ad 70. Christians often utilize Lamentations during the season of Lent.

Explore:

God gives us the freedom to make choices. In giving us that freedom, He permits us to choose between right and wrong, and if this world seems deeply troubled, it's because we humans keep making bad choices. Joni Eareckson Tada's book *The God I Love* contains the insight that sometimes God allows what He hates to accomplish what He loves.

Throughout the Bible, it is clear that people have choice:

- If serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. (Josh. 24:15)
- Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her. (Prov. 8:10–11)
- Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. (John 7:17)

If you look at human history, you don't need me to tell you that we have a bent toward misusing the free will God gives us.

People have made such horrible moral choices that there was a time when God was sorry He made us. "The LORD saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The LORD regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply

troubled” (Gen. 6:5–6). God gave us the freedom to make choices knowing that we would so grossly misuse it that He would regret having put us here.

God can’t be any clearer that He created us with free will and that we can use it however we want, even to our own demise.

One of author Jim Butcher’s stories contains this insight: “God isn’t about making good things happen to you, or bad things happen to you. He’s all about you making choices—exercising the gift of free will.”

Understanding these six aspects of God’s sovereignty can help calm our fears, anxieties, and worries about life on this planet, especially when evil seems to be triumphing over good and we suffer in ways that are undeserved.

Thurman, C. (2017). *The lies we believe about god: knowing god for who he really is*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

Question 1 of 5

Explain in your own words why that arrow that killed King Ahab was not a random shot.

Question 2 of 5

Why do you think that God gives you the freedom of choice even when it leads to problems in our life?

Question 3 of 5

With so many bad things going on in the world, what are some of the ways you question if God is in control?

Question 4 of 5

How have you felt angry and even resentful toward God, given that He has allowed bad things to happen to you and the people you love?

Question 5 of 5

When faced with, “Why does God allow evil things to happen?”

Why is it important to follow up with I am glad that God allowed this one evil thing to happen – He allowed Jesus to die on the cross.