

PRISONERS PERSPECTIVES

GOD, WHY?

by Dee Farmer

Learning to accept the tragedies that AIDS has brought to Earth has filled many people with questions that seem to go unanswered. Questions recede to the back of our minds, only to resurface at our next dose of AIDS reality. If your life has been touched by this disease, then you know what it is to question your own existence, to despise your own soul. Anyone who has had a direct or indirect encounter with AIDS definitely had to open up that chapter entitled 'death', look it in the face and come to terms with reality. Though some of us have come to accept the effect AIDS has on our lives, friends, community, family and the world, it seems all of us could periodically step back and take a look at how AIDS has robbed us of hope, life and liberty. If not from heartfelt emotions, then out of hopelessness and desperation, the question emerges: *God, why?*

This is probably more so for prisoners than any other group affected by AIDS. Being in prison is isolating in itself. The loneliness of prison life causes a false sense of security to develop, in which ego and physical strength are major factors. There is no place for AIDS, not even in the prison church. This leaves prisoners with AIDS no one but themselves to deal with their medical condition. If the lines of heaven were open for all to hear, the cries of many prisoners living with AIDS would be heard, not only pleading for mercy, but asking: *God, why?*

Kindred to prisoners are children

with AIDS. Many children and young teenagers, fourteen through sixteen years old, are HIV seropositive. Prisoners have no or limited access to spiritual guidance and children are too young to fully understand. It is almost impossible to envision telling a child or adolescent what it means to die when they have not yet learned to live. God, where is the mercy and love you promised? *God, why?* A child with AIDS may cry out to God, begging for his help, and when emotions overwhelm the young soul, the youngster bravely may ask, *God, why?* What response does he receive?

Unfortunately, some people have come to accept the unqualified theory that AIDS is a punishment from God. To accept AIDS as a punishment from God is to stop reaching forward, seizing each opportunity to grow in the understanding and application of faith. Most of all, it is a denial of the gospel message, which grips the mind, stabs the conscience, warms the heart, saves the soul and sanctifies life. Be assured that "the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ, Our Lord," not punishment. But even those who do not seek answers to their questions through the Word of God still ask, *God, why?*

If we are to take our lessons from the Word of God, then the Book of Job contains the answers. Job was a good man who suffered total disaster—he lost all his children and property, and became afflicted with a repulsive disease. When all this happened, Job sat by the garbage dump and took a piece of broken pottery to scrape his sores. However, he continued to have faith in God. When Job finally broke down, he said to

God, "I am tired of living. Listen to my bitter complaint. Don't condemn me. God, tell me!"

God's answer to Job's questions is a very hard one to accept, but it is essential to our salvation. What God basically told Job was, Who are you to question my wisdom? I am the Lord, who works all things together for the good of those who love me. Didn't I give you air to breathe? Didn't I breathe life into your body

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and give you eyes to see with, feet to walk with, ears to hear with, and a mind? Of course, Job had no answers for God. Other than to admit God is God, and to believe in him and trust in him, to have faith in him, through good and bad.

Stepping back to look at the phenomenon of AIDS may bring despair and questions, but if you look at all of God's wonders you will be filled with hope, faith and a desire for living. The wonders of God are all around you—the sun, the wind, the grass, even the food you eat and the clothes you wear. To really see these things is to have seen God's glory. So, the next time AIDS gets you down, take a look around you—look up to heaven, and know that God is with you. Let there not be a day when your heart and mind are not trained on the riches of God's kindness and love.

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