

# When God Doesn't Make Sense

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- I. This study derives its name and a lot of its content from James Dobson's excellent book, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*.
  
- II. There are times in life when things happen to us that we cannot understand.
  1. When calamity, suffering, or loss happens for no apparent reason, it can cause confusion, anger, depression, or despair. These things can include:
    - A. the death of a child
    - B. the untimely death of a spouse, parent, sibling, other close family member, or friend
    - C. cancer
    - D. a terrible disease which afflicts oneself or a loved one
    - E. prolonged sickness
    - F. prolonged anxiety or depression
    - G. a child born with a severe affliction
    - H. divorce
    - I. rape
    - J. child molestation
    - K. infertility
    - L. loneliness
    - M. prolonged singleness
    - N. rejection
    - O. failure
    - P. great financial loss
    - Q. widowhood
  2. For a Christian who believes that God is in control of all things, a terrible event in his life can cause him to question why God allowed it to happen when He could have prevented it.
    - A. Times like this can make believers feel like God doesn't make sense.
    - B. They often demand answers from God or others.
    - C. When the answer doesn't come, they can get angry, resentful, bitter, and full of despair.
  3. The purpose of this study is to help Christians, who are going through hardship in their lives, to learn how to process it Biblically, even when God doesn't seem to make sense.
  4. It is also designed to prepare Christians ahead of time for when the inevitable hardships of life come.
  
- III. Who this study will benefit most
  1. People who are older or have suffered serious hardship will get more out of this study.
  2. When people are young and haven't yet suffered much, they assume that life is a bed of roses and always will be.
  3. "During the springtime of their years, when health is good and the hardships, failures, and sorrows have not yet blown through their tranquil little world, it is relatively easy to fit the pieces in place. One can honestly believe, with good evidence, that it will always be so. Such a person is extremely vulnerable to spiritual confusion if trouble strikes at that point." (James Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense*, p. 10)
  4. Older people who have been fortunate to not have endured major trouble or suffering sometimes likewise live in la-la land.

5. But the vast majority of people will eventually come face-to-face with the sorrows, suffering, disappointments, and perplexities of life.
6. “As indicated, it is important to recognize that you are not alone. Your pain and discouragement, which might lead you to ask “Why *me?*” are not unique. You have not been singled out for sorrow. Most of us are destined, it seems, to bump our heads on the same ol’ rock. From ancient times, men and women have grieved over stressful circumstances that did not fit any pattern of logic or symmetry. It happens to us all sooner or later. Millions have been there. And despite what some Christians will tell you, being a follower of Jesus Christ is no foolproof insurance policy against these storms of life.” (Ibid, pp. 28-29)
7. When one’s time to experience life’s confusing trials comes, reviewing this study will hopefully prove to be helpful.

#### IV. God is sovereign

1. God does what He wants (**Dan 4:35; Job 23:13**).
2. He doesn’t answer to you or anyone else (**Job 33:13**).
3. He is the potter, and we are the clay (**Rom 9:21**).
4. We therefore have no right to question Him (**Rom 9:20; Isa 29:16**).
5. We have no business questioning Him, even when He takes things away from us (**Job 9:12**).
6. Woe unto them who strive with their Maker (**Job 40:1-2; Isa 45:9**).

#### V. Life isn’t fair.

1. Abel was murdered by his wicked brother because he worshiped God in truth (**Heb 11:4; 1Jo 3:12**).
2. Job was severely afflicted for no apparent reason (**Job 1-2**).
3. God allowed a man to be born blind and live that way for many years so that the works of God could be made manifest in him (**Joh 9:1-3**).
4. John the Baptist, the greatest prophet that ever lived (**Luk 7:28**), was imprisoned and executed for speaking the truth to king Herod (**Mat 14:3-12**).
5. “Look at the human talent that has been ‘wasted’ by early death or disability over the centuries. Wolfgang Mozart, for example, may have had the greatest musical mind in the history of the world. He composed his first symphony at five years of age and turned out a remarkable volume of brilliant work. But he died penniless at 35, being unable to attract any interest in his compositions. His most valuable possession at the time of his death was a violin worth about two dollars. He was buried in an unmarked pauper’s grave, and no one attended his funeral. Who was it that said life is fair?” (Ibid, pp. 56-57)

#### VI. Things that happen oftentimes don’t make sense.

1. God did miracles by Moses to demonstrate His power (**Exo 4:1-9**), but He would not heal his speech impediment (**Exo 4:10-17**).
  - A. “We can assume that the Lord didn’t heal Moses’ ‘slowness of tongue’ because Moses, like Paul, was learning that his strength was made perfect in weakness. He was chosen for leadership not because he was a miracle-worker or a superman but because the Lord determined to use his inadequacies and shortcomings.” (Ibid, p. 104)

- B. “Each of us is riddled with flaws and shortcomings that the Lord could overcome with a whisper. Instead, he often lets us struggle with our weaknesses to reveal His own power. That understanding comes straight out of Scripture: Paul wrote, ‘But we have this treasure in earthen vessels [clay pots], that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us’ (2 Corinthians 4:7, KJV).” (Ibid)
- 2. Moses faithfully did exactly what God told him to do when he confronted Pharaoh and told him to let the people of God go to sacrifice unto the LORD (**Exo 5:1-3**).
  - A. Pharaoh not only refused, but he increased the workload of the Hebrew slaves (**Exo 5:4-19**).
  - B. The people then turned on Moses and condemned him for what happened (**Exo 5:20-21**).
  - C. Moses went to God with confusion asking why He sent him, why things got worse after he obeyed Him, and why God didn’t deliver them (**Exo 5:22-23**).
  - D. Like Moses, we do not always get rewarded immediately when we faithfully serve and obey God.
  - E. Nevertheless, we must cling to our faith, even when things don’t make sense.
- 3. Believers face the same hardships as unbelievers (**Ecc 2:15; Ecc 8:14; Ecc 9:2**).
  - A. Sometimes, believers have it worse than unbelievers (**Ecc 7:15**).
  - B. On the face of it, this doesn’t make sense, but God has a reason for it.
  - C. “Again, these examples of heartache illustrate the fact that godly people—praying people—sometimes face the same hardships that nonbelievers experience. If we deny that fact, we create even greater pain and disillusionment for those who are unprepared to handle it. That is why we must overcome our reluctance to admit these unpleasant realities. We must brace our brothers and sisters against the betrayal barrier. We must teach them not to depend too heavily on their own ability to comprehend the inexplicable circumstances in our lives.” (Ibid, p. 34)

VII. God’s timing is often too slow for us.

- 1. When facing a problem, we pray earnestly, expecting relief to come quickly.
  - A. When it doesn’t come and we are left to suffer and wait, we can become disappointed, hurt, or disillusioned with God.
  - B. If God is all powerful and has infinite understanding and resources, why doesn’t He come to our aid right now, we often think.
- 2. Abraham and Sarah had to wait about 25 years to have their promised son Isaac (**Gen 12:4, 7 c/w Gen 17:15-19**).
  - A. When the promised son did not come after 11 years of waiting, they took matters into their own hands and got an Ishmael (**Gen 16:1-4**).
  - B. Even after becoming impatient and running ahead of the Lord, they had to wait another 14 years until the promised son came (**Gen 16:16 c/w Gen 21:5**).
  - C. How many prayers of confusion, desperation, and frustration were likely prayed by them as they waited on the Lord to fulfill His promise?
  - D. Nevertheless, Abraham believed God even when He didn’t make sense (**Rom 4:19-22**).
- 3. Consider the account of Lazarus’ sickness and death.
  - A. Jesus got word from Mary and Martha that their brother (and His friend) Lazarus was very sick (**Joh 11:1-3**).

- B. Despite loving them, He intentionally took His time and did not immediately come to heal him (**Joh 11:5-6**).
- C. This no doubt caused a lot of stress, anxiety, and consternation for Mary and Martha.
- D. By the time Jesus got there, Lazarus had been dead for four days (**Joh 11:17**).
- E. Mary and Martha were both distraught and perplexed by the time Jesus arrived much later than they had hoped (**Joh 11:20-21, 32**).
  - i. If he had come sooner, Lazarus would not have died, they reasoned.
  - ii. It hurt Jesus to see them hurt (**Joh 11:33-36, 38**).
  - iii. Others likewise questioned Jesus' timing and actions (**Joh 11:37**).
  - iv. If He could heal others miraculously, why didn't He prevent Lazarus from dying, they reasoned.
- F. What they didn't know was that God had a purpose for sending Jesus four days too late (**Joh 11:4, 11, 14-15, 40-45**).
- G. In reality, Jesus' timing was perfect, although it was not apparent to Mary and Martha at the time.
- H. Jesus is often "four days late" when we are suffering and seeking relief.
- I. We must faithfully *wait on the Lord* and trust that His timing is always right (**Psa 27:13-14**).

VIII. God doesn't always tell us why He does what He does and allows what He allows.

1. The secret things belong unto God (**Deut 29:29; Pro 25:2**).
2. There are things that God does that we cannot comprehend (**Job 11:7-10; Job 37:5; Isa 45:15; 1Co 2:16**).
3. There are some things in life that we are not going to understand, nor get answers to (**Rom 11:33; Ecc 3:11; Ecc 8:17; Ecc 11:5; Act 1:7**).
4. While on this earth, we see through a glass darkly (**1Co 13:12**).
5. God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways (**Isa 55:8-9**).
6. Even if God did explain why He let painful suffering into our lives, we often would not understand.
  - A. Little children can't understand why pain is necessary for their good, such as painful medical procedures.
  - B. If you tried to explain the necessity and purpose for such things to a toddler, he will not understand, but will just wail.
  - C. We likewise can't understand why God allows severe hardship into our lives.
  - D. Just as parents pity their children and want the best for them, even if that means allowing them to suffer pain for future benefit, so God pities us when we are suffering (**Psa 103:13-14**).
  - E. God cares for us (**1Pe 5:7**).
  - F. In our affliction, He is afflicted (**Jdg 10:16; Isa 63:9**).
7. We must trust God, acknowledge that He is right, and lean not on our own understanding to try to comprehend why God allowed calamity into our life (**Pro 3:5-6**).
  - A. Consider the example of Joseph.
  - B. "Look at the experience of Joseph, one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament. His entire life was in shambles until the triumphal reunion with his family many years later. He was hated by his brothers, who considered killing him before selling him

as a slave. While in Egypt, he was imprisoned, falsely accused of attempted rape by Potiphar's wife, and threatened with execution. There is no indication that God explained to Joseph what He was doing through those many years of heartache, or how the pieces would eventually fit together. He was expected, like you and me, to live out his days one at a time in something less than complete understanding. What pleased God was Joseph's faithfulness when nothing made sense." (Ibid, pp. 35-36)

- C. The word of the Lord tried Joseph while in prison (**Psa 105:17-19**), but we don't read of God explaining His plan to him during his affliction.
  - D. He only later understood God's purpose in it (**Gen 45:5-11; Gen 50:20**).
8. Confusion is more difficult than pain and suffering.
- A. "In fact, the majority of us will someday feel a similar alienation from God. Why? Because those who live long enough will eventually be confronted by happenings they will not understand. That is the human condition. Let me say it again: It is an incorrect view of Scripture to say that we will always comprehend what God is doing and how our suffering and disappointment fit into His plan. Sooner or later, most of us will come to a point where it appears that God has lost control—or interest—in the affairs of people. It is only an illusion, but one with dangerous implications for spiritual and mental health. Interestingly enough, pain and suffering do not cause the greatest damage. *Confusion* is the factor that shreds one's faith." (Ibid, p. 13)
  - B. "Jim Elliot, one of the five missionaries who were speared to death by Auca (now Waorani) people in Ecuador, best described this ultimate investment. He is quoted in Elisabeth Elliot's book *Through Gates of Splendor*: 'He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.' That biblically based understanding turns martyrdom into a glorious victory.

"By contrast, Christians who become confused and disillusioned with God have no such consolation. It is the *absence of meaning* that makes their situation so intolerable. As such, their depression over a sudden illness or the tragic death of a loved one can actually be more severe than that experienced by the nonbeliever who expected and received nothing. It is not uncommon to hear a confused Christian express great agitation, anger, or even blasphemy. This confused individual is like a little girl being told by her divorced father that he will come to see her. When Daddy fails to show up, she suffers far more than if he had never offered to come.

"The key word here is *expectations*. They set us up for disillusionment. There is no greater distress in human experience than to build one's entire way of life on a certain theological understanding, and then have it collapse at a time of unusual stress and pain. A person in this situation faces the crisis that rattled his foundation. Then, like little Chris, he must also deal with the anguish of rejection. The God whom he has loved, worshiped, and served turns out to appear silent, distant, and uncaring in the moment of greatest need. Do such times come even to the faithful? Yes, they do, although we are seldom willing to admit it within the Christian community." (Ibid, p. 14-15)

IX. God allows affliction and suffering in our lives to try our faith.

1. The trial of our faith works patience (**Jam 1:2-4**).
2. We are blessed when we endure temptation (trial of faith) and are promised a crown of life from the Lord (**Jam 1:12**).
3. Tribulation works patience, experience, and hope (**Rom 5:3-5**).
4. Temptations need to come into our lives from time to time (**1Pe 1:6**).
5. The trial of our faith is more precious than gold (**1Pe 1:7**).
6. “Apparently, most believers are permitted to go through emotional and spiritual valleys that are designed to test their faith in the crucible of fire. Why? Because faith ranks at the top of God’s system of priorities. Without it, He said, it is impossible to please Him (Hebrews 11:6). And what is faith? It is ‘the substance of things *hoped for*, *the evidence of things not seen*’ (Hebrews 11:1, KJV). This determination to believe when the proof is not provided and when the questions are not answered is central to our relationship with the Lord. He will never do anything to destroy the need for faith. In fact, He guides us through times of testing specifically to cultivate that belief and dependence on Him (Hebrews 11:6-7).” (Ibid, p. 17-18)
7. “Our message boils down to this very simple understanding: there is nothing the Lord wants of us more than the exercise of our faith. He will do nothing to undermine it, and we cannot please him without it. To define the term again, *faith* is believing that which has no absolute proof (Hebrews 11:1). It is hanging tough when the evidence would have us bail out. It is determining to trust him when he has not answered all the questions or even assured a pain-free passage.” (Ibid, p. 221)
8. “The biblical account tells us, ‘about the fourth watch of the night he cometh unto them, walking upon the sea’ (Mar 6:48). From the early evening to the fourth watch is a *seven-hour* passage of time. For seven hours, Jesus watched the disciples do battle with a severe head wind before He came to assist them. Yet they were in His vision and under His care throughout the night. Obviously, He permitted them to experience their need before coming to their rescue.” (Ibid, p. 157) (the text quoted was changed to the KJV)

X. Sometimes our troubles are due to our own sin and foolishness.

1. Ultimately, all suffering, sorrow, trouble, and death are due to sin.
  - A. When Adam sinned, he brought sin and death upon all of his posterity (**Gen 3:6, 17-19; Rom 5:12**).
  - B. The whole creation is under the curse because of sin (**Rom 8:20-23**).
  - C. The wages of sin is death (**Rom 6:23**).
  - D. It comes sooner for some than others.
  - E. Sometimes “innocent” people are like the unfortunate fish that get caught in the evil net (**Ecc 9:11-12**).
    - i. They might not have done a specific sin which caused their suffering or calamity.
    - ii. They are just part of the collateral damage of a sinful world.
2. But sometimes hard times fall on people as a result of their own sin.
  - A. Fools are afflicted because of their sin (**Psa 107:17**).
  - B. The way of transgressors is hard (**Pro 13:15**).
  - C. Sin brings forth death (**Rom 6:23; Jam 1:14-15**).
  - D. Sin has natural consequences.

- i. It doesn't take much imagination to see how the following sinful or foolish things will lead to suffering and death at times: abortion, fornication, adultery, sodomy, rage, disrespecting spouses, disrespecting bosses, disobeying parents, marrying the wrong person, not disciplining children, going into debt, excessive drinking and eating, drugs, smoking, foolish decisions, and driving recklessly.
  - ii. "...I believe many of the trials and tribulations that come our way are of our own making. Some are the direct consequence of sin, as we have seen. In other cases, the pain we experience is a result of unwise decisions. We make such a mess of our lives by foolishness and irresponsibility. When one considers the range of sheer nonsense that human beings can generate, it is understandable why author Mark Twain once said, 'At times it does seem a shame that Noah and his party didn't miss the boat.'" (Ibid, p. 192)
- E. When fools do stupid things, they often complain to God for allowing trouble into their lives which they brought upon themselves (**Pro 19:3**).
  - F. They wonder why God doesn't make sense. But they fail to see that *they* don't make sense.

## XI. Feeling forsaken by God

1. When experiencing suffering, affliction, loss, sorrow, or troubles, it is not uncommon for Christians to feel like God has forsaken them.
  - A. David asked God how long He would forget him and hide His face from him (**Psa 13:1**).
  - B. God will hide His face from us at times to humble us (**Psa 30:7**).
  - C. Asaph wondered if God would cast him off forever, be favorable to him no more, and forget to show him grace and mercy (**Psa 77:7-9**).
  - D. "When the heat is on and confusion mounts, some believers go through a horrendous spiritual crisis. They "lose God." Doubt rises up to obscure His presence and disillusion settles into despair. The greatest frustration is knowing that He created the entire universe by simply speaking it into existence, and He has all power and all understanding. He could rescue. He could heal. He could save. By why won't He do it? This sense of abandonment is a terrible experience for someone whose entire being is rooted in the Christian ethic. Satan then drops by for a little visit and whispers, "He is not there! You are alone!" (Ibid, p. 18)
2. God will sometimes leave us for a time to see what is in our heart (**2Ch 32:31; Deut 8:2**), but He will not forsake us utterly (**Psa 119:8; Isa 54:7-8**).
3. God hears our prayers, even if it doesn't *feel* like it (**1Pe 3:12**).
4. God knows our sorrows, even if it doesn't seem like it (**Exo 3:7**).
5. God considers our trouble and knows our souls in adversities (**Psa 31:7**).
6. God is near the brokenhearted (**Psa 34:18**).
7. God's mercy is great toward them that fear Him (**Psa 103:11**).

## XII. God doesn't always answer the prayers of even the godly.

1. The Father didn't answer some of the prayers of His sinless Son in His darkest hour (**Luk 22:42; Mat 27:46**).



2. The Lord didn't grant the Apostle Paul's request when he was suffering and seeking relief (**2Co 12:7-9**).
3. Imagine a world in which every prayer of Christians was answered.
4. "Consider for a moment the kind of world it would be if God did exactly what we demanded in every instance. First, believers would outlive nonbelievers by centuries. The rest of the human family would be trapped in decaying bodies, but Christians and their children would live in an idyllic world set apart. They would never have toothaches or kidney stones or myopic vision. All of their businesses would succeed and their homes would be beautiful, etc. The entire basis for the God-man relationship would be undermined. People would seek friendship with Him in order to gain the fringe benefits, rather than responding with a heart of repentance and love. Indeed, the most greedy among us would be the first to be drawn to the benefits of the Christian life. Most importantly, these evidences of God's awesome power would eliminate the need for faith." (Ibid, pp. 101-102)

XIII. God's love is shown to us by Christ dying for our sins, not by our circumstances.

1. We perceive the love of God by Him (Jesus Christ) laying down His life for us (**1Jo 3:16**).
2. The love of God was manifested toward us when God sent His Son Jesus Christ into the world to be a propitiation for our sins so that we might live through Him (**1Jo 4:9-10**).
3. Nothing, including tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword, or death, shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (**Rom 8:35-39**).
4. God loves us, even when we don't feel like He does.

XIV. Trust God's promises, not your feelings.

1. Feelings are a very poor substitute for faith.
  - A. The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (**Jer 17:9**).
  - B. Whoso trusts in his own heart is a fool (**Pro 28:26**).
  - C. Guide your heart, don't follow it (**Pro 23:19**).
2. Without faith it is impossible to please God (**Heb 11:6**).
3. We must trust in God's promises, such as:
  - A. He will provide for our needs (**Php 4:19; Psa 34:9-10**).
  - B. He will never leave us nor forsake us (**Heb 13:5**).
  - C. He will not give us more than we can handle (**1Co 10:13**).
4. "In my work with Christian families in crisis, I find them struggling in many of the same ways as the disciples. As they trudge along in deep thought, there is no evidence that Jesus is in their part of the universe. Because they don't 'feel' His presence, they cannot believe He cares. Since the facts don't add up, they are convinced no reasonable explanation exists. Their prayers bring no immediate relief, so they presume they are not heard. But they are wrong. It is my firm conviction in these instances that too much confidence is placed in what people feel, and too little on the promises of God, who said He would supply all our needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:19).

"If you find yourself on that dusty road to Emmaus today, and the circumstances in your life have left you confused and depressed, I have a word of counsel for you. Never assume God's silence or apparent inactivity is evidence of His disinterest. Let me say it again.

Feelings about His inaccessibility mean nothing! Absolutely nothing! His Word is infinitely more reliable than our spooky emotions.” (Ibid, pp. 48-49)

5. “Establish your foundation not on ephemeral emotions but on the authority of the written Word.” (Ibid, p. 49)
6. Have the mindset that God can save you, but if not, be determined to serve Him anyway **(Dan 3:17-18)**.
7. “That is the biblical prescription in its simplest terms. He can heal the disease that grips my body—but if not, my faith will survive. He can correct my child’s handicap, or save my bankrupt business, or bring my son home safely from the war. But if not, I will continue trusting in Him. That’s what Job meant when he said, ‘Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him’ (13:15).” (Ibid, pp. 113-114, changed quote to KJV)

XV. Two choices: acceptance or despair

1. When faced with a great hardship, affliction, or loss, we can either accept that God knows what He’s doing and has done it for a purpose, or we can fall into despair and lose our faith.
2. James Dobson quoted Dr. Jim Conway who endured the terrible trial of seeing his teenage daughter have to have her leg amputated. Here is what he ultimately came to terms with.
  - A. “Probably the most important thing I learned in this entire process is this: I became deeply aware that there were only two choices that I could make. One was to continue in my anger at God and follow the path of despair I was on. The other choice was to let God be God, and somehow say, ‘I don’t know how all this fits together. I don’t understand the reasons for it. I’m not even going to ask for the explanation. I’ve chosen to accept the fact that You are God and I’m the servant, instead of the other way around.’ And there I left it.

“It was in that choice that I came to cope with my situation. I frankly admit that after all these years, I still struggle with some things. I still get sick to my stomach when I see my daughter hopping on one leg. But I have come to recognize that God has a higher purpose and I just don’t understand that purpose. I am prepared to wait until eternity to receive answers to my questions, if necessary. Like Job, I am now able to say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him (Job 13:15, KJV). It’s either despair, or it’s the acceptance of His sovereignty. Those are the alternatives.

“Let me say it again. It’s either despair, or it’s God. There’s nothing in between. Our family has chosen to hold on to God.” (Ibid, quoting Dr. Jim Conway, pp. 88-89).

3. “There is only one answer, and it is the conclusion drawn by Dr. Jim Conway in his hour of crisis: Don’t demand explanations. Don’t lean on your ability to understand. Don’t turn loose of your faith. But do choose to trust Him, by the exercise of the will he has placed within you. The only other alternative—is despair.” (Ibid, p. 89)
4. “Either we continue to believe in God’s goodness and postpone our questions until we see Him face to face—or we will descend into bitterness and anger for the suffering around us. There are no other alternatives. Inevitably, you see, we circle back to the necessity of faith.” (Ibid, pp. 112-113)

5. “One of the evidences of emotional maturity is the ability (and the willingness) to overrule ephemeral feelings and govern our behavior with the intellect and the will.” (Ibid, p. 47)

XVI. Expect suffering, and accept it when it comes.

1. All that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (**2Ti 3:12**).
2. We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God (**Act 14:22**).
3. In the world we shall have tribulation (**Joh 16:33**).
4. Think it not strange when you go through fiery trials (**1Pe 4:12-13**).
5. The apostle Paul, our example, was no stranger to suffering (**2Co 7:4-5; 2Co 11:23-30**).
6. Pastors in particular are called to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ (**2Ti 2:3-4**).
  - A. **Hardness** *n.* – a. The quality or condition of being hard; difficulty of penetration, solution, apprehension, performance, endurance; inflexibility, rigidity, stiffness, harshness; rigour, severity, cruelty; obduracy, obstinacy; hardness, etc. see **HARD**
  - a. b. With *a* and *pl.* An instance of this quality; a hardship.
  - B. **Hard** *adj.* – II. Actively hard: pressing severely; severe. 11. a. Difficult to bear or endure; not easy to suffer, put up with, or consent to; pressing severely; severe, rigorous, oppressive, cruel.
  - C. **Endure** *v.* – II. To last; to suffer continuously. 2. *intr.* To last, continue in existence. Also, to persist, ‘hold out’ in any action, etc. 3. *trans.* To undergo, bear, sustain (continuous pain, opposition, hardship, or annoyance); properly, to undergo without succumbing or giving way.
  - D. Sometimes all we can do is *endure* temptations (trials).
  - E. The OT prophets, like NT apostles and preachers, were an example of suffering affliction patiently (**Jam 5:10**).
  - F. Those who endure are happy (blessed) (**Jam 5:11**).
  - G. They will receive a crown of righteousness in the next life (**Jam 1:12**).
7. “Heaven is not here, it’s There. If we were given all we wanted here, our hearts would settle for this world rather than the next. God is forever luring us up and away from this one, wooing us to Himself and His still invisible Kingdom where we will certainly find what we so keenly long for.” (Ibid, p. 106, quoting Elisabeth Elliot)
8. After quoting the words of the hymn, “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken,” which tells of a Christian enduring great hardship and yet counting himself blessed, Dobson had this to say.
9. “This message is a little different from ‘Something goooood is going to happen today,’ and it may even be unpalatable to a modern world. But it is biblically accurate, and you can build a rock-solid foundation of faith on it. With it, you can cope with whatever life throws at you, even when God makes absolutely no sense. It will hold you when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, because you need fear no evil. Life can never take you by surprise, again. Everything is committed to Him, whether you understand the circumstances or not. He becomes your possessor and your dispossessor. With this biblical understanding and a tough, well-fortified faith, the ‘awesome why’ loses its scary significance. A better question becomes ‘Why does it matter?’ It is not your responsibility to explain what God is doing with your life. He has not provided enough information to figure it out. Instead, you are asked to turn loose and let God be God. Therein lies the secret to the “peace that transcends understanding.” (Ibid, p. 172)

XVII. God views death differently than most of us do.

1. Death is terrifying to unconverted people, and to plenty of believers as well (**Heb 2:15**).
2. Many Christians view death as a terrible thing that is to be staved off at all costs.
3. God views it much differently (**Isa 57:1-2; Psa 116:15; Rev 14:13**).
4. If you are diagnosed with a terminal illness, remember **1Co 15:55** and **Php 1:21**.
5. Keep things in perspective.
  - A. Remember that life is temporary (**Psa 39:5; Psa 103:15-16; Jam 4:14**).
  - B. And then pray that God will help you to remember how frail and fleeting your life is so that you will make the most of the rest of it for Him (**Psa 39:4; Psa 90:12**).
  - C. We will be in heaven with Jesus soon, and all our troubles and trials will be over (**Rev 7:16-17; Rev 21:3-4**).

XVIII. Answering the “why?”

1. When a grieving person asks “why did God let this happen to me?”, fools often attempt to give reasons that God may have had for doing so.
2. The wrong answers
  - A. “God might have spared your loved one from more suffering in the future.”
  - B. “God might be trying your faith.”
  - C. “God might have allowed this to happen to you so that you can help others in a similar situation.”
  - D. These answers could be true, but they are not what a grieving, questioning person needs to hear.
  - E. Dr. Jim Conway said the following concerning what not to say to someone who is suffering intense grief or depression.
    - i. “When a person is going through this kind of terrible depression, some believers don’t know how to respond. They say, ‘I’ll pray for you,’ which may mean, ‘I’m no longer really listening to you.’ That can be a way of ending one’s responsibility to shoulder the load. In fact, when it comes to bearing one another’s burdens, the secular world sometimes does that job better than we do. They know the importance of letting resentment and anger spill out, whereas Christians may feel they have to hold it inside. The Scripture tells us, ‘The righteous cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.’ (Psalm 34:17).  
  
“It also bothered me later when people began offering simplistic explanations and flippant comments to ‘cheer me up.’ It was irritating when they quoted Romans 8:28, “all things work together for good,’ when they had not earned the right to brush off my pain. I wanted to say, ‘Tell me about it, Charlie. Tell me about it when your 16-year-old daughter’s leg is amputated. Come back when you’ve gone through something like this, and then we’ll talk again.’ Sometimes we get so used to the ‘cheer-up’ mode in Christianity that we become unreal.” (Ibid, pp 86-87 – Psa 34:17 quote changed to KJV)
  - F. “Those who would give glib answers to the awesome question of human suffering have probably not spent much time thinking about it.” (Ibid, p. 111)
3. The right answer

- A. The fact is that neither you, nor I, nor any man on this earth, knows why God allowed a calamity into someone's life.
  - i. To speculate is stupid because the answer cannot be known, and furthermore, any speculation or possibility you give will not make the grieving person feel any better, and will likely make him feel worse.
  - ii. This is especially true when a person is still in the grieving process.
  - iii. "No, it is better to acknowledge that we have been given too few facts to explain all the heartache in an imperfect, fallen world. That understanding will have to await the coming of the sovereign Lord who promises to set straight all accounts and end all injustice." (Ibid, p. 35)
- B. In my opinion, the best, and only true, answer is, "I don't know why this happened to you, and neither does anyone else. But God does. He allowed it to happen, and He has a good reason for it, though He has not revealed it to you. You have two choices: you can accept that God has allowed this into your life and trust that He did so for a good reason, or you can despair and become angry and bitter toward God and possibly lose your faith."

4. Final thoughts from James Dobson.

- A. "If you were sitting before me at this moment, you might be inclined to ask, 'Then how do you explain the tragedies and hardships that have come into my life? Why did God do this to me?' My reply, which you've read in previous pages, is not profound. But I know it is right! God usually does not choose to answer those questions in this life! That's what I've been trying to say. He will not parade His plans and purposes for our approval. We must never forget that He is God. As such He wants us to believe and trust in him despite the things we don't understand. It's that straightforward.

"Jehovah never did answer Job's intelligent inquiries, and He will not respond to all of yours. Every person who ever lived, I submit, has had to deal with seeming contradictions and enigmas. You will not be the exception. If that explanation is unsatisfactory and you can't accept it, then you are destined to go through life with a weak, ineffectual faith—or no faith at all." (Ibid, pp. 236-237)

- B. "My strongest advice is that each of us acknowledge *before* the crisis occurs, if possible, that our trust in Him must be independent of our understanding. There's nothing wrong with trying to understand, but we must not lean on our ability to comprehend! Sooner or later our intellect will pose questions we cannot possibly answer. At that point, we would be wise to remember His words, 'as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts' (Isaiah 55:9). And our reply should be, 'not my will, but thine, be done' (Luke 22:42).

"When you think about it, there is comfort in that approach to life's trials and tribulations. We are relieved from the responsibility of trying to figure them out. We haven't been given enough information to decipher the code. It is enough to acknowledge that God makes sense even when He doesn't make sense." (Ibid, pp. 237-238) (Luke 22:42 quote was changed to the KJV text)

- C. “But the source of bitterness must be admitted before it can be cleansed. There is no better way to get rid of it than to absolve the Lord of whatever we have harbored, and then ask His forgiveness for our lack of faith. It’s called reconciliation, and it is the only way you will ever be entirely free.” (Ibid, p. 238)
- D. “If we truly understood the majesty of this Lord and the depth of His love for us, we would certainly accept those times when He defies human logic and sensibilities. Indeed, that is what we *must* do. Expect confusing experiences to occur along the way. Welcome them as friends—as opportunities for your faith to grow. Hold fast to your faith, without which it is impossible to please Him. Never let yourself succumb to the “betrayal barrier,” which is Satan’s most effective tool against us. Instead, store away your questions for a lengthy conversation on the other side, and then press on toward the mark. Any other approach is foolhardy—because your arms are too short to box with God.” (Ibid, p. 69)