

Week 2, Day 6: Faith, Science, and the Struggles of Life

As we enter the second week of our **Faith, Science, and the Struggles of Life** devotions, what do you think of this advice from a secular atheist?

We didn't fall from grace, we rose from slime over the course of natural history and then struggling through the tangles of our difficult childhoods... Look around you. There's no supreme adult in heaven or on earth, no infallible guide, just us and our better or worse guesswork we can learn to improve a bit with some effort, to gain the wisdom to know the differences that make a difference...

If you're suffering, maybe try to let go of that unanchored spiritual story you've clung to. Swim around. Look at yourself, at all of us, conflicted sapiens from the scientific side – not that bunkum about you being a chemical feeling machine designed by almighty evolution but at our natural history from responsive effort through feeling, and then language's tower-of-babble confusions unique to humans. (Jeremy E. Sherman Ph.D., MPP)

Reaction? We will get back to this. But first a quick review. We are looking at the relationship of faith and science in the struggles of life. Last week, we were reminded of the core truths:

- **We are created and baptized children of God, living by faith and seeking to give glory to God and to show love to our neighbor.**
- **Science is the knowledge we get by observing how things work.**

Science is never to start with a truth which then needs to be proven. Science is about observing the world, collecting the data, and coming to the truth. Some 700 years ago, Christian philosopher Thomas Aquinas gave this warning: *“If we get creation wrong, we get God wrong.”* We live in a world in which science is getting creation wrong and so getting God wrong. This leads us back to our quote above. Science which gets creation and God wrong will always be wrong regarding the struggles and sufferings of life. Now, we are going to take the core truths from last week and apply them specifically to the struggles and sufferings of our lives.

Again, it needs to be emphasized that science is always to be subjected to faith. God gave us both science and faith. Faith is first. Faith is pre-eminent. Science is always to be viewed in the light of our faith and in the light of God's Word. The first three chapters of Genesis tell us that God created everything. When he was finished:

Genesis 1:31:

³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.

We don't live in a perfect world. Our quote from our atheist philosopher is wrong. We did not rise from slime. We did fall from grace. After confronting Adam and Eve after their disobedience, Genesis tells us:

Genesis 3:14-19:

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent:

**Because you have done this,
 you are cursed more than all the livestock,
 and more than every wild animal.
 You shall crawl on your belly,
 and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.**

¹⁶To the woman he said:

**I will greatly increase your pain in childbearing.
 With painful labor you will give birth to children.
 Your desire will be for your husband,
 but he will rule over you.**

¹⁷To Adam he said:

**Because you listened to your wife's voice
 and ate from the tree about which I commanded you,
 "You shall not eat from it,"
 the soil is cursed on account of you.
 You will eat from it with painful labor all the days of your life.**

**¹⁸Thorns and thistles will spring up from the ground for you,
 but you will eat the crops of the field.**

**¹⁹By the sweat of your face you will eat bread
 until you return to the soil,
 for out of it you were taken.**

**For you are dust,
 and to dust you shall return.**

The problems of this world are a result of sin in this world. Some people conclude that since God made everything, he made evil too. However, the great theologian St. Augustine reasoned:

1. God is the author of everything in the created universe.
2. Evil is not a thing or a substance; it is a privation or lack in things (blindness is lack of sight, pain is lack of health, hate or murder is lack of love).
3. Therefore, God did not create evil.

God did not create evil. Evil and sin came about because Satan tempted Adam and Eve, and they fell from grace. However, our God is the giver of all good things. James tells us:

James 1:13-17:

¹³Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” because God cannot be tempted by evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is dragged away and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. And sin, when it is full grown, gives birth to death. ¹⁶Do not be deceived, my dear brothers. ¹⁷Every good act of giving and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the lights, who does not change or shift like a shadow.

God-less science does not have a good explanation of suffering and leaves people with a fatalistic hopelessness. Faith in our loving God leads us to this truth...

God’s Truth #6: In the battles of life, sin is always the cause.

Week 2, Day 7: Faith, Science, and the Struggles of Life

All suffering and struggles are the result of sinners living in a sin-filled world. But, here's what our atheist philosopher says:

There's no supreme adult in heaven or on earth, no infallible guide, just us and our better or worse guesswork we can learn to improve a bit with some effort, to gain the wisdom to know the differences that make a difference. (Jeremy E. Sherman Ph.D., MPP)

This philosophy is a result of science without faith in the true God. Remember that science is the knowledge we receive by observing how things work. Even more, science is the knowledge we receive as we see God's work in our world and in our lives. We live in a world that is growing more secular. In other words, science divorces itself from faith. When that happens, it is "*just us and our better or worse guesswork we can learn to improve a bit with some effort, to gain the wisdom to know the differences that make a difference.*"

What a sad way to look at reality! What a bitter end such a person will have!

What is your reaction to the sufferings and struggles of life? Are you affected by the philosophy of the world and view suffering as a bitter end? Or, do you view suffering as a powerful tool in the progression of our faith?

The Apostle Paul suffered many things in his life as a proclaimer of the faith. He had one particular struggle which he called his thorn in the flesh. He sought the Lord's help.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9:

⁷Therefore, to keep me from becoming arrogant due to the extraordinary nature of these revelations, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me, so that I would not become arrogant. ⁸Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that he would take it away from me. ⁹And he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me.

We can learn a lot from this account. First, the sufferings of Paul were beneficial for him. God blessed him with amazing visions. When we receive blessings, we can be tempted to become arrogant. The Lord allowed Paul to suffer to keep him humble. Paul's sufferings were indeed a blessing because if his pride was left unchecked in the Apostle's heart, it would have driven out Christ and the message of grace. God used this messenger of Satan to purify the Apostle's heart. Peter tells us in his first epistle that this is often the purpose of struggles and sufferings:

1 Peter 1:3-7:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵Through faith you are being protected by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time. ⁶Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials ⁷so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

With the words “proven character,” Peter alludes to gold being refined by fire so that its character is ever-purer gold. He uses the same words to describe a Christian being refined by various kinds of trials so that the character of his or her faith is an ever-purer faith. (EHV Study Bible). Sufferings and struggles are not bad for the Christian but are blessings when we turn to the Lord. Remember the incident from the life of the Apostle Paul. His struggle not only purified his heart, but it pointed him to his truest power and strength.

2 Corinthians 12:9:

⁹And he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, because my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will be glad to boast all the more in my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may shelter me.

Sometimes we might look at these words and think that God is telling us he will help us just endure suffering. Oh, it is so much more. It is more than endurance. By relying on God’s grace we are given power and hope and victory. Over the next few days, we will get into some very real situations that we face in life. Today, remember this truth...

God’s Truth #7: In the battles of life, God uses the struggles to give blessings and the power of his grace.

Week 2, Day 8: Faith, Science, and the Struggles of Life

The first seven devotions provided some important core truths to use as we approach the struggles and sufferings of life. These are the core truths to remember:

- **We are created and baptized children of God living by faith.**
- **We seek to give glory to God.**
- **We are here to show love to our neighbor.**
- **Sin, not God, is the cause of suffering.**
- **God uses struggles to give us blessings and the power of his grace.**

With these truths in mind, consider George Matheson, a Scottish minister and hymn writer from the late 1880s. He was born in 1842. Shortly before he was to be married, he went blind. His fiancé left him saying she could not be married to a blind man for life. With the aid of his faithful sister, he attended Seminary and became a Scottish minister. On the eve of his sister's marriage and recalling his own heartbreak that he never married, he wrote the song: *O Love that wilt not let me go*. In his first verse he lifted his heart in trust to the Lord of love:

**O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.**

As he contemplated the desertion of his fiancé and the loss of his eyesight, Matheson did not grow angry with God nor did he become bitter and frustrated. No, he remembered his identity. He was a created and baptized child of God living by faith in his Savior. His life, no matter the suffering, was to be lived to the glory of God. God was not the author of his suffering. Yet, in his suffering, the Lord gave him tremendous blessings. George Matheson went blind, lost his fiancé, and never married. And yet, he did not look down in navel-gazing, but he looked up and sang:

**O Cross that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.**

George Matheson's line: "*and from the ground there blossoms red,*" refers to our life covered in the dear life, death, and blood of our Savior. Matheson would agree that it was through his struggle that he became even closer to God.

How do we view our struggles and sufferings? The world lies to us, and we listen to its lies when we delve into self-pity and bitterness in the face of suffering. Our problem is that we describe our

lives in terms of quantity versus quality. We define quality on our terms: *If I am able to do the things I want, if I am able to enjoy the things of this world that I want to enjoy, then my life has quality. If I am lying in a hospital bed, if I am in the nursing home, if I am homebound, then I have no quality of life.* Who are we to determine the quality of our lives? We are created and baptized children of God. Our lives are lived in faith. Whether we can fully function in our work life or are bedridden, we have quality before our God. Whatever we may be suffering, God would draw us closer to him.

But, we object, why do I need suffering to bring me closer to the Lord? Remember the incident from the life of the Apostle Paul. To keep him from becoming conceited, he needed suffering. Can we really think of ourselves as stronger than the Apostle Paul? If he needed sufferings and struggles to bring him closer to God, don't you think that we do as well?

I sat with Dave days after a series of strokes struck at his body. Lying in his bed, I was concerned that he was going to become bitter. Yet, this man preached God's Word to me. *"To blame God is to be on the wrong side, right, Pastor?" "Yes, Dave, you are right,"* I encouraged him. *"It just looks like my body has finally gone kaput."* There was no blaming God. I have sat with other Christians who became bitter and resentful. Where are you? Have you accepted the trials of life with grace, or have you allowed them to expose bitterness and resentment in your heart?

When we face the trials of life, one of the temptations is to blame God. That is why Martin Luther wrote the following reminder: *"Temptation is the best school into which the Christian can enter; yet, in itself, apart from the grace of God, it is so doubly hazardous, that this prayer should be offered every day, 'Lead us not into temptation,' or if we must enter into it, 'Lord, deliver us from evil.'"*

Despite struggles and suffering, as created and baptized children of God, we approach each struggle this way...

God's Truth #8: In the battles of life, God brings me closer to him and to his power.

Week 2, Day 9: Faith, Science, and the Struggles of Life

Some of you might recall the origin of the song: *It is well with my soul*. Horatio Spafford's daughters were lost at sea while on a transatlantic trip with their mother to England. Horatio had remained behind to tend to business. When he heard of the tragedy, he sailed immediately to rejoin his wife in England. While sailing near the area his daughters drowned, he penned the song: *It is well with my soul*. Many may wonder how one's soul could be well after such tragedy. A man once told me that his father taught him to live and suffer well and to die well. What does that mean?

As we face suffering and the end of our life, godless science says that we are to end suffering no matter what. Dying with dignity – that is the mantra of the secular world. To the world without God, they see no dignity in suffering and pain. Remember that our atheist philosopher says it is “... just us and our better or worse guesswork we can learn to improve a bit with some effort, to gain the wisdom to know the differences that make a difference.”

We know differently. Paul reminds us...

Romans 5:1-5:

¹Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. ²Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand. And we rejoice confidently on the basis of our hope for the glory of God. ³Not only this, but we also rejoice confidently in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces patient endurance, ⁴and patient endurance produces tested character, and tested character produces hope. ⁵And hope will not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us.

We rejoice confidently in our sufferings. I can remember the time my good friend, Pastor Jerry Free, visited us the night before my wife's ovarian surgery. He walked in with a smile on his face and exclaimed, “*Have you thanked God for this surgery?*” Even though I was a pastor, I can tell you that I hadn't thought about thanking God. Patiently he instructed us with these words from Romans. In suffering we receive patient endurance, character, and hope. God's love works through the struggles and sufferings of our lives.

We are tempted to face suffering with fear and dread. We seek to do everything we can to avoid suffering. Godless science sees no value in suffering except maybe that nature is weeding out the weak. According to godless science, the purpose of suffering is to get rid of that which is weak, and the strong survive. Faith leads us in a totally different direction.

Remember the story of the young pastor from last week who was in a terrific car accident. “*My brother, you are not doing this very well.*” These were the words of an older pastor to a younger pastor who struggled with pain from the accident. The younger pastor had become irritable and

bitter towards his family and the nursing staff. *“You are not doing this very well – you are not suffering very well.”* The words stung in this young man’s heart. He wanted to lash out at this older, veteran pastor. *“What do you mean I am not doing this well? Why don’t you try laying here with multiple broken bones and internal injuries? See how you do?”* Patiently, the older pastor encouraged, *“That’s not the point. It doesn’t matter what you are suffering. What matters is how you react to your suffering. Are you doing the will of God even in the midst of your suffering?”*

Martin Luther spoke of our suffering when he said: *“Grant us grace to bear willingly all sorts of sickness, poverty, disgrace, suffering, and adversity and to recognize that in this your divine will is crucifying our will.”* (The annotated Luther; Volume 4, page 187)

To suffer well is the encouragement of Scripture. Paul says...

Philippians 2:14-16:

¹⁴Do everything without complaining and arguing, ¹⁵so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God without blemish among a crooked and perverted generation. You shine among them like lights in the world, ¹⁶as you hold on to the word of life.

God wants us to shine even when pain devastates the body, and the heart is broken. When we are faced with situations like chemotherapy treatments, surgery, or organ transplants, we want all of our decisions to cause our faith to shine into a dark world. Should we take treatments? Our faith will pick the decision that best shows trust and confidence in our Savior and shine forth with glory for God. Should we end treatments? Our faith will pick the decision that best shows trust and confidence in our Savior and shine forth with glory for God.

My dad taught me how to live and suffer well and how to die well? When we face the struggles of life, let us remember we have a great opportunity to teach others – especially the unbelieving world – how to live and suffer well.

God’s Truth #9: In the battles of life, God gives me the opportunity to shine.

Week 2, Day 10: Faith, Science, and the Struggles of Life

Coming to the end of our second week of devotions leads us to a discussion of the end of our lives. Paul reminds us...

Romans 8:18:

¹⁸For I conclude that our sufferings at the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.

With every passing day, our final breath draws closer. Oftentimes, death feels like humiliation and defeat. For the Christian, death is not defeat. Through death God gives *you life as your victor's crown*. *Jesus battles and wins, and so we win!* Your body may be wasting away, but victory and life are yours. We remember that Satan is always seeking to accuse us. He is seeking to rip you out of the hand of your Father. Yet, remember the promise of Revelation after the accuser tries:

Revelation 12:11:

“And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.”

These words may be very blunt, but they are necessary. Do not love your life on this earth too much. This life is but a journey. This life is but a battle. If we blame God for the struggles of this present life, then it is possible that we might too pre-occupied with this life. Jesus did not die on the cross to give you an eternal life on this earth. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree and fell into sin, God would not allow them to eat from the tree of life. Out of love, he prevented them from living forever in this sinful world. He held before them the promise of Paradise restored. God holds before your eyes the promise of Paradise restored.

Be faithful – he encourages. **They have conquered by the blood of the Lamb** – he promises.

I will give you life as your victor's crown – our Savior holds before our eyes the vision of victory.

In view of heaven, God fills our hearts with a comforting vision. Yet, we still have moments of anxiousness. Professor Becker, who taught at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, told his students:

“Some days I sit in my office and think about dying, and I can hardly wait. Other days I think about dying, and I am scared to death.”

Are we not all like this? For this reason, it is important for us to strengthen our hearts and souls with Word and Sacrament. It is here in the Word and at his table that we receive the life-sustaining food for our souls. God wants to strengthen us so much that we can always sing: *It is well with my soul*.

It is good to feel well with oneself even while dying. When the world speaks of dying with dignity, they think that dignity is about avoiding suffering and ending life on their own terms. That is not dying with dignity but dying with self-centered pride. The true dying with dignity is to joyfully accept whatever death the Lord allows us to endure.

We always approach the struggles of life with confidence.

God's Truth #10: In the battles of life, God wins – and we win!

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