

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

*what about sickness and death?
...and how about healing and life!*

Do we think about death?

The Bible has a lot to say about death. Do you know it is better to go to a funeral than to go to a party?

Ecclesiastes 7:2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart. (NIV)

We do not think about death at parties, yet funerals challenge us into thinking about our eternal future (consider Isaiah 5:11–12). Death is not a nice subject for most people, and usually only when it confronts us do we think about it.

Why then should we think about death? Quite simply, it is too late for a person to think about death when they die, so we need to prepare ourselves beforehand. We do not know when we will die, and death can happen suddenly, so we should start preparing for it today if we have not already done so. Many people fear death because they are not ready to die, but if we get to know God first, we need not fear it (Hebrews 2:14–15).

The first thing we need to do when considering death is to accept it and not to deny it. There is no medical cure for it and neither will there ever be one. One day we will die.

Ecclesiastes 3:1–2 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: a time to be born and a time to die... (NIV)

Accepting death can be a hard thing for us to do especially when a friend dies at a young age and we do not have a proper understanding of death. Sometimes it is a relief to see them no longer suffer, but most of the time we would rather they live. It is worse still when a close relative dies; such as husband, wife, father, mother, son or daughter. We depend on them in some way, and when they die, a part of our life dies with them.

Do we think about sickness?

It can be hard for us to accept sickness as well. We all know people who suffer greatly in some way. A relative may be in constant pain, or a friend may suffer mentally, or someone we know may struggle with fears and depression. This grieves us. One of the hardest things to bear is when you see someone you love suffering and you do not know how to help them.

For many people, sickness is a torment and a form of torture which in all likelihood will only result in death. They cry out for relief, but most get no answer or comfort. The physical pain is just one aspect of their torment. Probably the greater pain is the mental torment; the questions, the lack of understanding, and the senselessness of it all.

Struggling to find answers

It may be while they are in the midst of suffering that someone comes up to them and gives them the gospel and tells them that they need to save themselves from the wrath to come.

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. (NKJV)

However, they might find it difficult to respond to this call because they are grieved and angered by the suffering and evil in the world. How can God love the world if He lets them suffer so much? Surely He could intervene and remove all the suffering?

For some people, this problem is of such importance that they need to find adequate answers to it before they will respond to the gospel.

How then can we find the answers to our questions? Thankfully there is a way. Firstly, we need to acknowledge that man's wisdom is insufficient, and we need to seek God's help. Mankind has wrestled with these problems for many generations yet still asks questions. If man's wisdom was sufficient, we would have adequate

answers by now. The Bible says that God's foolishness is wiser than men's wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:25), and Jesus Christ is the way and the truth (John 14:6), so perhaps the reason why man lacks understanding is because he has not directed his questions toward God.

Someone who found answers

There is an example in the Bible of someone who wanted to have some questions answered.

2 Chronicles 9:1–2 When the queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame, she came to Jerusalem to test him with hard questions. Arriving with a very great caravan—with camels carrying spices, large quantities of gold, and precious stones—she came to Solomon and talked with him about all she had on her mind. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was too hard for him to explain to her. (NIV)

We do not know what questions she asked, but it is likely they were similar to the ones we will look at in this book. Why would the Queen of Sheba travel such a long distance and with such costly presents if her questions were not that important? They must have had something to do with life and death. Whatever they were, Solomon answered them all because God had given him wisdom and knowledge (2 Chronicles 1:7–12). We can say that, in effect, she got her answers from God. This should encourage us that if we look to God, we should receive the answers to our questions.

How to ask God for answers

Assuming that we look to God for help, we need to approach Him in the right way. If we demand to know why there is so much evil in the world, God will not answer us because He is greater than us and will not give an account of what He has done or allowed to happen (Job 33:13). If we want to know anything from God, we need to approach Him with the respect He is entitled to.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge... (NKJV)

A wrong attitude will keep us from finding wisdom. We may argue, for instance, that if we were God, we would heal our friends and not let them suffer. But this is not a right thing to say, because we imply that we would make a better God than He already is. This is impossible. We must accept from the outset that God is righteous and there are good reasons why the world has ended up like it has.

Proverbs 14:6 A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it, But knowledge is easy to him who understands. (NKJV)

We need to approach God humbly. He wants us to know about these things (Proverbs 1:20–23), and we can learn what the answers are to these questions by seeking Him with the right attitude. We need also to trust God to show us what we do not know (James 1:5–6).

As we will see later, our relationship with God is based on faith, and we need to trust Him first in order to receive from Him.

Our approach in this study

In the following chapters, we will attempt to answer difficult questions frequently asked by people today. We will look at why is there so much evil in the world, why is there sickness and death, why accidents happen, why is life so unfair and why would a good and loving God even contemplate sending people to hell.

The approach we will take is to look to God for wisdom rather than to look to man. We will base our answers on what we can see written in the Bible and as we look expectantly to God, we believe He will speak to us and show us what we desire to know.

Once we have looked at these questions, we will move on and consider the solution God has provided through the death of Jesus Christ, His Son. We will try to understand how we can have a relationship with God, why we need our sins forgiven, and why Jesus Christ had to die for us.

The questions we will look at are profound and involve a lot of thought. Although the answers in this book are based on verses in the Bible, they will be incomplete and may even be wrong at times. The Bible itself will be right, but the interpretation (which is based on an imperfect human understanding) may be incorrect. Those who have paid the price of studying and applying the Bible in their lives will be able to give deeper and more comprehensive answers than those shown here.

It may be you wish to read this book on your own; however, you will probably get more benefit from reading it together with some friends and perhaps in a church house group. Quite a few subjects will be covered, and as a necessity not every subject will be comprehensively covered. Indeed some questions are left unanswered. There is therefore much scope to learn from other people in a house group and much room for discussion.

Setting realistic goals

Some of you will have been through some rough times, and there will be areas you currently do not want to explore. This is perfectly understandable. You will be able to see in advance what topics will be discussed and so have the opportunity to avoid the difficult areas, if you so wish, when they arise. However, loving and supportive house groups can benefit us greatly by helping us go through these difficult areas and come into a better relationship with God.

Our goal is not to understand why everything happens in life as this will be too hard for us (Romans 11:33). Instead our goal is to understand enough so that the hardships of life, the pain and the disappointments no longer pull us away from God.

Romans 8:35–39 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither

death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (NKJV)

Questions to consider

1. Can we always get answers or are some questions too hard for us?
2. What makes these sort of questions so hard to answer? Our lack of capacity to understand, our emotions or something else?
3. How helpful are partial answers?

1. INTRODUCTION
