



A JOURNEY OF FAITH
SESSION TEN

10 Why Do Bad Things Happen to God's Children?

Larry Aikens, Jr.

© Copyright 2021
Printed in the United States of America
Only Jesus 4 Me, Inc.
OnlyJesus4Me.com
Virginia USA

“Why do Bad Things Happen to God’s Children?”
Session Ten of Ten Sessions from the book:
A Journey of Faith Discipleship Ministry:
Bible Answers to Life’s Toughest Questions

Written by: Larry Aikens, Jr.
Contributing Editor: Diane Aikens

Categories: Discipleship Ministries, Spiritual Help, Bible Studies, Bible Answers, Small Groups

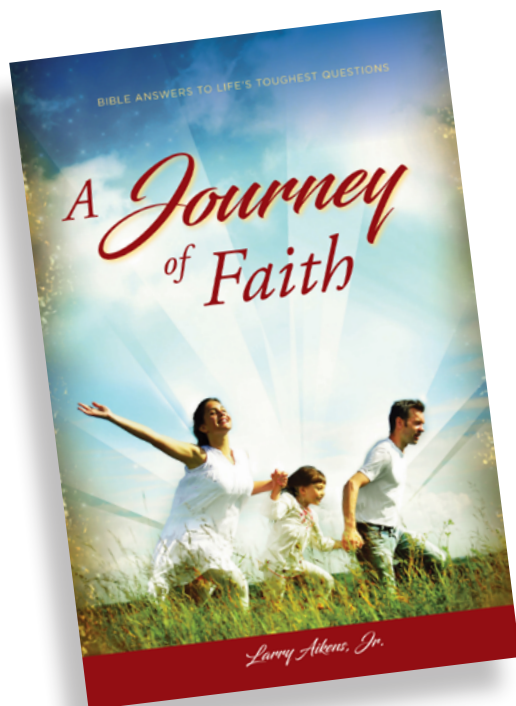
All rights reserved. No part of this resource book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or scholarly journal.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

SESSION **TEN** FROM

A Journey of Faith

BIBLE ANSWERS TO
LIFE'S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS



Only Jesus 4 Me, Inc.
www.OnlyJesus4Me.com
Virginia USA

A SPECIAL INVITATION

As a pastor since 1992, I have realized that many people have questions on their mind about God and the Bible. Sometimes they tell me that they aren't sure they should ask, but they wonder, "Why *do* bad things happen in this world—especially to good people? Doesn't God love us, can't God protect us? Why doesn't God answer *my* prayers?"

So many people have said to me, "Pastor, I have been trying to read the Bible, but I just don't understand it. And besides, where did all these different versions of the Bible come from. Which one should I use? It's just so confusing!"

And the questions keep on coming: "How can I know for sure that I will be in Heaven when I die? Has my life really mattered? Is there any help in the Bible for my personal finances? How can I make better decisions? Do you believe in speaking in tongues? Can a person recover from addictions?" And on they go...

All of these are good and fair questions—completely necessary—and they have caused me to really pray for guidance of the Holy Spirit as I have studied God's Word to try to find answers for what I consider to be *the toughest questions about life*. This book is the product of that research and experience—trying to get at answers that will help you understand God better.

I am quick to admit that I can't answer all of the toughest questions completely—some of life's mysteries God just hasn't fully explained—but I have tried to provide sessions in *A Journey of Faith Discipleship Ministry* to at least engage with these questions fairly.

These sessions provide a framework to process these mysteries through a biblical understanding of what God has explained to us and really wants us to know. You might be surprised at just how much can be uncovered if you are willing to do a little bit of discovery in a guided setting. So many people with the toughest questions have told me that this study has helped them immensely.

I want to thank these folks who have *journeyed* with us up to this point. Each sincere person has deepened my faith, and has in some way been an encourager to produce the resource that you hold in your hand. I feel indebted to all who have spoken into my *Journey of Faith*, and especially to the Holy

Spirit who has guided each of us, and has revealed the truth of God's Word to our hearts as we have diligently pursued a relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

It is my sincere hope that you will also travel with us and take the time to study these provided materials carefully. This *Journey* very well could be a wise investment in your relationship with Almighty God. My prayer is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, you may emerge from this series of studies a more informed and dedicated follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your fellow Journeyer,

Larry

Psalm 40:1-3

WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY!

We are delighted that you have joined us for *A Journey of Faith*. We know that this is a wise investment you are making in your life, and it is our sincere desire that you will understand more of God's love for you and how you fit into God's plan of grace. We would like to introduce you to a few practical ideas:

- ✓ When you watch or attend the sessions, be sure to have a Bible, this resource, and a way to take notes. We will be studying the Bible, using the *New Living Translation*. While it is not required, it might be helpful for you to purchase this translation. We suggest the *NLT Illustrated Study Bible*.
- ✓ Before each session, please read carefully the material you have received. We believe that *Truth Discovered Is Truth Retained!* Please come to the sessions prepared.
- ✓ We offer this *Journey* with appreciation to those whose questions, together with our own, have challenged us to dig deep into God's Word for answers. It is because of their curiosity that this discipleship ministry has been developed. As you study, we realize that you also may have questions of your own. Please feel free to ask your questions during our discussion time, or contact your facilitator throughout the week. We are always happy to talk with you about your *Journey*.
- ✓ After the session, please complete the Discussion Questions and Abiding Principles on our website. Submit these for extra credit!
- ✓ If you are enjoying *A Journey of Faith*, please refer a friend to Journey with us. Visit www.onlyJesus4me.com to discover how to become a Licensed Facilitator and offer this life-changing resource to others. It is easy and rewarding!
- ✓ Before our study each week, we will say this prayer together:
“Dear heavenly Father, I ask that you open my heart to receive the Scripture for today's lesson. I also ask for the Holy Spirit to give me courage to take the steps of a true disciple in following Jesus, as truth is revealed to me through this *Journey of Faith*. Thank you for your grace at work in my life to draw me closer to your awesome love. I pray in Jesus' holy name, Amen.”

THEME VERSES

2 Peter 1:3a, 5a

³By his *Divine Power*,
God has given us
Everything we need
for living a *Godly Life*.

⁵In view of all this, make
every effort to *Respond*
to God's *Promises*.
Supplement [or add to]
Your Faith.



ABIDING PRINCIPLES

ROMANS 8:28

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 11:33-34

³³Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! ³⁴For who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?

2 CORINTHIANS 12:8-9

⁸Three different times I begged the Lord to take it ["a thorn in my flesh"] away. ⁹Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me."

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION TEN

Let me say at the outset of this session that I realize there is a great deal of pain in this world, and I don't pretend to completely understand. My heart breaks each time I witness tears being shed, and I have also known my share of hurt and confusion. So, before we get started, I think it is only fair to share with you several things that are on my heart, which together provide a backdrop for what we will explore together:

1. First of all, I come to this subject with a deep belief that through Jesus Christ our Lord, we serve a living and all-powerful God who cares deeply for everyone in the world (Read John 3:16-17). Even though I don't understand all of God's ways, I believe that God is completely just, always righteous, and incapable of making mistakes. When my *feelings* tell me that God has somehow failed, my *faith* leads me to trust in God's wisdom and ultimate triumph. I truly believe that the mysteries of suffering will somehow be revealed in time, and we will understand that God did truly overcome evil. God has not abandoned us.
2. Second, I realize that everyone will not have the same opportunities to study God's Word that I have had. Therefore, I am both grateful and even more responsible for sharing with others the privileges afforded me. Through the lens of my theological training, I have been given a perspective to observe the ways of God at work in my life and thousands of others. My understanding is certainly far from perfect, and there is so much more to learn; yet what I have discovered to this point has developed a sense of structure around tragedies that informs my faith and helps me remain centered in God.
3. Third, in light of this awareness, I share this session out of a deep pastoral concern—a longing to somehow impart faith in a structured way so that you can find the strength to remain faithful to God—even in the midst of unexplainable circumstances. Jesus warned us, “[Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows,](#)” but he also went on in that same verse to encourage us, “[take heart, because I have overcome the world](#)” (John 16:33b). I hope this session will help encourage you

through the many heartaches you must face.

While we should not question God, in the sense of doubting God's goodness, we should inquire of God, and grow in our understanding of God's ways. I believe there is a huge difference between *questioning* God and *inquiring* about the ways of God. The Bible has given us the pathway to understand God's ways better, and hopefully this session will at least get you started.

Questioning God is very different
from *Inquiring* about his ways.

Will we come to any definite conclusions about the mysteries of life that trouble you most? Probably not. I suspect there may be many inquiries left, but it is my sincere hope that you will be better equipped to have a faithful response to God in the midst of suffering—a response that will not charge God with irresponsibility or argue against divine providence, but rather, will rest by faith in God's goodness. Job tried unsuccessfully to argue with God and had to repent (see the story of Job, especially Job 42:1-6).

With just a little bit of work on your part, this session could provide a theological framework for your life—a framework that will help you know God better, and equip you with a better way to interpret the events of this life.

TEXT: 2 CORINTHIANS 11:23-31

Paul's Many Trials

²³ Are they servants of Christ? I know I sound like a madman, but I have served him far more! I have worked harder, been put in prison more often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again.

²⁴ Five different times the Jewish leaders gave me thirty-nine lashes.

²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I spent a whole night and a day adrift at sea.

²⁶ I have traveled on many long journeys. I have faced danger from rivers and from robbers. I have faced danger from my own people, the Jews, as well as from the Gentiles. I have faced danger in the cities, in the deserts, and on the seas. And I have faced danger from men who claim to be believers but are not.

²⁷ I have worked hard and long, enduring many sleepless nights. I have been hungry and thirsty and have often gone without food. I have shivered in the cold, without enough clothing to keep me warm.

²⁸ Then, besides all this, I have the daily burden of my concern for all the churches.

²⁹ Who is weak without my feeling that weakness? Who is led astray, and I do not burn with anger?

³⁰ If I must boast, I would rather boast about the things that show how weak I am.

³¹ God, the Father of our Lord Jesus, who is worthy of eternal praise, knows I am not lying.



SESSION 10: WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOD'S CHILDREN?

In the natural world, it is expected for tragedy to respect no boundaries as it imposes its awful humility on mankind. However, many Christians often wonder, “Why does God allow us believers to suffer along with everyone else?”

The Bible says that God loves us dearly, and that God’s power is limited only by God’s own design and choosing. So, how do we make sense of stories like the Apostle Paul’s, given to us in our text? He certainly was one of God’s chosen servants, yet he experienced persecution and suffering above measure. Why did all of these bad things happen to Paul? Where was God?

Have you ever wondered...?

- Doesn’t God love us enough to protect us?
- Isn’t God able to control the circumstances around us in order to insulate us from evil?

Admittedly, no one can completely answer these troubling mysteries. God simply has not explained all of his reasons to humankind—they are secrets

waiting to be revealed. On the other hand, God has revealed some principles that can help guide us as Christians to a better understanding of why trials and afflictions have come into our lives. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, “The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions.”

God does not expect of us a blind faith, but has mercifully given us the Bible and principles therein to build our faith upon. This session will examine these principles that deal with tragedy in this world, suggesting four possible keys to unlock some of the mysteries of suffering. While not explaining these mysteries completely, these principles can at least provide a starting place for sound reasoning that will help us faithfully respond to the challenges of life in a way that is pleasing to God.

I. Others’ Choices. Sometimes we suffer because we are part of a fallen human race.

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 – ²¹So you see, just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. ²²Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life.

A. Creation is under the curse of sin—this world is not what God intended it to be.

Genesis 3:16-19 – ¹⁶Then he said to the woman, “I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.” ¹⁷And to the man he said, “Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. ¹⁸It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. ¹⁹By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”

1. Even though we have believed in Jesus Christ, we are still living within a corrupt system.

- a. One day, we will experience victory—God will make all things new.

Romans 8:21- The creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

- b. For now, we struggle like everyone else.

Romans 7:24-25a – ²⁴Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?

²⁵Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord.

*One day, we will Experience victory—
God will make All things new.*

2. The sin and wrong choices of others—unbelievers and believers alike—affect all of humanity and compound our suffering.

Romans 8:22-23 – ²²For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

²³And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.

ILLUSTRATION

Joshua 7 tells the story of a man named Achan who disobeyed God. His disobedience caused 36 people to die, and it discouraged all of his fellow

citizens. I encourage you to read this narrative in its entirety. The sins of others do have a profound effect upon us.

When I was in college, a tragedy involving two sisters, both college students, occurred as they were driving home for the holidays. Along the way, they took an exit off the interstate for a rest break. As they pulled off the interstate onto the exit ramp, they were hit head-on by a car speeding the wrong way toward them. The two sisters were killed instantly. Later, it was discovered that the driver of the car that hit them was drunk and fleeing from the police. In a dazed panic, he had taken the wrong ramp. Unhurt by the accident, he walked away to face multiple charges with the police; yet sadly, that did not bring back those precious, innocent young ladies to their grieving family and friends.



B. Further, while on the earth we live in a mortal body of flesh that has been corrupted by the fall.

1 Corinthians 15:53 – For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.

1. Sickness is unavoidable.

2 Corinthians 5:2 – We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing.

2. Death is imminent.

Romans 6:23 – For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

ILLUSTRATION

My precious mother was diagnosed with cancer at just 44 years of age. She battled bravely for 7 years, but finally passed away, leaving behind a grieving husband and six heartbroken children. I was the second of her children, 27

years old at the time and pastoring a church in North Carolina. I had four younger siblings, two in college and two at home, just 10 and 12 years of age.

Mother's death was a devastating loss to us, and we still miss her so. Mother was one of the godliest ladies I have known, and it was hard to accept that God would allow her to die of cancer—especially with four young children who needed her so. I still don't understand, and it still hurts all of us, but we have to accept that even mother—as good as she was—was part of a fallen, sinful world.

I remember like yesterday the family gathering around Mother in the hospital. At that point, she was intubated to help her breathe, so she couldn't speak with us. But her mind was clear. We were grieving, asking why. Why wasn't God healing her...why wasn't God answering our prayers? Mother motioned for a writing pad and wrote these words: "The blood for my healing in is my Savior's hands."

In this life, no one escapes the awful curse of sin—it takes its toll on all of our bodies and eventually leads us to death. However, for those who have been washed in the blood of Christ, we will someday experience complete victory over sin, death, and the grave—just as Mother already has. For further study, please read 1 Corinthians 15:51-58.



II. Our Choices. Sometimes we suffer because we make sinful choices that carry awful consequences.

- A. God has given to us the privilege of making choices—we are free to choose right or wrong.

ILLUSTRATION

Someone wisely said, "You can choose your sin, but you cannot choose your consequences."



1. Humans were created in the image of God so that a relationship with God would be possible.
 - a. Relationships require a mutual *desire*.
 - b. Relationships require a mutual *decision*.
 2. God has allowed each of us to make a decision about our relationship with God.

Revelation 3:20 – “Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.”

 - a. This choice starts with eternal salvation.

John 1:11-12 – ¹¹He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. ¹²But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.
 - b. After being born-again, we have to make daily decisions concerning God’s will—to obey or disobey, to follow or turn aside.

James 1:16 – So don’t be misled, my dear brothers and sisters.
- B. With this privilege to choose comes the responsibility of each decision.
- Isaiah 55:7 – Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously.
1. The Bible teaches that sinners who reject Christ’s offer of salvation, will pay the penalty of that awful decision.

2 Thessalonians 1:8 – In flaming fire, bringing judgment on those who don’t know God and on those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus.

Luke 13:3 – [Jesus said], “You will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God.”

2. There is also chastening of the Lord for believers when we neglect God's will for our lives.
Hebrews 12:6 – For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.
3. Also, if we choose sin, we will suffer the consequences.
Proverbs 14:12 – There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.
 - a. God forgives us when we repent of our sins.
 - b. Forgiveness doesn't erase the natural consequences.
4. Time and again throughout the Word of God, God says, “Look, today I am giving you the choice between a blessing and a curse” (Deuteronomy 11:26)! Our freedom to choose carries with it a grave responsibility for the decisions we make.

ILLUSTRATION

There were two brothers growing up in our church, who were just a little older than I. Soon after they finished high school, they fell in with the wrong crowd. One night, as the group was out cruising around, they were a bit short on money. Someone had an idea: “I’ve done some work for an elderly farmer close by. He always keeps a big sum of cash in his bib-overalls. Let’s go over to his place and take his money.” The group agreed. So they went over to the farm and robbed him; then someone in the group shot and killed the farmer and his wife. This tragic and awful situation is etched on my memory. I will never forget the anguish of my peers and their parents.

I truly believe the boys from my church did not intend to be part of a murder that night—and probably did not pull the trigger—but nonetheless, they were both tried, found guilty, and sentenced. It seems like a small choice they made in cruising around with the wrong crowd, but that one choice led to another, and another...and the result of those decisions was devastating for them and their families.

I'll share one other story to illustrate this point. I knew a very nice Christian girl while I was in high school—a girl that I liked at the time. The last time I saw her, we were both visiting a Christian college to explore the possibility of attending there. She told me, “Larry, I know that God is calling me to attend college here next year. I will see you here.” Those were the last words I remember her saying to me. She went home, and instead of getting ready to pursue God’s will, she started dating a young man who led her farther and farther away from God. College started that next year without her. A few months went by, and I received the very sad news that she had been tragically killed. Was she where she was supposed to be? I don’t profess to know, but I do know from her story and many others that the decisions we make carry definite consequences.



III. God’s Choices. Sometimes we suffer because the sovereign will of God is working out God’s plans for our greater good.

- A. God sees the “big picture” and makes choices accordingly.
1. God does things very differently than we do, because God knows how everything fits together. We see only a very small piece of the whole puzzle.

Isaiah 55:8-9 – ⁸“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the LORD. ⁹“And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. ⁹For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”

Romans 11:34 – For who can know the LORD’s thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?

*We can Trust that God always
wants what is Best for us!*

2. God has the right to be God.

Romans 9:20-21 – ²⁰No, don't say that. Who are you, a mere human being, to argue with God? Should the thing that was created say to the one who created it, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹When a potter makes jars out of clay, doesn't he have a right to use the same lump of clay to make one jar for decoration and another to throw garbage into?

B. When we do not understand what God is doing, we may rest assured that God has our best interests in mind.

Romans 8:28, 31b – ²⁸And 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. ³¹...If God is for us, who can ever be against us?

ILLUSTRATION

I will never forget holding in my arms a little girl who had just died, after living about 24 hours. There was a fine couple in our church who had three boys, yet longed for a baby girl. We all had been praying for some time that the Lord would bless their home with a little girl. In time, God answered that prayer, and the church rejoiced with them. Though the pregnancy seemed very normal, there were complications at birth; and the precious little girl didn't make it.

There have been few things in my ministry that have moved me

to tears as much as that little girl's death. Together, we all managed to remain steadfast in the Lord as we trusted God's Word and received God's comfort through the tragedy of her death. Several years later, the Lord sent another fine and healthy little baby girl to their home.

I still don't understand all about that situation, but I can look back and see that God was working in a clear and definite way. I look forward to seeing that precious little girl in heaven. I happen to think she will know me and that there is a little hug waiting on the other side...and just maybe a little bit more understanding for the rest of us who grieved her loss.



IV. Sometimes suffering comes into our lives because God is working to deepen our spiritual fortitude.

Notice carefully these verses: Romans 5:3-5 – ³We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. ⁴And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. ⁵And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.

- A. There is a redeeming value of going through problems and trials, if we respond correctly.

*There is a Redeeming Value...
if we Respond Correctly.*

ILLUSTRATION

The story is told of a farmer in South Georgia who raised peaches for a living. For years, he had been faithful to God through his local church. Each and every Sunday, this farmer would be in church, serving the Lord with his tithes and helping in whatever way he could.

One spring a late frost came, killing all the blossoms on his peach trees. His crop was devastated, and his finances ruined. Angry at God for this late frost, the farmer stayed home from church brooding about his losses.

After several weeks went by, the pastor of the church heard of his plight. With concern for his soul, the pastor paid him a visit. The bitter farmer spoke angrily to the pastor, “God knows you can’t grow peaches with a late frost. If God is going to treat me this way, I intend to never serve him again.” The pastor humbly replied, “Friend, you are correct—God does know that you can’t grow peaches with a late frost. But God also knows that he can’t grow a farmer without a late frost every now and then.”

The farmer began to realize that God was allowing this testing in his life—**not to harm him, but to help him**. He went back to church, asked for God’s forgiveness, and followed as God guided him through the trial of his crop failure and helped him find other ways to absorb his losses. His faith was strengthened, and he went on to serve God in more effective ways.

You see, God is more interested in growing your Christian character than in growing your crops or investments.



1. Romans 5 teaches that problems “develop endurance” (vs. 3b).
2. Endurance is a spiritual discipline that teaches us important lessons

about walking with God.

- a. We need to learn to wait on God and not rush ahead with our own solutions.

Psalm 27:14 – Wait patiently for the LORD. Be brave and courageous. Yes, wait patiently for the LORD.

- b. We need to learn to be faithful to God, regardless of difficulties that come.

2 Corinthians 12:10 – That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- c. We need to learn to stay focused on God’s greater plan.

Hebrews 12:2 – We do this [run life’s race] by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.

3. Romans 5 also teaches us that endurance “develops our strength of character” (vs. 4).

2 Peter 3:18a – Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

- a. God wants us to grow and mature in our faith.

- 1) Big problems force us to wait on God to work in our lives.

- 2) As we get out of God’s way and let God work, we experience God in a deeper way than ever before.

- b. God wants us to learn more about God and the Bible.

- 1) Big problems often cause us to search for God.

James 4:8 – Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

- 2) This search for God will cause us to pay attention to the Bible and learn how to pray.

- 3) This search for God will cause us to seek spiritual advice and

direction.

4. Romans 5 goes on to say that “character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.”
 - a. When we search for God and we begin to notice God at work in our lives, our faith in God’s eternal plan is strengthened.
 - b. As our faith in God grows, we begin to better understand God’s priorities for our lives, and we become more willing to cooperate with God’s plans for us.

Romans 5:1-2 – ¹Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ²Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God’s glory.

- B. There is victory for a Christian who responds properly to problems and trials.
 1. We will have grown in our faith, so that we will trust in God even more.

Romans 5:5a – This hope will not lead to disappointment.
 2. Further, we will emerge more assured of God’s love for us.

Romans 5:5b – For we know how dearly God loves us...

IN CONCLUSION

Why do bad things happen to God's children? My prayer is that you will now be able to run the events of this life through the filter of these four principles that we have studied. While not always giving us concrete answers, perhaps these principles can help us find peace in knowing that nothing happens arbitrarily, or without purpose. God is firmly in control of our lives, and often several of these principles are simultaneously at work in each difficult circumstance.

I'll say this from my own personal experiences... So many of the bad things I have endured in my life have been brought on by my own foolish decisions or the foolishness of others. How dare I accuse God of unfaithfulness, when in reality, my own failures or the failures of others are to blame?

Proverbs 19:3 says, "People ruin their lives by their own foolishness and then are angry at the LORD."

Could it be that some of the mysterious happenings we observe in the lives of others are rooted in the same choices and failures? We need to be careful to place blame on sin and the devil when much of the evil we experience in this world *is* the result of people who have turned their backs on God. Their wickedness and sin have brought horrific suffering to others because of their cesspool of sin and its awful consequences.

"But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). Jesus has overcome the world, and he is coming back for us. Heaven is real. Justice will be served. God will triumph over evil, and every wrong will be made right.

**When bad things happen in your life, don't give up!
Beat the discouragement by:**

- B – Believing the *promises* of God (2 Peter 1:4).
- E – Expecting the *presence* of God (Hebrews 13:5-6).
- A – Accepting the *peace* of God (Philippians 4:6-7).
- T – Triumphant with *praise* to God (Psalm 43:5).

Romans 8:17-18 – ¹⁷And since we are [God's] children, we are his heirs. In fact,

together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. ¹⁸Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have you read and studied this entire session? Yes No

Please answer the Discussion Questions below in complete sentences, using our website. When you submit your answers to OJM, you will get a copy of Larry's and Diane's answers in return via email! (You may wish to keep a copy of your answers to compare yours with theirs as you continue discovering truth.) If you are not sure how to answer each question, go ahead and "take a stab at it." Once you start writing, you may surprise yourself! There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We want to hear your thoughts!

1. Discuss the difference between questioning God and inquiring about the ways of God?
2. Please share briefly the questions about God that you brought with you to this session.
3. Please re-write Deuteronomy 29:29 in your own words and discuss what that verse means in light of your questions.
4. The author states that relationships require a mutual desire and a mutual decision. Discuss why God gave humans free will and conscious choice regarding their relationship with God.
5. Take a look back over your life and discuss the ways in which God has been working to deepen your spiritual fortitude. Comment on how cooperative you have been with that process.

IN ADDITION...

Remember to write out the Abiding Principles on the website. If you complete these simple assignments, you will earn an upgraded certificate!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All the glory and praise goes to God for all of the many blessings we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I truly am grateful to God for the wonderful people God has put in my life since I was but a small child. I chose the theme verses for Only Jesus 4 Me (OJM) from [Psalm 71:17-18](#), for truly as the Psalmist said: “[God has] taught me from my earliest childhood.” I am indebted to many voices and guides who have spoken into my faith *Journey* to bring me to this new opportunity to teach others *A Journey of Faith*.

My *Journey of Faith* started many years ago, when in God’s grace and providence, God allowed me to be born into a Christian home. When I was but three years of age, God led my parents, Larry and Linda, into full-time missions work. My early life was enriched by their experiences of faith and service to Christ. I owe them my lasting gratitude for the many ways they gave me a wonderful start in life.

Further, I am very grateful for the church families that have allowed me to serve Jesus in their midst since 1992. So much of what I have learned has been in the pursuit of their needs. Also, searching questions that have come to the surface in both my life and theirs, have called forth a diligent study on my part. I love each and every person with whom I have had the opportunity to minister throughout the years, and I appreciate all that they have taught me. Space would not allow me to thank each person by name, but to those who were part of these church families, know that I am eternally grateful that our journeys have intersected. I feel that we have blessed each other forward in our mutual faith, and I am thankful for what you have brought into my life.

I am grateful for a host of professors, pastors, teachers, and counselors who have spoken into my faith journey. I studied officially in many classrooms, but unofficially, I have sat at the feet of so many wonderful Christians—some whom I have pastored and others whom I have led as part of my church staff. Those very ones whom I was called to lead have led me in many ways. I can’t thank these mentors enough. I only wish that space would allow me to mention each one by name.

I also want to offer my appreciation to my first wife, Holly, and my children, Nathaniel and Jessica, for allowing me the time to pursue ministry, writing,

education, and the lofty dreams that I felt God placed within my heart. While I felt my motives were pure and my intentions were the best, I haven't always known how to balance my time and priorities well. I am sure that in my early zeal for God, I often got caught up in lofty goals that were more than what God had called me to pursue. In those times, my family suffered a great deal for my lack of attentiveness to them, and I regret that. I also made my share of mistakes and needed forgiveness. For those sacrifices they made to invest in who I have become, I offer my sincere thanks and humble gratitude. If I could go back, I would do things very differently. My children are grown now, and I love them very much.

God in his mercy and grace has allowed me to remarry a wonderful partner, Diane. I am very grateful for her support and the expertise that she has brought into my life. She is a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, a grammarian, and an excellent musician. Her humble ways of living out her faith in Jesus Christ are constant lessons to me. She has a gentle spirit and has modeled to me the Christ-life, to which I aspire. I can't say "thank you" enough to her. She has a courage about her that is remarkable, and even though God has entrusted to her a battle with Stage IV cancer, she fights on with great courage. My thanks for her careful review of all of our written materials and the excellent edits. She might just make a grammarian out of me yet. I doubt it, but it is worth her continued try! Also, a special thank you is in order for Diane's parents, Don and Doris Johns. They are special folks, and they sure reared a fine daughter!

I must give a special thanks to my church family at Bethel. They are simply the BEST. I would never be able to express to them how much I love them and the church that we all call "home." It is such a privilege to be their pastor and to help carry on the work of Jesus. I appreciate Bethel's support and belief in the project of OJM. Their partnership is such a blessing to us. I want to give my appreciation to the chairperson of our Church Board, Robert Phillips, and his wife Lena, and also the chairperson of our Deacons, Ron Wampler, and his wife Carolyn. All of the leaders at Bethel are dear friends and encouragers in the work of Christ—I wish I had the space to list all of their names. I also want to thank our District Executive Minister, Bro. John Jantzi, for his review of some of our lessons and his excellent input and ideas. Also, my thanks go to him for believing in me and being the conduit that God used to bring Bethel and us together. He is a blessing and such an encouragement as we endeavor

to serve Christ together. I also want to give a shout out to the Discipleship Ministries Team with whom I have the privilege of serving: David Chappell, Jan Orndorff, and Debby Rimel are wonderful friends and encouragers. My “thank you” to the team! They have made me a better disciple of Jesus, and I appreciate their steady encouragement to look to Jesus and keep the attention on HIM!

Only Jesus 4 Me (OJM) was born out of a calling that I felt through fervent prayer on my knees. I shared the vision first with Diane, and she was right there to support me. We both prayed for God’s direction in putting the right people into our path to help launch this ministry. In the early days, God led us to a local businessman, C.L. Russell of C.L. Russell Photography in Broadway, Virginia. He is the creative genius behind the videography and photography! He and his wife, LaShonda, have become good friends, and we are very grateful for the ways they have supported OJM. In those early days, God also led us to Josh Hallahan of Christian Internet Design in Missoula, Montana. He and his team have brilliantly developed the website and have constantly been a source of encouragement in the Lord. They have found the tools to make the vision a reality! We are very grateful to them.

As we began to delve into the work of creating OJM, we realized very quickly that we needed some expertise in graphics design, technical issues, and developing the ministry materials, such as the book that you are reading. After much prayer, the Lord reminded me of a good friend who had assisted us on many previous projects, Tillman Ross of Graphic Imaging in Concord, North Carolina. We asked Tillman to consult with us as our Impressions Manager, and he graciously accepted. He is gifted at bringing colors, web pages, pictures and concepts into a unified whole. His creations speak of excellence, and we feel they are a wonderful reflection on OJM’s passion for Jesus. A “thank you” to Tillman for his steady and creative guidance, as well as being a friend in the Gospel ministry since 2003.

On the business side, we have been working with our CPA and friend, Ed Neese, from Greensboro, North Carolina. I pastored there in the late 1990’s and asked Ed to do my personal taxes. Since that time, Ed has done my yearly return and has counseled me on many financial matters. He loves the Lord Jesus, and he has been a true business friend. I am deeply grateful for his

guidance in financial matters concerning OJM, and ministry in general, but even more so for his consistent friendship and encouragement to both me and Diane. God has also brought into our lives a good friend and attorney, Dan Neher from Harrisonburg, Virginia. He is a solid brother in Christ and has been a source of encouragement and assistance in advising us on legal matters concerning OJM. We are grateful to Dan for his expertise.

Musically, God has put in our path a new friend from Nashville, Tennessee, Peter Young. Peter is an accomplished drummer, arranger, and producer. He has given “wings” to the theme song God allowed me to compose, “Only Jesus 4 Me,” and brought together incredible talent in Nashville to produce the song at the legendary Studio 19. He has been awesome to work with. Our thanks to Peter, and a thank you to the recording studio and all of the musicians who played on the project: Kyle Hershman, Studio Engineer; Chris Nole, Keyboards; Ron de la Vega, Bass; Peter Young, drums; Tony Paoletta, pedal steel; Joe Spivey, Acoustic Guitar, Fiddle and Mandolin, and Chas Williams, Lead Guitar. Mike Lusk is the awesome singing talent on the theme song, and he sounded just great. We appreciate Mike and all the musicians for their contributions!

There are so many others God has used in my life—many friends, family members, neighbors, and colleagues who have prayed for me—and I am truly grateful for each and every one. If I have failed to mention you by name, please understand that it was not on purpose. Yet above and beyond all others, I am humbled by the friendship of Jesus. I am so grateful that Jesus would entrust to me his vision for *Only Jesus 4 Me* and *A Journey of Faith*. I realized long ago that inspiration and creativity do not come from a human being; rather, all that is good comes from the Holy Spirit working through a yielded person to accomplish the purpose of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. When I am at my best, I feel the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and I give all the glory to Jesus. “In him, I live and move and have my being” (Acts 17:28). I know all the glory goes to God and I am eternally grateful for any small part that I have in Jesus’ kingdom. If this ministry touches your heart and is a help to you, please join with us in giving God the glory. God alone is worthy! Praise be to Jesus! Thank you, Jesus. Only Jesus 4 Me! Amen!



PHOTO ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Images used in *A Journey of Faith* were provided under a Creative Commons License (CCO); yet to show appreciation to these artists, here is a list of the photos used with appropriate credit where possible.

Photo 1: “A frustrated young woman with smartphone by the damaged car after a car accident, making a phone call,” September 16, 2018 by contributor: Halfpoint, on istockphoto.com, stock photo ID: 1036766502.

Photo 2: “Spiral Jetty,” United States, October 12, 2015 by Greg Rakozy on Unsplash.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Larry was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and reared on the missionary field. He is the second of six children. His folks served the Spanish-speaking world until Larry was a teenager, and then they traveled as a family in full-time evangelistic work in the United States. He recalls being in forty-three states and three other countries before going to college. During these formative years, Larry gave his heart and life to Christ and felt a calling to serve the Lord in local church work.

Larry was ordained to the full-time Gospel ministry in 1992, serving as a music and youth minister until 1995. Since that time, he has had the privilege of lifting up Christ as a pastor in the Baptist Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Church of the Brethren (COB). He is currently serving as the pastor of Bethel-Mayland COB in Broadway, Virginia, and the interim pastor of Pine Grove COB in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He also serves with the Shenandoah District COB as a member of the Discipleship Ministry Team.

Larry has earned three seminary degrees: a Master of Theology (Th.M.) and a Doctorate of Theology (Th.D.) from Covington Theological Seminary, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; and a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Larry is the father to two grown children, Nathaniel and Jessica, and a grandfather to Kirsten. Larry and his wife Diane reside in New Market, Virginia. When not busy in the ministry, Larry enjoys music, the outdoors, golf, tennis, riding motorcycles, and reading—especially biographies. Diane shares many of the same interests and is also a wonderful pianist. They both enjoy ministering, spending time together, traveling, and meeting other believers.



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Diane was born near Tacoma, Washington, and grew up as the baby sister of two brothers. At seven years of age, her family moved across the country back to her mother's home in the mountains of Pennsylvania. They took up residence in an old farmhouse on the edge of the family farm and got very involved in their local church and Christian school. Diane's dad served as an assistant to the pastor, and her mother taught high school maths and sciences in the Christian school.

After graduation from high school, Diane went to Pensacola Christian College (PCC) and earned her bachelor's degree in Music Ministry in 1999, traveling with the PCC Ensemble for two years and helping to promote the college. She was offered an opportunity to continue her studies as a Graduate Assistant and earned a seminary degree in Church Music (M.C.M.) through Pensacola Theological Seminary in 2001.

Diane has had a diverse opportunity to experience Christ and how various traditions practice their faith. She grew up in a Community church, belonged to a non-denominational church, served on staff at a Baptist church, attended a Full Gospel church, and has belonged to the United Methodist Church. She is now a member of the Church of the Brethren, where she serves with her husband, Larry. Diane has also served the local church as a choir member and director, pianist, Sunday school teacher, secretary, and financial secretary. She is very involved in supporting Larry's ministry as a pastor's wife.

She offers her input in the discussion questions throughout this book as a person who has experienced the *Journey* many times. She hopes that her input will help to broaden the discussions and further the conversations around these important topics.



A JOURNEY OF FAITH INCLUDES

- Session 1 | God's Wonderful Assurance of Salvation
- Session 2 | What Does Baptism Mean?
- Session 3 | The Meeting House of God
- Session 4 | Is the Bible Relevant for Today?
- Session 5 | A Guide to Prayer and Fasting
- Session 6 | God's Will: Revealed & Concealed
- Session 7 | Financial Wisdom
- Session 8 | The Worldwide Ministry of the Holy Spirit
- Session 9 | Anointed by the Holy Spirit
- Session 10 | Why Do Bad Things Happen to God's Children?



Don't Miss A Session!