

### In *Everything* Give Thanks?

Psalm 92.1; Philippians 4.6-7; Colossians 3.17; 1 Thessalonians 5.18

Giving thanks to God is enjoined throughout Scripture. His faithfulness, goodness, mercy, and grace are acclaimed. But we all know the realities of life – disasters, disease, violence, and war. Should we give thanks for those things as well? How can we give thanks in difficult times?

- Heroes of faith face difficult times...and give thanks!
  - *Biblical prophets, priests, and apostles*
  - *Persecuted Christians throughout church history*
- Blaming God for evil: Wrong explanations for suffering
  - *“You’ve committed sin and God is punishing you!”*
  - *“God is ‘chastising’ you to teach you something!”*
  - *Deism, Determinism, and other unsatisfactory views*
- What God is doing in a world under Satan’s power...

*...the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

1 John 5.19

*...greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.*

1 John 4.4

*...take courage; I have overcome the world.*

John 16.33



in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:18

1. Suffering is universal in the world. It may be the result of random occurrences – natural disasters, disease, accidents. Other times it is intentional – ethnic hatred, religious persecution, despotism. But whatever the cause, when difficult times come, we look for a reason. What are some answers those who do not believe in God give? What answers are given by various religions? What different answers have you heard from Christians?
2. Deism is the view that God is not involved with His creation – He got us started, and is letting us run things on our own. One variation of deism is the idea that God would like to stop all suffering, but is unable to (He is not omnipotent). Determinism is the idea that God, for reasons we cannot know, *determined* everything that happens in time before creation – every thought, word, action, even our eternal destinies. How would you respond to these views of God?
3. Another reason given for suffering is reflected in the advice of Job’s friends, who suggested that God was punishing him for some secret sin, or God wanted to teach him something through his trial. But in the book of Job, who is it that initiates Job’s suffering (Job 2.7)? At the end of the book, how does God respond to Job’s friends for their counsel to Job? Why is God so angry with them?
4. The idea of thanking God even when we are going through difficult times seems counterintuitive. What is there to be thankful for when we’re suffering?! This is because we often adopt one of the wrong views of God noted above. When you recognize that Satan and sin are the cause of suffering, can you think of reasons to thank God in difficult times? How is this perspective reflected in biblical events? What examples of giving thanks in difficult times can you think of in Scripture? In the lives of Christians?
5. There are signs that Christians may soon face increasing persecution in America, as Christians already are in many countries around the world. How can we prepare for suffering? What can we thank God for, even as we anticipate coming trials?