

Note: The sermon below will be delivered by the Rev. Caleb Kim on Sunday, April 13, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Fenelon Falls and via Zoom.

Title: Why Is Life in This World So Hard? (The Invisible War Series Part 3)

...Before we jump into today's lessons, I want us to think about the sermon title itself: "Why is life so hard in this world?" In other words, "Why is there suffering in the world?" This is one of the most important questions people have asked for centuries. This morning, we'll explore the reasons for our suffering, the results of it, and the right responses we should have in our walk with God.

Let me begin by addressing the causes or reasons why life is so difficult on this planet. According to the Bible, rebellion against God has broken everything—literally everything in life. Adam and Eve, our spiritual ancestors, lived in paradise, the Garden of Eden. At that time, they had no problems—no suffering, no troubles, no discouragement. Everything was perfect. But one day, Adam and Eve chose to do what they desired to do, even though they knew it was the one thing God had forbidden. Not only did Adam and Eve make that choice, but you and I have made it as well. Whether we admit it or not, we have all gone our own way. In the book of Isaiah, the prophet describes this: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way" (Isaiah 53:6). As far as I know, without the protection and guidance of a shepherd, sheep are weak and defenseless. Sometimes they get lost and wander alone if they do not follow their shepherd. Like sheep, from time to time, we feel vulnerable, being lost to the shepherd, and falling into temptation in life. Like sheep, we have wandered from the correct path, which is God's direction, to follow our own ways. That means we have all done wrong things, and the Bible calls that rebellion.

In the Bible, there are three kinds of rebellion against God, where we do our own thing rather than following Him. The first is called sin. The word "sin" in Hebrews means "missing the mark" or "target." In other words, sin is failing to live up to "God's standard of righteousness." Anytime we fail to meet God's expectation, we sin because biblically, sin is not fulfilling God's perfect plan for us.

The second term for rebellion is transgression. The word "transgression" in Hebrews means "breaking a law or command." It implies "going too far," while sin indicates "falling short." Transgression is "going past the boundaries" set by God or others. For instance, if we're driving on a highway with a speed limit of 100 kilometers per hour and we go 130, that is a transgression from a biblical point of view.

The third word for rebellion against God is iniquity. The word "iniquity" in Hebrews means "hurting intentionally." In other words, it is an intentional evil desire to damage something or someone. If we're violated or offended by someone's wrongdoing, we may want to harm them back with immoral acts. That is called iniquity—a wicked practice that is "offensive to both society and, especially, to God."

Let's look at these three rebellions through the lens of a football game... Each of these football rules helps explain one of the three types of rebellion: sin, transgression, iniquity. The sad truth is that all of us, in different ways, we have rebelled against God in all three of these areas. According to God's Word, all of us break His laws and commands, and this rebellion has broken everything in the world. That is the reason why life is so hard in this world. In a broad and spiritual sense, sin has broken everything, and sin is the reason we suffer in life.

Now, let's explore the results of our wrongdoing, Sin has ruined everything. It has destroyed all that God intended for us. In today's scriptures, we can find three consequences of sin in our lives. This morning, I want us to look at these costs of sin in this world and apply these lessons to our faith journeys.

Firstly, sin has damaged the world. The Apostle Paul highlights this consequence in the following scripture: "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time" (Romans 8:22).

Did you notice that, just as we, as human beings, hope for salvation, all of God's creation longs to be liberated from destruction? When God created everything in heaven and on earth, He expressed His satisfaction over His creation by saying, "It was good" (Genesis 1). God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to "work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). We must remember that God entrusted us as stewards to care for the world and protect our planet. However, because sin entered the world, it has been damaged and destroyed. The environment has been marred by our irresponsibility in caring for God's garden. It is no longer perfect. As John Milton, the famous English poet and historian, wrote in his poem "Paradise Lost," we are no longer living in Eden. We now live in a broken, sin-darkened world.

As a result of our careless attitude and behaviour toward God's creation, and from a biblical perspective on climate change, we see natural disasters and deformities, such as hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, droughts, and floods. Through our selfish and greedy pursuits in the name of development, we fail to fulfill our responsibility to care for God's beautiful world and its amazing environment. Instead, due to our rebellion against God, we are abusing and neglecting the gifts He has given us. That is why God's creation is suffering and waiting to be saved, just as we are. The consequence of the first human's sin is the loss of paradise and a separation from the haven God had given us.

Secondly, sin has damaged our physical existence. Not only did God curse the ground of His Eden due to Adam and Eve's disobedience, but He also prevented them from taking from "the tree of life" and living forever (Genesis 3:23). Before the fall, Adam and Eve were meant to live eternally by eating from the tree of life. However, after they sinned, God pronounced death as His judgment upon them, the consequence of sin (Romans 5:12). They had disobeyed God by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17), and that is why physical decay and death entered the world after human rebellion against God. As human beings, we are now required to work hard for our food until we return to the ground, since we were made from it—"for dust we are, and to dust we will return" (Genesis 3:19). Before sin, there were no death, no decay, and the world was perfect—paradise.

King Solomon, known as the wisest person of his time, echoed this truth in Ecclesiastes: "Since no one knows the future, who can tell someone else what is to come? As no one has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the time of their death" (Ecclesiastes 8:7-8). We know when we are born, but none of us know when we will die, when we will be called to be with the Lord. Even though death is inevitable, we cannot prevent it. We are all going to die one day. While this may seem bleak, in a sense, it is good news because we don't want to live forever on an imperfect planet. Although we try to postpone aging, we cannot stop the physical decay. The Bible says,

“...outwardly we are wasting away” (2 Corinthians 4:16)—in other words, our physical bodies become older and weaker with time.

I recently came across a humorous article about the signs of getting older... King Solomon portrays the nature of aging in Ecclesiastes 12:1-8... Once again, we see that we are all aging, and sin has broken everything, including our physical bodies. The Bible says, “Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). In other words, “everyone dies because all of us are related to Adam, the first man” (1 Corinthians 15:22, New Living Translation). Furthermore, the Bible says, “Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). According to God’s Word, after this natural death, we will all face God’s judgment. Sin has not only resulted in our separation from God through death and decay, but it has also made us accountable for the choices and actions we make during our earthly lives.

Thirdly, sin has damaged our nonphysical existence as well. There is spiritual discontent and disappointment. King Solomon, once again, expresses our dissatisfaction with the following scripture: “When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Did you notice the repeated phrase in Solomon’s writing? “Everything is meaningless.” After Solomon invested his time and effort trying to find a satisfactory life—allowing himself to explore every possible avenue—he confessed that everything was meaningless under the sun. During his faith journey, Solomon pursued various forms of power, possessions, and pleasure, including “wine, laughter, and great projects, but in the end, he was left feeling empty and unsatisfactory.

According to the Bible, as living creatures, we have two distinct areas that need to be fulfilled in life—two separate sources of satisfaction. One is for our physical well-being, and the other is for our spiritual well-being. Both of these aspects can lead us to experience hunger and thirst in our lives—physical hunger and thirst, as well as spiritual hunger and thirst. We who were formed from the soil need something to satisfy our physical needs. We who were breathed into by God need something to meet our spiritual needs. That is why St. Augustine prayed: “You have created us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Every human being has a “God shaped hole” that only God can fill, and we are never truly satisfied until our hearts rest in Him. To be filled with divine satisfaction, we need to hunger and thirst for God’s righteousness in our hearts.

Sadly, as human beings, we have an amazing ability to overestimate how happy we will be with worldly pleasure, possessions, and power. We often misjudge how fulfilling these things will be. For example, we think, “If I could just get this one thing, I will be happy.” Then we get it, and we are happy for a while, but soon the joy fades. The reason is simple: it is the same old thing, just with a new name. In a spiritual sense, it is unfair to expect someone or something to meet all our needs. They cannot, and God never meant it that way. We have needs in our lives that only God can meet.

Another sad truth is, if we are honest, we are not only disappointed with the things the world offers, but also with ourselves. Do you know why? Because we have looked for God—and our spiritual satisfaction—in all the wrong places... Many people, including myself, despite having great resources, often feel the desire for just a little more to reach full happiness. But this leads to even greater discontent and discouragement. We think, “I thought by this point in life, I’d be a lot more financially secure, emotionally happy, and socially popular.” Yet, we may feel disappointed with ourselves if we are not fully filled with the Holy Spirit.

Once again, everything is broken in this imperfect world because of our sinful and selfish desires. Our rebellion against God has destroyed not only our physical subsistence but also our emotional, relational, financial, vocational, and spiritual well-being.

Friends, that is not a pretty picture that I just shared with you. When we look at the damage sin causes to the world, the body, and the spirit, what are we supposed to do? We must hate sin! You know, the problem today is that many people laugh at sin, making light of wrongdoing. All kinds of misconduct are portrayed in ways that mock those who are trying to do the right thing, and the wrong is often justified as “normal.”

If we want to understand just how bad sin is, we need to look at the cross. Jesus, with His arms outstretched, died on the cross on our behalf to forgive our sins. There is no way we can undo the wrongs that are destroying the world, our physical bodies, and our spiritual lives on our own. We need a Savior. Without the Saviour, we are lost in the darkness of sin, completely separated from God.

To be saved from this broken world, and from the total damaged done to our physical and spiritual being, we need to believe in what Jesus has done for us. We need to accept Christ as our Saviour and Lord. Just as the whole creation longs to be “liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom” (Romans 8:21), we, too, need to eagerly await “our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies” through Jesus, who “sacrificed once to take away the sins of many” (Hebrews 9: 28). Christ “will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him” (Hebrews 9: 28).

Because of what Jesus accomplished through the Cross and Resurrection, there is good news for us to remember in the words of 1 Corinthians 15:42-43: “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.” Our earthly bodies are weak and will eventually die, but they will be filled with glory strength when we are resurrected with Christ and live forever in Heaven.

The Savior, who has accomplished this incredible, eternal event, is depicted as the light of the world in our Gospel reading today: “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12).

When we look at the world, or even ourselves, inwardly and outwardly, we may often feel disappointed. We may be discouraged by things happening around us, dissatisfied with things don’t go as we want, or even despairing of others’ actions. We may also feel discouraged by our own shortcomings. Friends, in these challenging times, we need to examine ourselves through the spiritual mirror of God’s Word and confess our brokenness before Christ. We need to ask God for His forgiveness of our rebellious attitudes and behavior, and for His strength to restore our damaged physical and spiritual health.

Furthermore, we need to focus on our Redeemer Jesus who can restore our broken world. We need to follow Christ, the true Light, who can save us from every area of damage and lead us to a new, perfect place called God’s paradise, Heaven, where we will dwell with Him forever.

*In preparing this sermon, I was inspired by Rick Warren’s “Invisible War” series, based on texts from Genesis 3:17-24; Ecclesiastes 2:1-1; Romans 8:18-25; John 8:12.