

Week Six - Give An Answer: What Good Can God Bring Out of Problems?

Readings: Genesis 40:1-23

Series based on 1 Peter 3:15 NIV “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...”

What is Apologetics?

Apologetics is worshipping God with our minds as we defend the Christian faith with logic and evidence that may remove barriers to belief.

From Joshua Johnson: What Apologetics IS and is NOT

Apologetics IS: Worshipping God with our minds, defends the Christian faith with logic and evidence, removes barriers to belief (some call pre-evangelism), ...the science and art of Christian persuasion, any reason why a person believes in Jesus, equips believers to engage hard questions they will face in life, ...connecting faith with science, history, philosophy without sacrificing one or the other, bridges faith with experience, gives believers and unbelievers space to ask questions, investigate holistic discipleship.

Apologetics is NOT: saying “I’m sorry,” ...arguing or bullying people into faith, ...possessing absolute certainty in all theological beliefs, ...debating with people on a stage, ...eliminating the mysterious or the spiritual, ...about winning, ignoring the heart, the spirit, or experiences, ...a purely mental exercise, providing a bubble that prevents questions of the Christian faith, ...cookie cutter explanations.

Five Reasons We Need to be Equipped for Apologetics (from Joshua Johnson);

1. It is biblical, historical, and Jesus and John Wesley used it.
2. It is part of the holiness journey.
3. It is a multi-purpose tool.
4. It demands integrity. [Questions are not accusations; they are opportunities to respond with gentleness and respect. Both require integrity.]
5. It engages the next generation and changing world.

How does Jesus teach us to go about explaining the reasons for what we believe?

Matthew 10:16 – NASB 16 “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so [a]be shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves.”

The Message: 16 “Stay alert. This is hazardous work I’m assigning you. You’re going to be like sheep running through a wolf pack, so don’t call attention to yourselves. Be as shrewd as a snake, inoffensive as a dove.”

Families have problems. What issues existed in Israel's family?

Joseph was the first born of Israel's favorite wife, Rachel. She died, which made the connection to Joseph and Benjamin, Rachel's youngest son, more precious. Israel was not subtle about favoring Joseph as Rachel's first son and that caused animosity and jealousy among his 10 older brothers. Another thing that bonded Israel to Joseph uniquely was the fact they were dreamers. We read about Israel hearing from God in a dream when he's on the run from his brother. When Joseph tells him and his brothers about the dream he had, that they would all one-day bow down to him, Joseph gets pretty puffed up thinking "I'm going to be a big man one day!" His father doesn't necessarily discount the dream, but he is very concerned about the relationship with his older brothers. He sends Joseph to check on his brothers maybe hoping a little alone time with them will ultimately benefit Joseph and strengthen their brotherly bonds and familial situation. That's exactly what happened but not the way Israel had planned.

Surely, you aren't suggesting all challenges and problems are blessings from God?

Certainly not! I've had my share of problems that were not a blessing. Injustices, injuries, and traumas are not God's plan for you! But we do live in a fallen world. Jesus said, "In this world you will have trouble." It was not a flip comment. The intention someone had in the heat of the moment that was pure evil, was just that. Evil is not of God. Joseph shares realized truth with his brothers in Genesis 50:20. His brothers have been beating themselves up for years, mortified by their behavior toward Joseph, questioning why they did it. It didn't matter anymore to Joseph because of all God had done with the circumstances. Every one of them was changed. It was tough, but they were changed. Joseph says, "20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." We struggle with "if's" and "but's". God invites us to stop that. What peace is found in letting that go and giving God the glory when anything good can come out of a tragedy.

Today's takeaway: We were created by a loving God on purpose for a purpose. Even when others try to stop us, or when tragedy or pain strikes, God will find a way to get to us and lead us to the next step on the path.

Meditations for the Week:

1. Old Testament passages are as relevant as any for our lives today. For instance, what does The Message paraphrase of Isaiah 48:17 speak to you now? "I am God, your God, who teaches you how to live right and well. I show you what to do, where to go." What more do we need to hear to understand Whose leading to seek in times of trouble?
2. Does Jesus understand our pain when we've been wronged, harmed, or hurt? Does he know it's not our fault? Does he feel our pain? Hebrews 4:15 "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." He was also wrongly accused, wrongly punished, and wrongly killed. Yet, Jesus has overcome the world! Praise God! AMEN.

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