

S T U D Y G U I D E

Dealing with Difficult Problems

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

Renew your Mind.

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Introduction

Are you seeking God's will for your life? Are you perhaps questioning God as a result of your suffering or the suffering of a friend? Problems lead to great stress in our lives. Some seem totally overwhelming. This series gives insight into how some of the problems you face as a Christian can be handled. You also learn how to aid a friend or loved one who is facing problems, enduring suffering, or grieving. Listed below are the titles of each lecture.

1. Knowing the Will of God
2. Understanding Suffering
3. How to Deal with Guilt
4. Forgiveness
5. How to Deal with Anxiety
6. How to Deal with Anger

The following outlines are intended to be used as learning aids. Because they are to accompany the actual audio/video presentation, they do not attempt to duplicate what is said point by point. Rather, the outline is designed to aid the student in keeping track of Dr. Sproul's development of his topic and by reviewing in summary form what he has presented.

Knowing the Will of God

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the variety of ways the Bible uses the concept of the will of God.
2. To steer people into a proper emphasis and accent on obeying the will of God.
3. To relieve people's anxiety over an indiscriminate preoccupation with unanswerable questions.

OUTLINE

- I. There are several meanings to the general phrase *the will of God*.
 - A. The English word *will* translates two different Greek words.
 - B. To clarify the possible meaning of *will*, several distinctions are necessary.
 1. The "revealed will of God" is that which God has made clear.
 2. The "hidden or secret will of God" is that which God has chosen not to reveal to us.
 3. The "active will of God" refers to His bringing about certain events under His sovereignty.
 4. The "passive will of God" describes cases in which He allows some things to take place.
 5. The "decretive will of God" pertains to God's sovereign decree, which is unchangeable.
 6. The "preceptive will of God" pertains to the laws that God has ordained for men, but that we choose whether or not to follow.
 7. The "will of disposition" expresses God's attitudes, desires, and delights.
 - C. To illustrate the importance of using the correct interpretation for a word, consider the sentence "God is not *willing* that any should perish."
 1. "Willing" used in this way should be translated as "desiring."
 2. Any other translation directly contradicts other parts of Scripture.
- II. It is wrong when Christians seek to discern God's hidden will. Decisions should be based on what would be most pleasing to God.

III. The “preceptive will of God” should be our focus. Our obedience to His commandments are of primary importance.

- A. We are to live by biblical principles.
- B. It is also appropriate and legitimate to seek God’s leading for our lives, carefully moving according to His precepts.
- C. The more we make it a priority to know God’s precepts, desires, and Word, the more we will be able to make decisions that are pleasing to Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Can you think of any incidents in your life in which biblical principles clearly revealed what you should do in a specific situation? Next, think of those current decisions or circumstances for which you are currently seeking God’s will, and consider which biblical principles clearly address those situations.
2. When you face a choice between “two rival goods,” what are three specific steps you should take before making the decision? Having done these, if you still cannot determine which would be the better choice, what should you do?

2

Understanding Suffering

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To equip Christians with a proper perspective on how suffering fits into the Christian life.
2. To help people avoid certain approaches to suffering.
3. To help people understand appropriate responses to various kinds of suffering.

OUTLINE

- I. Everyone must deal with suffering.
 - A. We enter the world in suffering.
 - B. The Christian faith speaks directly to this issue.
- II. Secular views of suffering fall into four categories.
 - A. The Docetic view of suffering denies its reality. An example of this would be Christian Scientists, who claim that suffering is only in the mind.
 - B. The Stoic view of suffering sees man as a victim of impersonal forces. His response is to cultivate imperturbability.
 - C. The Hedonistic view of suffering tries to counteract pain by maximizing pleasure. An example would be the man who tries to drown his sorrows in “wine, women, and song.”
 - D. The Existential view of suffering sees life as meaningless, but faces it with courage anyway. An example would be the man who sees suicide as a victory over death.
- III. The biblical view of suffering is on a collision course with these widespread cultural approaches.
 - A. The Christian should have a different response.
 1. Grief is a legitimate emotion for a Christian, unlike the stoic who suppresses it.
 2. We are not to praise God for the suffering but to praise Him in the midst of suffering.

- B. Christ is the model of a godly response to suffering.
- C. The relationship of sin to suffering is clear in Scripture. Although suffering is a result of sin, there is not a direct one-to-one correspondence between the amount of one's sin and suffering.
- D. We must trust and obey God with our lives in the midst of pain.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In relation to Job's suffering, what can we say about his sin? What can we say about God's righteousness?
2. What are some of the consequences of suffering in a Christian's life? In other words, how does God use suffering for His own purposes? (See 1 Peter 5:10; 2 Cor. 1:3-5.)
3. Christ commands us to be of good cheer. The writer of Ecclesiastes, however, says it is better to mourn (7:2-4). How do you reconcile these sayings? How do they relate to suffering?
4. How do we distinguish between grief and self-pity? How do we have only grief and avoid self-pity and bitterness?

How to Deal with Guilt

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To clarify the difference between guilt and guilt feelings.
2. To help understand the role of conscience.
3. To give practical, concrete steps for the healing of guilt.

OUTLINE

- I. There are two types of guilt that affect people.
 - A. “Objective guilt” has to do with the reality of being in the wrong regardless of guilt feelings.
 - B. “Guilt feelings” describes the inward response to our perception of guilt.
- II. Society’s morals and ethics are constantly changing.
 - A. Christians are called to live by God’s standards regardless of the culture’s view.
 - B. Conscience is very susceptible to changing values. There are three factors relating to conscience.
 1. The “desensitizing of conscience” refers to justifying sin through rationalization.
 2. A “hypersensitive conscience” produces guilt based on what one has been taught is wrong even if there is no basis in Scripture for that teaching.
 3. Satan influences our consciences to accuse us.
 - C. The Word of God must be our guide for what is right and wrong, not our feelings.
- III. Dealing with guilt consists of specific steps.
 - A. We must acknowledge the reality of guilt.
 - B. We must repent.
 - C. We must accept God’s promise of forgiveness.
 - D. Through this process, we are cleansed.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Suggest ways that unresolved guilt might be manifested if it isn't acknowledged (for example, poor self-esteem).
2. What are some reasons we might continue to feel guilty even after we have repented and been forgiven by God?
3. Read Psalm 51 and discuss David's prayer after he had sinned with Bathsheba. How did he deal with his guilt?

Forgiveness

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the difference between real forgiveness and feelings of forgiveness.
2. To give practical guidelines for our obligation to forgive each other.
3. To help understand the relationship between repentance and forgiveness.

OUTLINE

- I. There is much confusion concerning forgiveness.
 - A. Arrogance prevents us from taking God at His word.
 - B. Repeatedly asking God's forgiveness for the same sin challenges His very character.
 - C. It is difficult for us to accept forgiveness as a free gift.
 1. We want to make up for sin through our own merit.
 2. Because of God's holiness, it is foolish to think we could make up for any sin by our efforts. We must depend on God's grace alone.
- II. Feelings are subjective; forgiveness is objective.
 - A. God's Word makes forgiveness indisputable when we repent.
 - B. Our feelings cannot negate God's authority.
 - C. We can be assured of God's forgiveness if we abide by His requirements.
 - D. If God has forgiven us, we must not allow pride to keep us from accepting His grace and forgiving ourselves.
- III. What is the meaning of forgiveness and our obligation toward others?
 - A. Forgiveness means never holding that particular sin against the person who committed it again.
 - B. We are obligated to forgive someone who repents; if they do not repent, we do not have to forgive them.
 - C. In marriage, we are required to forgive an adulterous mate who asks for our forgiveness; however, in adultery, forgiving them does not mean divorce is out of the question.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Consider the implications of 1 John 1:9. Look up *faithful* and *righteous* in a dictionary and discuss how they assure our forgiveness in this verse.
2. Explain why it is wrong to want to “pay your own way” or earn forgiveness.
3. In what other areas of our walk with God do we sometimes trust our feelings instead of God’s Word?

How to Deal with Anxiety

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the causes of anxiety.
2. To distinguish between various kinds of anxiety.
3. To learn practical ways for coping with anxiety.

OUTLINE

- I. Jesus often said, “Fear not” and “Be anxious for nothing.”
 - A. He clearly knew that people suffer from anxiety.
 - B. “Anxiety attack” is a modern phrase used to describe the panic of extreme anxiety.
- II. Anxiety can be caused by a number of factors.
 - A. Excessive change produces anxiety through a lack of permanence.
 - B. Uncertainty about the future can also cause anxiety.
- III. Three types of anxiety are described.
 - A. “Objective specific anxiety” is produced by something that is perceived as a threat. It could be a phobia.
 - B. “Neurotic anxiety” is usually repressed and nonspecific. Some probing is necessary to determine its cause.
 - C. “Restlessness” is rooted in estrangement from God. We were created to be in fellowship with God. Without this, we cannot experience a sound mental outlook.
- IV. There are practical ways to deal with anxiety:
 - A. Avoid “wallowing fellowship,” which means comparing our problems with others.
 - B. Avoid overindulging in introspection.
 - C. Avoid a negative (for example, I can’t) attitude.
 - D. Put your focus on God. Give your burdens to Him because only through His power can we triumph over anxiety.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Scripture tells us that we are to demonstrate concern, which may entail some anxiety. At what point would this anxiety become sinful?
2. Differentiate between sharing our burdens with other believers and “wallowing fellowship.”
3. Consider what 1 Peter 5:7 and Philippians 4:6 have to say concerning this issue.

6

How to Deal with Anger

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. To provide instruction on the biblical concept of anger.
2. To understand the causes of anger.
3. To recognize the different types of anger.
4. To provide practical suggestions on different ways to control the destructive elements of anger.

OUTLINE

- I. The Bible says “Be angry and do not sin” (Eph. 4:26).
 - A. Anger in and of itself is not evil.
 - B. Anger can produce responses such as bitterness, vengefulness, and violence, all of which are sinful.
 - C. We are to practice self-control or temperance.
- II. There are three common causes of anger.
 - A. Disappointment
 - B. Frustration
 - C. Pain or hurt
- III. Two common types of anger are “situational anger” and “misdirected anger.”
 - A. Situational anger is expressed toward an innocent person over circumstances beyond your control.
 - B. Misdirected anger is expressed toward someone or something else when we are really angry at ourselves.
- IV. There are several ways we should deal with anger.
 - A. We should not be short-tempered.
 - B. We should not suppress anger altogether.

- C. We should try to understand the reason behind the anger.
 - D. We are not to provoke one another to anger.
 - E. We are not to let the sun go down on our wrath.
- V. The Bible says, “Be angry, but . . .”
- A. Be angry at what angers God.
 - B. Never victimize others over your lack of self-control.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Depression has been described as anger directed inward. How should we best deal with it?
2. Make a list of those people toward whom you feel angry and why. What would God expect of you in dealing with those situations?
3. Think of your most recent episode of anger. What caused your anger? Why did you react the way you did? Could you have reacted in a more godly way? How?

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