

Questions for reflection, application, and discussion

1. In John 9 tells us that Jesus and his disciples saw a man blind from birth, and his disciples asked him, “*rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind?*”
 - a. This question revealed an extremely hard-hearted and insensitive attitude toward this man who had been handicapped and debilitated by his blindness since birth. Did they think they were being cold and judgmental? What do you think may have contributed to this cold and hard-hearted attitude by the disciples when they saw this man?
 - b. What is your natural response (both in thought and in action) when you see someone with severe special needs? How can you be guilty of similar attitudes or actions as the disciples? How does God want us to respond to people with special needs?
2. The disciples asked Jesus about the cause of the man’s blindness, assuming that it was the result of someone’s sin. The only question was, was it the result of the man’s sin or his parents?
 - a. The idea that suffering was somehow earned and the result of sin was widespread in Jesus day. Is that belief still around in our day? If so, how does this belief make itself evident? Have you ever struggled with this belief?
 - b. If we believe suffering is the result of sin, it follows that blessings and prosperity are the result of righteous living – that God owes us blessings if we do the right things. How common is this belief today? How does this belief make itself evident, and have you ever struggled with this belief?
3. In his message Pastor Mike argued that the idea that a person’s suffering is the result of some personal sin is based on the false presumption that we live in a world defined by the perfection of Eden, where we should expect only good, and that God owes us only good.
 - a. If this is indeed a false presumption, why is it wrong?
 - b. Do you agree that our (and anyone’s) struggle with pain and suffering is based on this wrong assumption? Why or why not?
4. Pastor Mike said that if the world defined by the perfection of Eden and God owes us only good, then God intervenes in our world as a judge sending pain and judgement, but if the world is broken and fallen, and we are all sinners, then God’s intervention is always an intervention of grace.
 - a. What did he mean by that? Do you agree with this argument? Why or why not?
 - b. Theologians talk about God’s “general grace” – grace that he shows to everyone in the world, and his “special grace” – grace that he shows only to those who accept his gift of salvation through Jesus. How does God show his general grace toward all in the world?
5. In his message Pastor Mike said that the Bible teaches that suffering comes from sin in general, but not from sin in particular. What did he mean by making this distinction, and why is this distinction important?
6. The disciples wanted to focus on the cause of the man’s blindness, but Jesus focused on God’s purpose.
 - a. What does this passage, and other passages teach us about God’s purpose in pain and suffering? Why is this so important to know and remember?
 - b. What was the significance of Jesus making mud and covering the man’s eyes with mud?