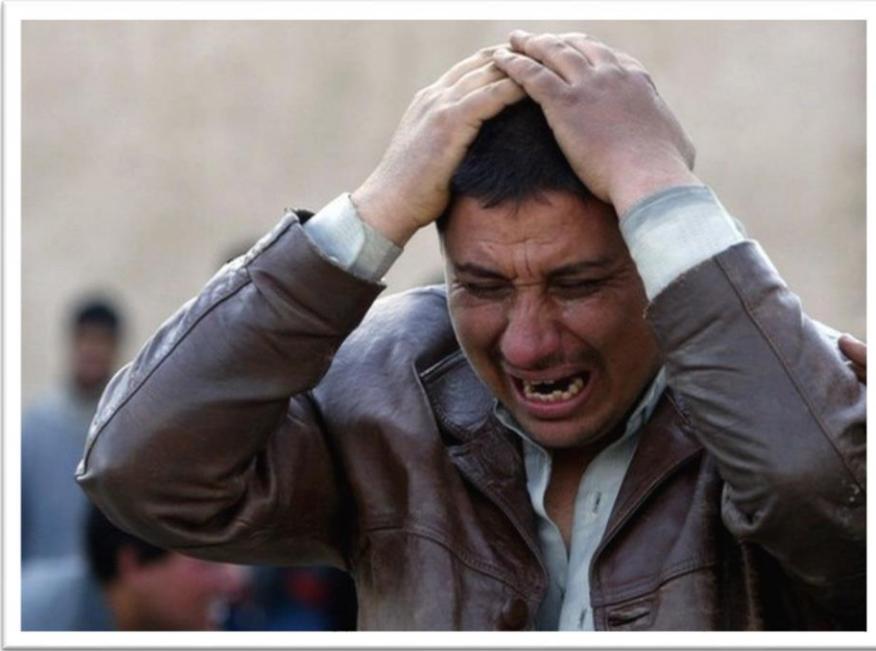


IS GOD PUNISHING ME?



This is a common question when people suffer. Here are two true stories. The first is of an older friend of mine who had been a miserable alcoholic in his early life, but 30 years prior had given his life to Jesus and had been sober ever since. He had become a remarkably loving man and served God in many ways. His adult daughter though had become a drug addict and was the source of much pain in the family. “God is paying me back for what I did all those years ago,” he voiced to me one day.

The second story is that of a woman who came to visit me in my church many years ago. I had never met her before. She shared her sad story with me. “I was the cause of my husband leaving his first wife. We worked together, and I seduced him into an affair. He got a divorce and we got married. Now we both hate each other. On top of that, we both have serious illnesses. Could God be punishing me for what I did?”

To this lady I said, “Well, I’m not God, but yes, I believe there is a strong possibility you are being punished – but in order that you might turn to God and be saved. What you need to do is apologize to the man’s first wife, ask her forgiveness, and ask God’s forgiveness. Then you will find your life restored.” “Well, I could never do that,” she said, and got up and left. I never heard from her again.

To my friend in the first story I said emphatically, “God is NOT paying you back.” He looked a little surprised at the force in my voice. I went on, “Yes, there are consequences to all choices we make, but YOUR “payback” fell on Jesus Christ. He took upon himself whatever payback you had coming – and now that you are repentant and walking with Jesus, you are free and clear of God’s judgment against those sins. You really need to be clear about that.” He seemed relieved.

Yes, when we who belong to Jesus insist on going our own way, God will spank us. But it is to teach us a lesson – it serves as discipline – in order that we be RESTORED. “Many times he delivered them, but they were rebellious in their purposes and were brought low through their iniquity. Nevertheless, he looked upon their distress, when he heard their cry” (Psalm 106:43-

44). God in his mercy mitigates his punishment. He apparently cannot stand to see his own people suffer for too long – even when it is their own fault. For which I am very grateful!