**Small Group notes – 7 March 2021**

**Welcome**

What characteristics do you most value in a friend?

**Word - The mystery of suffering & the sovereignty of God -The reasons for suffering?**

In the book of Job (Chapter 3 through to chapter 32) there are a series of conversations
between Job and his three friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. They are talking about
the important theme of suffering?

**Eliphaz observation – The innocent do not suffer but the wicked do**. Job 4:7 & 15:20

**Bildad observation – Job you must have sinned.**  Job 8:20 18:5

**Zophar’s Observation – The Guilty are always punished.**  Job 11:11 & 20:23

The summary of Job’s three friends:

**A God who is just + A person who is suffering = Clear proof of sin**

**A God who is just + A person who isn’t suffering = Clear proof of virtue.**

Some of what Job’s friends say seems to make sense. Much of what they say is repeated in other places in the scriptures. However, we know from what God states about Job, that he is his servant and is without fault. Job 1:8.

We read that Jobs’s friends made a number of observations and accusations against him. They came to the wrong conclusion when they assumed suffering is always a sign of a person’s sin or God’s displeasure with a person. The friend’s wrongly assumed God was never present in a person’s suffering.

Suffering and sorrow was a sign to them that God had removed himself from a person because of their sin. Now, it is clear that sin does separates us from a Holy God. Yet the bible also reveals a God who makes himself known through suffering. **It is only because of the suffering of Jesus that we can know God.** It is often through our own experience of suffering in which we come to know God. Suffering is not reserved for the wicked alone.

* **Suffering will find us because we are fallen people.** Because we are flawed, there are times when we will make wrong choices which will create certain consequences. As fallen people, our genetic code is fallen making us susceptible to disease and illness.
* **Suffering will find us because we live in a fallen world.** Because we live in a fallen world, we can experience suffering due to the poor decisions and choices made by others. Accidents, acts of violence, greed, lust, corruption and natural disasters.
* **Suffering will find us because we are Christians.** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told us we would be persecuted in this world. Matthew 5:11: As we obey him, we will experience negative consequences by those who do not follow him or hate God.
* **Suffering will find us because we have an enemy that hates us.** Satan is real and his desire is to create as much pain and suffering in the world as possible. 1 Peter 5:8. Ephesians 6:12
* **Suffering will find us because it’s God’s plan for us.** How can I say that? Read what Job says. *He knows the way that I take, when he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold. 23:10*

The apostle Paul would agree Amen to that statement. He implies there are a number of benefits to suffering.

**Reliance** – 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 - Suffering can be a call to trust God and not the things of this world.

**Righteousness** – Hebrews 12:6-10-11 - Suffering can be the discipline of a loving heavenly Father.

**Reward** – 2 Corinthians 4:17 – Suffering can be for us a great reward in heaven that will make up for every loss here a thousand fold.

**Reminder** – Philippians 3:10 – Suffering can be for us a reminder that God sent his son into the world to suffer so that our suffering would not be Gods condemnation but his purification.

I believe that suffering is a guaranteed aspect of living in this world, especially as a follower of Jesus.

Most of us try our best to avoid suffering at all costs.

* **Expect it**  **–** Just knowing that each of us will experience suffering at some level or other may help us not to be shocked or overwhelmed by it when it does show up.

One of the things that Job’s story clearly demonstrates is that suffering is not a sign of God’s absence and it is not always a sign of our poor decision making or sin.

* **Embrace it –** God can and does work through suffering and brokenness. We can encounter God in the midst of our suffering. God draws near to the broken-hearted. Paul tells us in Romans 8:28. “And *we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to His purpose”*.

There are a number of reasons why people experience suffering today. We know that God allows it and Job’s story tells us we cannot even rule out that God may even send it our way?

Maybe today whatever you are going through God can use your suffering to bring you closer to him?

Maybe today God can use your suffering to teach you total dependence, patience and perseverance? Maybe today God can use your suffering to comfort others or as a witness to others?

**Questions**

* What are the different reasons for why people suffer today?
* Why does God allow it?
* Have you ever felt abandoned by God?
* How much do you listen to and act on the advice given by your friends?
* Have you ever felt abandoned by Friends in the midst of a period of suffering?
* What do you think about the idea that God not only allows suffering but also brings it about?
* What are some of the benefits of suffering that Paul speaks of? Have you experienced any of these?
* How do you feel about the thought of being more embracing of suffering?
* In what ways has your suffering and the way you have responded to it been a
witness or comfort to others?

**Pray for one another**

**Reminders \_ All in Zoom**

Monday 8 March – Coffee & Chat 11am

Wednesday 10 March – Members Meeting - 8pm

Thursday 11 March – Lunchtime reflection – 12.30pm