

QUESTIONS FOR HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD

1. What do people think of when they hear the name Jesus?
2. What do these passages say about Jesus? John 1:1-18; 14:8-11; I Cor. 8:4-6; Heb. 1:1-4.

3. Read Mark 4:35-5:43 and answer the following questions.

4:35-41 = How could Jesus sleep during a storm that frightened seasoned fishermen?

Who was He trusting?

What did Jesus have control over in this scenario? Compare Psalm 89:9 and 107:23-32.

Why were the disciples terrified?

Have you ever been in a place of fear, a place where there was nothing you could do to save yourself? A place of grave danger where death or injury seemed imminent? Put yourself in the place of the disciples. They didn't know what to do except to wake Jesus and tell Him they were all going to die! Have you been in a situation you had no control over and felt helpless and afraid? What did you do? Who did you turn to?

4. 5:1-20 = What was the demon-possessed man's life like?

Did the demon know who Jesus was? How?

Compare Luke 8:30-31. Where did the demon not want to go?

Where did Jesus allow him/them to go?

What happened?

Why were the people afraid?

Why would they want Jesus to leave?

In contrast, what did the former demon-possessed man desire?

What did Jesus tell him?

Why would this be important?

What did Jesus have power over in this scenario?

Have you ever dealt with demonic forces or those entangled in the occult? Have you experienced demonic oppression or come in contact with someone who was oppressed or even demon possessed. What did you do? Can we handle these things in our own human frailty?

As believers what is our position in Christ in regard to demonic forces and what is our offensive weapon? Look up Eph. 6:10-20.

5. 5:21-43 = What had Jesus been asked to do?

Who detained Him? Why?

Read Lev. 15:25-31. How would the woman's bleeding problem have affected her life?

Why would Jesus care about who "touched" Him when so many people pressed Him?

Why would the woman tremble with fear?

What did Jesus tell her?

What actually healed her?

Have you fought the battle with a long-term illness, or do you know someone in such a condition? Do you/they suffer from depression? Do you/they feel ostracized at times and just long to feel normal? Like this woman, have you/they spent a small fortune on doctor's and medicines only to find they do little or nothing, maybe even make the situation worse with their side effects? Who or what is your/their faith placed in? Or have you lost all faith and just long for death/heaven?

Does Jesus ever allow us to be in a situation that we can't handle in His strength? (Cf. II Cor. 12:9-10)

How do you think Jairus felt when he learned his daughter was dead?

What did Jesus tell him?

What did the mourners think about Jesus?

Why would Jesus order the family not to tell what happened?

What did Jesus have power over in this scenario?

Have you struggled with the death of a loved one or a close brush with death yourself? Do you wonder why "good" people suffer and die and evil people seem immune to any problems? You're not alone!

What conclusions did these men come to? Job (Job 21), David (Ps 10) and Asaph (Ps. 73).

Read Romans 8:18-39. What do you learn about suffering from this passage?

How big is your God?

QUESTIONS FOR HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD

1. What do people think of when they hear the name Jesus?

A rebel leader
A myth
A wise man
A cute baby in a manger
A man
Good Teacher
Prophet
God of the healthy and wealthy
Blonde, blue-eyed, usually slightly effeminate, European
Someone who was woefully misled and died for a noble cause
Michael the archangel
Brother of Lucifer, etc.

Very few believe Jesus to be God in human flesh, and those who do believe He was God don't usually see Him as the Sovereign, Omnipotent Creator of Life.

2. What do these passages say about Jesus? John 1:1-18; 14:8-11; I Cor. 8:4-6; Heb. 1:1-4.

John 1:1-18 = He is God; He is the Creator; He is Life and Light; He was not recognized or received by His own creation even though He came to give them true life and make them children of God; as God, He became man and dwelt among us; the Only Begotten, eternal Son allowed us to see His glory, and from the fullness of His grace we have received one blessing after another; He brought grace and truth; no one has seen God, but Jesus has made Him known.

John 14:8-11 = if you've seen Him, you've seen the Father; He lives in the Father and the Father lives in Him; He speaks the Father's words; the miracles were proof of who He was.

I Cor. 8:6 = Father and Son are one and the same; all things came through Him and we live through Him.

Heb. 1:1-4 = He is the heir of all things since He created everything; radiance = light emanates from; Jesus is the Light of the Father, the exact representation of His being (Col. 2:9), sustaining all things by His powerful word; He finished the work of redemption and sat down at the right hand of the Father; He is superior to the angels - their Creator.

3. Read Mark 4:35-5:43 and answer the following questions.

Jesus spoke with authority, but His words wouldn't have meant much unless they were backed up by what He did. In this passage we see a few of the miracles which displayed His awesome power and authenticated what He said.

v. 37 = Furious squall = These storms were common on this lake, surrounded by high hills and narrow valleys that functioned as wind tunnels. A storm in the evening was especially dangerous with night approaching, and on this occasion the boisterous waves literally kept spilling over into the boat so it was nearly swamped.

v. 38 = These were fishermen. They knew the Sea of Galilee better than most and they were afraid for their lives. Yet here was their Master blissfully asleep on a sailor's leather rowing cushion, seemingly unaware of the danger. They wake Him, calling Him "Teacher," but they still don't realize what He has been teaching them about Himself, about Who He is.

v. 39 = I imagine Jesus getting up with a sigh. With just a word He literally orders the wind and waves to be quiet and still. "Be silent! Be muzzled and remain so!" This verb, "be muzzled," was somewhat of a technical term for dispossessing a demon of his power (cf. 1:25) and may suggest that Jesus recognized demonic powers behind the ferocious storm. But at His command the wind stopped and the lake became completely calm.

Have you ever seen a lake after a windy storm? It doesn't immediately become calm when the wind stops. The waves continue for quite a while afterward. So this was unusual.

4:35-41 = How could Jesus sleep during a storm that frightened seasoned fishermen?

He knew who He was (Jo. 8:23-29, 42, 58; 10:30; 14:8-11; 18:1-11, 36-37).

Who was He trusting?

He had entrusted Himself into the Father's hands (cf. Mt. 26:39, 42, 53-54; Lk. 23:46; Jo. 8:27-29; 12:27-28; 17:1-5; 18:1-11; 19:11; I Pet. 2:23)

What did Jesus have control over in this scenario? Compare Psalm 89:9 and 107:23-32.

The weather and the sea - the elements, the forces of nature. After all, He created them.

Ps.89:9 = "You rule over the surging sea; when it's waves mount up, You still them."

Ps. 107:23-32 = He did wonderful deeds in the deep. He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves, then stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed and grew calm.

Why were the disciples terrified?

v. 40 = Jesus seems a little hard on His disciples, but they just didn't get it. He rebukes them for being afraid or cowardly in a crisis. Despite Jesus' tutoring (v. 11, 34) it still had not dawned on them that God's authority and power were present in Jesus. This is what He meant by His second question, "Do you still have no faith?" (cf. 7:18; 8:17-21, 33; 9:19) In stilling the storm Jesus assumed the authority exercised only by God in the OT (Ps. 89:8-9; 104:5-9; 106:8-9; 107:23-32). Even the forces of nature obeyed Him. The disciples were getting just a small glimpse of Almighty God and they were terrified (a reverence that overtakes people in the presence of supernatural power - cf. 16:8). But they still didn't understand.

Have you ever been in a place of fear, a place where there was nothing you could do to save yourself? A place of grave danger where death or injury seemed imminent? Put yourself in the place of the disciples. They didn't know what to do except to wake Jesus and tell Him they were all going to die! Have you been in a situation you had no control of and felt helpless and afraid. What did you do? Who did you turn to?

(Ex. accident in Germany)

4. 5:1-20 = What was the demon-possessed man's life like?

v. 1-2 = The tombs were probably cave-like rooms cut into the rocks of nearby hills which served as tombs and sometimes as haunts for demented people.

v. 3-5 = The condition of this man was pathetic. He lived away from people in the tombs, among the dead. He was an outcast from society and he was uncontrollable, like a wild animal that cannot be tamed. And notice his unusual strength. A normal person, even an exceptionally strong one, can't tear chains apart or break irons. The demonic forces within him gave him so much strength that he was able to do this easily. No one was strong enough to subdue him. In his misery, he cried out and cut himself with stones (perhaps in a demonic form of worship). "Such behavior shows that demon possession is not mere sickness or insanity but a desperate satanic attempt to distort and destroy God's image in man" (Gen. 1:26-27; 9:4-6, murder; Col. 3:5-11, giving into the flesh). He was a tormented man. Most likely his greatest desire was to be set free.

Note: When we trust Christ as our Savior we become a new creature. This new self, is constantly being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator (II Cor 5:17; Col. 3:10). This is the last thing Satan wants to happen.

Did the demon know who Jesus was? How?

Yes. As soon as he saw him in the distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him, shouting at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!"

“The words, Most High God, were used in the OT, often by Gentiles, to refer to the superiority of the true God of Israel over all man-made gods (cf. Gen. 14:18-24, Melchizedek; Nu. 24:16, Balaam; Is. 14:14, Satan; Dan. 3:26; 4:2, Nebuchadnezzar). The demon even grovels/pays homage at Jesus’ feet (This was not true worship. That will come in the future - Phil. 2:9-11).

The demon knew Jesus as his Creator, as the Son of the Most High God. Jesus had control over the man/demons that humans didn’t have. He knew Jesus had the power to torture him/them or throw him/them into the Abyss. (Compare Lk. 8:28, 31 and Mt. 8:29 “before the appointed time.” II Pet. 2:4; Jude 5-7. Jesus, their Creator, was the ultimate threat to their power and activity. This climaxed at the cross - Col. 2:15)

v. 9-10 = Legion = “The Latin word ‘Legion,’ commonly known in Palestine, denoted a Roman army regiment of about 6,000 soldiers, though it probably also meant a very large number (cf. v. 15). To people under Roman domination the word no doubt suggested great strength and oppression.” The point was that “Many evil powers controlled this man and subjected him to intense oppression. They tormented him as one combined force under the leadership of one demon, their spokesman. This accounts for the alternating singular (‘my’) and plural (‘we’) pronouns. Repeatedly the leading demon begged Jesus earnestly not to send them out of the area, or region, into a lonely exile where they could not torment people.”

Compare Luke 8:30-31. Where did the demon not want to go?

To the Abyss.

The Abyss was thought of as a place of the dead, and also as a “watery place,” which made the outcome of this encounter all the more ironic and climactic. (It also helps to understand the fear of the disciples in the storm on the lake.)

Where did Jesus allow him/them to go?

Into a herd of about 2000 pigs.

What happened?

When the demons entered the pigs, the herd went crazy, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned.

v. 11-13 = Pigs = Jews considered pigs as unclean, but much of the population on the east side of the Sea of Galilee was Gentile. These people raised pigs for the meat markets in the 10 cities (or Decapolis, v. 20) of that region. When the demon begged that Jesus send them into the herd of pigs as their new hosts, Jesus let them. 2000 pigs rushed headlong down the steep bank and literally “one after another, they drowned themselves” in the sea (a watery place just like the Abyss was believed to be). I believe Jesus has quite a sense of humor! (Ex: Lemmings!)

Why were the people afraid?

This was something they couldn't understand. They were in the presence of the supernatural and they were afraid. Their livelihood was gone. Instead of asking Jesus to stay, and wanting to learn more about His power and who He was, they asked Him to leave.

Why would they want Jesus to leave?

They were probably afraid worse things would happen. Why was this crazy Jew killing off their pigs anyway?

v. 14-17 = The herdsmen were not willing to be responsible for this economic catastrophe. They ran back and reported what they'd seen. The people couldn't believe the report and many went out to see for themselves. No pigs! And there sat the former demoniac, dressed and in his right mind, rational and self-controlled. The transformation caused the people to be afraid, or in awe. But their main concern was the loss of profit. They wanted Jesus out of there! There is no record that Jesus ever returned to this predominantly Gentile area. How sad! These people gave up their one chance to listen to Jesus' teaching.

In contrast, what did the former demon-possessed man desire?

He begged to go with Jesus. Jesus had set him FREE! I'm sure he was so excited about what it happened to him that he wanted to stay with the man who had freed him from his chains/torment.

What did Jesus tell him?

Jesus told him to go to his family and people from whom he had been estranged and report to them all that the Lord had done for him, and how He had mercy on him. When the man did just that, the people who listened were amazed, astonished, overcome with fear/awe by the power of God.

Why would this be important?

The power of a changed life is unmistakable. Jesus knew this. He knew that the man would have a significant and widespread witness among his own people. They had seen him at his worst, and now he was a new, changed man. People who wouldn't listen to the average preacher, prophet or rabbi, would listen to this man because he was one of their own.

What did Jesus have power over in this scenario?

Jesus had power over demonic forces - their activities among men and their future judgment.

Have you ever dealt with demonic forces or those entangled in the occult? Have you experienced demonic oppression or come in contact with someone who was oppressed or even demon possessed. What did you do? Can we handle these things in our own human frailty?

No. Only the power of God working in and through us can deal with these demonic forces. We need to know God's Word and wield it in spiritual battle because it is the power of God (Mt. 4:1-11; II Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-20; Heb. 4:12). And remember to bathe everything in prayer.

Jesus is God Most High in human flesh, and the demons knew it. As God, He had only to speak a word, and the demons fled. In contrast, our only weapon against such forces is the Word of God and prayer. We are to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power, not our own. But if you don't really know your Lord and Savior how can you stand firm in His strength? If you don't believe He is able to deliver you, then you're powerless to resist the evil one. And if you don't know His Word, then you have no offensive weapon.

As believers what is our position in Christ in regard to demonic forces and what is our offensive weapon? Look up Eph. 6:10-20.

They have no power over us. We are to be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. We are to use the full armor that God has given us and take our stand against the devil's schemes. If we know our God, if we know His Word (our offensive weapon), if we know who we are in Christ and are constantly in communication with Him, then we will be able to stand our ground in this spiritual battle. Like a good soldier, we must always be alert (I Pet. 5:8-9).

Note: Remember, it is never wise to slander these demonic forces or speak abusively against them. Even the Archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 8-10) Even the archangel Michael wouldn't oppose Satan in his own strength. There is power in the occult or people wouldn't flock to it, or like this man, be controlled by it. (Ex: Campground - Bear Dance)

My son, Jeremiah wrote this a few years back: "Remember that the Bible is the sword of the Spirit, the only offensive weapon listed in our spiritual arsenal. Have you ever tried to use an unfamiliar weapon? We usually don't do very well. The best way to make yourself effective is to become as familiar with the weapon as possible through constant use and examination. The same is true with God's Word. If it spends all of its time collecting dust on the shelf, or securely wrapped in a fancy case, you can be sure you won't be as effective as if you use it daily. UNSHEATHE YOUR SWORDS!"

God's Word is also our best source for getting to know our Lord. Spend time in it daily. And Pray! Pray! Pray! And remember: as a child of God, God dwells in you by His Spirit. You don't need to be afraid. Demons are very aware when someone who belongs to God enters their space (Ex: New Age book store; man at gas station)

5. 5:21-43 = Here we have two miracles entwined in one narrative. Jesus not only controlled the elements and the demons, but He had power over illness and death.

What had Jesus been asked to do?

Jairus, one of the synagogue rulers, came with a heavy but hopeful heart to Jesus and plead with Him to come and heal his little daughter, his only child, who was close to death. I'm sure he was ecstatic when Jesus went with him and then deflated when Jesus stopped in the press of the crowd to ask who had touched Him.

Who detained Him? Why?

This woman has a special place in my heart. She had been ill (a bleeding disorder) for 12 years and hadn't found a cure even though she went to many doctors. (Notice that Dr. Luke says only that "no one could heal her" [Lk. 8:43], whereas Mark says, "She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse." Sound familiar?)

When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind Him in the crowd. In faith, she reached out in spite of her "uncleanness" and touched His cloak, thinking, "If I just touch His clothes I'll be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she knew she was freed from her suffering. How cool is that? This woman not only had faith but she acted on it! What good is faith if we don't (Ja. 2:14-26). Simple head knowledge gets us nowhere.

Read Lev. 15:19-31. How would the woman's bleeding problem have affected her life?

She would have been constantly "unclean", and anyone who touched her (v. 19), her bed, or something she sat on would be unclean. If her husband slept with her and her discharge touched him he would be unclean up to 7 days at a time (v. 24). So she couldn't really have sex with him either (if she had a husband, or if he stayed with her all those long years). She wouldn't have been allowed in the temple area or Women's Court because she would have "defiled God's dwelling place" and died in her uncleanness (v. 31). So she was basically a social outcast and unable to participate in worship with her family. She was financially ruined because she had spent everything on doctors and got nowhere. Can you imagine being very sick, and on top of it being excluded from normal social relations because people were afraid to touch you and

become “unclean?” She probably felt hopeless, severely depressed, friendless, and desperate.

What a picture of our spiritual condition before salvation! (Eph. 2; Is. 64:4-7)

Why would Jesus care about who "touched" Him when so many people pressed Him?

He knew that power had gone out from Him. Think of this woman's joy, then her sudden apprehension when Jesus, realizing that power had gone out from Him on account of who He was/is, turned and asked, “Who touched me?” And He wouldn't give up, even when the disciples thought His question absurd. Jesus, as God, had the unique ability to distinguish the touch of one who in faith expected deliverance from the inadvertent touch of those crowding against Him. (Another proof of His deity!)

Why would the woman tremble with fear?

The woman, the only one who understood Jesus' question, fell at His feet, trembling with fear (awe, reverence) because she knew who Jesus was and what had happened to her. She also knew she was "unclean" and had touched this Holy One. When He reacted, she knew she had been found out. Her response to her healing was to tell Him and everyone there everything that had happened. What a testimony to God's grace.

What did Jesus tell her?

"Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Jesus affectionately calls her “Daughter” (the only recorded use of this term).

What actually healed her?

Jesus attributes her healing to her faith, not a somehow magical result of touching His garment. There was nothing she could do herself. Her only hope was Him, and when she stepped forward and touched Him in faith, she was completely healed. “Faith, confident trust, derives its value not from the one who expresses it, but from the object in which it rests (cf. 10:52; 11:22).” It isn't the amount of faith we have but the Person in whom we place that faith that makes the difference. This woman's faith rested in Jesus. He was her only hope.

Jesus added, “Go in peace and be freed (lit., “be healthy”) from your suffering. Full of compassion, Jesus assures her that her healing was complete and permanent. Her health was back; her social and religious isolation was over. She was no longer a living “dead” person.

Again we have a beautiful picture of when we realize we are hopelessly lost in our sin and trust His grace by faith - then we are spiritually healed and given new life in Christ. Wow!

Have you fought the battle with a long-term illness, or do you know someone in such a condition? Do you/they suffer from depression? Do you/they feel ostracized at times and just long to feel normal? Like this woman, have you/they spent a small fortune on doctor's and medicines only to find they do little or nothing, maybe even make the situation worse with their side effects? Who or what is your/their faith placed in? Or have you lost all faith and just long for death/heaven?

Does Jesus ever allow us to be in a situation that we can't handle in His strength? (Cf. II Cor. 12:9-10)

No. By His grace He works in and through us. His grace is sufficient to meet our every need in every situation (even if it doesn't make sense to us). He will never fail us. His power is made perfect ("exhibits itself more perfectly") in our weakness ("strengthlessness") because people see that it isn't us but Him doing awesome things (cf. Col. 1:29). This should cause us to actually delight in our weaknesses because the power of Christ rests ("Greek, 'tabernacle upon,' cover my infirmity all over as with a tabernacle" - God's Presence) on us (cf. II Cor. 4:7; I Cor. 2:3-5; I Pet. 4:14). "The Lord has more need of our weakness than of our strength: our strength is often His rival; our weakness, His servant, drawing on His resources, and showing forth His glory. Man's extremity is God's opportunity; man's security is Satan's opportunity. God's way is not to take His children out of trial, but to give them strength to bear up against it (Ps. 88:7 John 17:15)."¹

(Ex: Me! God big enough to get me through!)

Now back to Jairus!

How do you think Jairus felt when he learned his daughter was dead?

The delay just described must have been a severe test of Jairus' faith. And his worst fears were confirmed when some men came and reported that his daughter was dead. They believed any hope was futile so why trouble the Teacher anymore? I'm sure his heart sank with grief, hopelessness, and despair. He was afraid, and probably more than a little angry with Jesus and this woman for taking away precious seconds that could have possibly saved his daughter.

What did Jesus tell him?

¹ BLB, Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, Commentary on II Cor. 12.

But Jesus refused to listen to the bearers of bad tidings, ignoring them. He exhorted Jairus to “Stop fearing (i.e., in unbelief); just keep on believing.” This was a big step of faith for the poor man, but he had just seen how faith in Jesus’ power had restored the sick woman; now he had to believe that Jesus could raise his dead daughter to life again. Oh the agony he must have felt!

What did the mourners think about Jesus?

Only three disciples were allowed to come as legal witnesses. At the house the elaborate ritual of Jewish mourning had already begun. The uproar included the activity of hired mourners, weeping and antiphonal wailing. When Jesus rebuked them and said the child was only asleep, the mourners laughed at Him, knowing she was dead. They must have thought He was crazy. I'm sure they thought differently when they later found the girl was alive. But for Jesus, her condition wasn't final or irrevocable. And notice: Jesus wasn't unsympathetic to the grief of the parents. He put out all the mourners. This must have caused quite a disturbance in itself as I'm sure some refused to budge at first. But once again, we see Jesus in control of a tough situation. When it was finally quiet, He took the parents and the three disciples and went in to the child.

Why would Jesus order the family not to tell what happened?

v. 41-43 = Jesus didn't use any magical formula. When He spoke it was a simple command: Live! The parents and three disciples were literally “out of their minds with great amazement” when the girl stood up and walked around. Again we see Jesus' compassion. He orders the girl be given some food, confirming her restoration to good health.

What a heart of compassion Jesus had for people. May we have the same heart.

I don't know how this miracle could have been kept quiet, especially when the girl was seen in public. But Jesus gave this order because He didn't want the miracle to attract people to Him for the wrong reasons. He was already being mobbed by the crowds. He was already having trouble getting any time alone with His disciples to teach them; He and they were exhausted. The crowds were huge and pressed Him constantly, wanting to see more miracles and possibly make Him King by force (John 6:14-15). This wasn't in God's plan (3:7-12, 20-21; 4:1, 35-38; 5:24, 31; 6:30-34, 53-56; 7:24; 7:31-37; 8:1-3, 22-26; 9:25; etc.). Jesus never preformed miracles to grandstand or draw a crowd. The miracles were to confirm Who He was and to minister to the hearts of those who believed.

What did Jesus have power over in this scenario?

As God, Jesus had/has power and authority over sickness and health, life and death (1 Cor. 15; John 5:16-30).

Have you struggled with the death of a loved one or a close brush with death yourself? Do you wonder why “good” people suffer and die and evil people seem immune to any problems? You’re not alone!

When my Dad was killed in a logging accident just after my 17th birthday I asked a lot of these questions. Is 26:3-4 and Is. 57:1-2 have helped me some over the years. But I still ask, "Why some righteous and not others?" (Cf. Ps. 116:15; I Ki. 14:12-13; Rev. 14:13). Our days are numbered before we are born (Ps. 139:16), so if it's our time, it's our time, otherwise we're invincible.

What conclusions did these men come to? Job (Job 21), David (Ps 10) and Asaph (Ps. 73).

Job = The wicked seem to have everything go well for them, but their prosperity is not in their own hands, and as often as not, they are struck by calamity too. One man lives in ease, another in bitter poverty, yet they both die and have to face their Judge. No one understands why God allows this; He is transcendent. But it's a bitter pill to swallow when the righteous suffer while the unrighteousness prosper.

David = The wicked do as they please and believe they are not accountable to God, that He doesn't see or care what they do. But God does see and hears the cry of the afflicted. He encourages them and defends the fatherless and the oppressed. Some day there will be an accounting. In the meantime it just seems like God stands off and let's things happen without intervening. (If only we could see the big picture! But then we wouldn't have to live by faith.)

Asaph = He envied the carefree prosperity of the wicked and figured he had kept himself pure for nothing since he was suffering and they had no struggles at all. When he tried to understand it all it was oppressive to him, until he entered God's sanctuary and understood their final destiny. Their future is uncertain, a slippery slope. They may seem powerful to us, but to God they are just a vapor, here one moment and gone the next. But believers have a certain future with Jesus in heaven. This old earth is not our permanent home, and we need nothing besides our wonderful Lord. God will destroy the wicked, but He is a refuge for those who trust in Him. (If this is the only pleasure the wicked receive before they are sent to Hell, then I shouldn't begrudge them a little good when I have so much more in store for me.)

Read Romans 8:18-39. What do you learn about suffering from this passage?

Our present sufferings aren't even worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us, the glorious freedom of the children of God. Meanwhile, we need to remember that we live in a fallen and cursed world, so be patient. Just as the world groans, longing for our final redemption, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groans that cannot be uttered in accordance with God's will. And somehow through it all God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose, to mold them into the image of His Son. If God is for us, then who can be against us? If He didn't spare

His own Son to gain salvation for us, then He won't give up on us now. He declared us righteous, so no one can condemn us, and Jesus is interceding for us. No one or nothing can separate us from His amazing love. We are super-conquerors through Him who loves us! Hallelujah! So hang in there and stand firm in the knowledge of His love and grace.

How big is your God?

Big enough to fill the universe, yet loving enough to stoop down to lift me up! I love You, Lord!

How Big is Your God? No one completely understands why God allows “bad” things to happen. There could be many reasons. But generally speaking, we live in a fallen, cursed world where bad things happen on a regular basis - disasters, demon possession, illness, death, etc (Ro. 8:18-39). God doesn't always choose to save us out of these situations, but He is in control. And He does look on us with compassion. I don't know how people survive without knowing God and trusting in Him.

God is transcendent, meaning He is high above our simple human comprehension. He sees the whole scenario, how each situation or piece of the puzzle fits into the whole. He's not a big ogre up there getting a kick out of our pain. And He's not indifferent as some would tell you. He knows us intimately and cares about every person (Ps. 139). Sometimes when we're in a tough situation and can't see our way out, it's hard to remember that our Lord is there guiding and loving us each step of the way. It's hard to remember that He's in control, that He has a purpose for our trials, our pain, our grief. Sometimes all we can do is cry out “Why?” Sometimes God will allow us to look back and see some of the reasons for our struggles, our pain and our grief, but just as often we never know. Even though we may not understand why we face a certain problem, we can know how to deal with the situation and respond in a way that pleases the Lord.

A few years ago Tony and I went through really rough year. Our son was in Iraq with the Marines, a 12 year old boy molested a three year old girl on the church grounds, a woman chose to lie about Tony instead of admitting she was wrong, I was having what we thought to be heart problems, and the list goes on. We were worn out emotionally and physically, but we knew we had to trust God even when we felt like giving up. One of our men gave me a little book mark that still means a lot to me. It says:

Dealing With Difficult Situations: by Andrew Murray

1. Realize that God brought me here. It is by His will I am in this place; in that fact I will rest.
2. Realize that He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child.
3. Realize that He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.
4. In His good time He can bring me out again--how and when--He knows.
So, I am here...

- by God's appointment
- in His keeping
- under His training
- for His time

Romans 8:28 = "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

"One of the marks of spiritual maturity is the quiet confidence that God is in control without the need to understand why He does what He does."

The bookmark is a good reminder to me that my loving God is in control and I need to rest in Him no matter what the circumstances. He is my Rock. He is bigger than my problems, my pain, my grief. But He is also compassionate and full of mercy; He understands our weakness, our emotions (Heb. 4:14-16) and wants us to pour out our hearts to Him (Ps. 62). He is strong, but He is also loving! Rest in Him. My prayer is that your faith in our good and sovereign God will stand firm even when your world seems to be falling apart. And that eventually you'll be able to thank God for those very trials.

A good resource on why God allows suffering is: Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering? It can be found at <www.rbc.org> in the Discovery Series.