

Neighborly Apologetics

Dr. Del Tackett's Neighborly Apologetics Webinar Series

26-0311wc - Neighborly Apologetics, Evil & Suffering, Dr. Del Tackett

This detailed summary by Grok / X, (Transcription by TurboScribe.ai)

Del's site: deltackett.com, [Neighborly Apologetics Series Video link](#),

Class Resources: [NA-links](#), Our website: wschurchofchrist.org/education.php

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Neighborly Apologetics Summary

Facilitator: Scott Reynolds

26-0311-Summary: 2 - Evil & Suffering, Part 2 (0:04 - 1:03:03)

(0:31 - 1:59) Introduction, Welcome, and Purpose of the Session

Del shares his screen to display slides and warmly welcomes participants to the second session on the problem of evil. He notes that the topic is so profound it could easily warrant four, five, or even more sessions. This webinar continues the focus on neighborly apologetics rather than a strictly academic approach, with the goal of exploring the subject more deeply than in the previous session. He briefly mentions that he and Marc Fey have just returned from North Pole, Alaska, after leading an Engagement Project training conference there, arriving back only the day before yesterday.

(1:59 - 3:26) Alaska Experience and Movie Premiere Announcement

The trip to Alaska was wonderful despite waking up to minus 34 degrees—the coldest weather Del had ever encountered—with the scenery described as absolutely gorgeous. He shares a photo he took from the plane showing a stunning valley and a large glacier on the right, using the image to segue into an advertisement for the upcoming premiere of the sequel to **Is Genesis History?**, titled **The Rise of Mountains**. A premiere was held last week in Cedarville, another is scheduled for Nashville this Thursday, and the film is expected to be released in streaming format by the end of March. He expresses great excitement about the project.

(3:26 - 4:52) Review of Neighborly Apologetics and the Royal Law

Del transitions to the core content by explaining the need for a review. Neighborly apologetics is grounded in the Royal Law of Scripture, which boils everything down to loving one's neighbor—not with today's sentimental definition of love, but with God's steadfast, sacrificial zeal for the true good (shalom) of those providentially placed near us. This command fueled the explosive growth of the early church for its first 200 years. The Engagement Project seeks to restore this biblical vision,

entrusting the primary work of the kingdom to ordinary Christian families rather than professionals. Del calls this “ground zero” for kingdom work and the driving force behind neighborly apologetics and strong ambitions for the family.

(4:53 - 6:34) First and Second Key Verses – 1 Peter 3 and Colossians 4

The entire webinar series is framed by three foundational verses. The first, from 1 Peter 3:15, commands believers to honor Christ the Lord as holy in their hearts, always being prepared to give a defense for the hope within them, yet doing so with gentleness and respect. Neighborly apologetics is deliberately couched in this gentleness and respect, which Del believes is increasingly the only effective way to engage people in today’s culture. The second verse, from Colossians 4:5–6, instructs believers to conduct themselves wisely toward outsiders, making the most of every opportunity, letting speech always be gracious and seasoned with salt so they know how to answer each person. He openly confesses that much of his earlier Christian life failed to follow this pattern—he operated from his own agenda rather than wisdom, lacked grace in speech, and did not tailor responses to individuals.

(6:34 - 8:39) Godly Wisdom, Discernment, and Responding to Each Person

Godly wisdom is not primarily for personal benefit (as he once thought) but for the true good and shalom of others. Discernment helps categorize neighbors: Are they believers or non-believers? Are non-believers open or closed to God? Do believing neighbors hold a solid biblical worldview, or do they need help (in which case he recommends the Truth Project and Engagement Project)? This discernment directly applies the Colossians passage, enabling wise conduct toward outsiders and individualized responses. In the present cultural moment, such wisdom must be embedded in deep, trusting relationships built through diligent prayer and gracious action.

(8:39 - 10:15) Building Trusted Relationships and the Third Key Verse – 2 Timothy 2:24–26

Last session’s examples—Dr. Rosaria Butterfield and the stories in **I Once Was Lost**—illustrate that people often begin asking worldview questions only after a trusted relationship is established. The third verse, from 2 Timothy 2:24–26, emphasizes that the Lord’s servant must gently instruct opponents in the hope that God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, so they come to their senses and escape the devil’s trap. Del stresses that humans do not cause repentance—God does—so believers must constantly pray for others, especially in a culture that may have been given over to a depraved mind. Neighbors in deception should be viewed as captives whom the devil has taken to do his will.

(10:16 - 12:01) Academic vs. Neighborly Apologetics and Tonight’s Focus

While academic apologetics is valuable and believers should be grateful for the decades of labor by scholars, in today’s environment it cannot lead the conversation. Neighborly apologetics begins with significant, trusted relationships in which questions naturally arise when a person’s worldview fails to answer life’s deepest issues. Only then can the truth of God’s Word be shared effectively. The current webinar series covers major apologetic categories, starting tonight with the second part on evil and suffering. Last time, three forms of the problem were introduced: the logical argument, the evidential argument, and the personal argument.

(12:02 - 14:42) Review of the Three Forms of the Problem of Evil

The logical argument (tracing back to Epicurus) claims that if God is omnipotent and omniscient He could prevent evil, and if He is perfectly good He would want to; since evil exists, God cannot be all three. This formal philosophical version is unlikely to be presented by most neighbors. Far more common is the evidential argument: the sheer amount and horror of evil in the world provides no evidence of a caring God, making belief difficult. Most frequently encountered, however, is the personal argument—people deeply wounded by evil and suffering who ask, “Where was God? He could have stopped it but didn’t.” This personal pain often becomes the reason for rejecting or questioning God. Neighborly apologetics therefore requires wisdom, discernment, gentleness, and grace rather than an agenda-driven approach, so believers can know how to respond appropriately to each person’s place on the worldview continuum.

(14:43 - 16:41) Starting with Empathy and Preparing for Neighborly Engagement

Del emphasizes beginning neighborly apologetics on the problem of evil and suffering with genuine empathy and sympathy, especially when building relationships with those who have been deeply hurt. This involves asking thoughtful questions about the specific circumstances in their lives that shaped their current thinking and personal worldview. He stresses the importance of preparing oneself and one’s family in advance before engaging in this work, as relationships must be intentionally built over time. As an example, he describes a hypothetical neighbor, Mrs. Smith, who has become bitter toward God and everyone else after her husband suffered a horrible death from cancer despite her fervent prayers for healing. In her view, God failed to come through, leaving her filled with anger and resentment. The family should discuss and recognize what Mrs. Smith is wrestling with, preparing to engage her gently and respectfully as the relationship develops.

(16:41 - 18:46) Three Critical Biblical Truths for Preparation

To engage effectively, believers must hold firmly to three key understandings from a biblical worldview. First, we live in a fallen world where humanity has a fallen nature, subjecting us to two kinds of evil: natural evil (from the created order) and moral evil (from human choices). Del notes the need to discern whether a person’s suffering stems primarily from natural evil or moral evil, as each requires a different kind of engagement—though time prevents deeper exploration tonight. Second, God is unchanging, righteous, holy, just, merciful, compassionate, loving, and good; He is not subject to whims, moods, or repeated frustration with human failures. People—even non-believers—frequently accuse or question God, making it vital to remember His immutable character. Third, believers look forward to God’s ultimate restoration of all things, when there will be no more pain, suffering, or evil, and everything will be resolved.

(18:46 - 20:39) Answering Fundamental Questions and Resource Recommendations

These three truths enable believers to address the core questions raised by evil and suffering: What is evil? Where does it come from? What is the solution? Evil is anything contrary to God’s design and order. It arises from rebellion against that design and order—including natural evil, which results from the fallen state of the world triggered by human rebellion. The ultimate solution is Christ’s atonement and the future restoration of all things. For preparation on this topic, Del recommends revisiting The Truth Project, particularly Tour 2 or 3 (on anthropology and the states of man) and Tour 2 or 4 (on philosophy and ethics, exploring the basis for right and wrong). These

resources help individuals and families prepare to address neighbors like Mrs. Smith thoughtfully.

(20:39 - 22:16) Reexamining the Dilemma for Non-Biblical Worldviews

Del revisits the dilemma faced by those with a non-biblical (particularly naturalistic) worldview, going deeper than in the previous session. In a naturalistic framework—pervasive in modern culture—answering "What is evil?" becomes problematic. He references Dr. William Provine, whose honest, logical position based on evolutionary naturalism provides a clear illustration. If the cosmos is all that exists (as Carl Sagan put it), containing only matter and energy with no gods or purposing forces, then several conclusions follow logically: no free will (man's mind is merely a cause-and-effect machine or stimulus-response mechanism), no life after death, no ultimate meaning in life, and no ultimate foundation for ethics.

(22:17 - 24:48) The Absence of Ethics and Moral Categories in Naturalism

In a purely materialistic universe (the "cosmic cube" of matter and energy), nothing can be labeled good or bad, righteous or evil; all actions must be amoral. Dr. Provine acknowledged proximate (pragmatic) reasons for ethics but denied any ultimate foundation. This creates a profound contradiction for naturalists who speak of evil, as their worldview provides no basis for such moral judgments. Many people hold this worldview without fully thinking through its implications, leaving them with hopelessness: no meaning, no purposing forces, and no objective ethics. Pointing this out gently in conversation—when the relationship is strong enough—can be a powerful apologetic tool.

(24:48 - 27:10) Contradictions with Evolution and the Shift to "Might Makes Right"

Evolution itself poses a further dilemma within naturalism: the process of the strong destroying or outcompeting the weak is considered progress and therefore "good" in evolutionary terms, yet modern society rejects this as immoral—highlighting an internal contradiction. In the absence of a transcendent ethical foundation, Western civilization increasingly defines evil through an amalgamation of human-centered ("homo Deus") selfishness. People view themselves as divine, with their hearts determining truth, right, and wrong. This leads to "might makes right," where personal declarations (such as preferred pronouns) are treated as divine proclamations that others must accept, and dissent is punished under cultural "blasphemy laws."

(27:10 - 30:11) The Second Dilemma: Where Does Evil Come From in Naturalism?

The second major dilemma for non-biblical worldviews is the source of evil. In naturalism, evil cannot originate from man himself because man is viewed as basically good or purely amoral—a cause-and-effect machine or stimulus-response mechanism with no inherent capacity for evil. Del cites Abraham Maslow, known for his hierarchy of needs, who claimed humans have no intrinsic instincts for evil. Similarly, Carl Rogers, a founder of humanistic psychology, stated that he did not find evil to be inherent in human nature. These views reflect the non-biblical perspective that man lacks any intrinsic propensity toward evil, making it impossible within naturalism to account for the origin of genuine moral evil.

(30:11 - 32:37) Historical Roots of the "Man Is Basically Good" View and Its Implications

Del traces the naturalistic view that man is inherently good back to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that man remains good by nature unless corrupted or deformed by external influences like society. This perspective underpins the modern "homo Deus" idea, where the individual's heart is assumed to be pure, good, and even divine. It drives the desperate cultural search for one's "true self," extending even to young children in grade school who are encouraged to explore gender identity not as discovering how they were made, but as determining "who I am" in a divine sense. Abraham Maslow echoes this by claiming that sick people are made sick by a sick culture; if culture were healthy, people would remain good and healthy. Carl Rogers similarly attributes human behavior problems primarily to cultural influences rather than any inherent evil in human nature. In this framework, evil does not originate from man himself—he is amoral or basically good—but from external factors: social institutions and culture.

(32:37 - 34:50) Consequences in Modern Culture and the Need for Prayerful Engagement

This worldview shifts blame for evil away from personal sin toward systemic or cultural sources, consistent with naturalism but creating significant problems. In contemporary society, discussions of evil rarely focus on individual sin; instead, they emphasize how individuals have been shaped by evil systems, cultures, or institutions. A biblical worldview allows believers to ask and answer these questions properly, while non-biblical views leave people with unresolved dilemmas and contradictions. When engaging neighbors holding such views, the goal is to help them see these issues gently, always within the context of deep, sincere prayer. Only God can open eyes, soften hearts, and enable people to hear, see, and process truth—especially in a culture potentially given over to a depraved mind.

(34:51 - 36:39) Proposed Solutions in Non-Biblical Worldviews

In naturalistic thought, the solution to evil involves getting in touch with one's real, good inner self to achieve self-actualization. Maslow points to this higher need, while Rogers describes reaching self-actualization when a person fulfills their goals, wishes, and desires across life stages. Today this manifests in the "homo Deus" pursuit: true happiness, contentment, and health come from living authentically according to one's heart and identity. Oppressive social institutions—particularly those with absolute ethical values like the church—are seen as the main barriers preventing individuals from achieving this wellness. Biblical ethical standards are increasingly viewed as oppressive obstacles to personal and cultural health, blocking self-actualization.

(36:40 - 37:34) Modern Focus on Institutional Reform as the Answer to Evil

In summary, within this non-biblical framework, evil originates from social institutions, and solutions concentrate on reforming, funding, or replacing those institutions. There is no emphasis on individual sin or personal repentance. Del notes that this is the dominant approach seen in Western civilization in 2023: all efforts to address evil and suffering target systemic change rather than personal transformation.

(37:34 - 39:05) Shifting to the Topic of Suffering and Introduction to the Book of Job

Having laid the foundation contrasting biblical and non-biblical views on evil, Del turns to

suffering, which is the aspect of the problem of evil most likely encountered in neighborly conversations. Suffering results from both natural and moral evil and often brings mental anguish from not understanding "why" it occurs. Scripture addresses suffering extensively, with God graciously dedicating an entire book—the Book of Job—to exploring it. The story begins with Job, a wealthy man with a large, loving family, who loses everything: his possessions, children, and health. He is afflicted with painful boils and sores, left in profound misery.

(39:05 - 40:58) Job's Three Friends and Their Approach to Comfort

Three friends arrive to comfort Job, but—as the Scripture notes—they ultimately fail to do so and even provoke him. Job later calls them miserable comforters, liars, and whitewashers. The book features three cycles of dialogue: each friend lectures Job in turn (Eliphaz, Bildad, then Zophar), and Job responds each time. While the friends say many true things about God, their application becomes faulty, requiring readers to exercise wisdom, discernment, and a solid biblical worldview to distinguish accurate theology from misapplied truth. In the end, God rebukes the three friends for not speaking rightly about Him, underscoring the need for careful reading.

(40:58 - 42:48) Core Arguments in the Job Dialogues

The friends' central (oversimplified) claim is that Job's suffering must be punishment for some hidden sin; therefore, he needs to repent. Job counters that he is innocent and blameless, insisting there is something wrong with God—He is being unjust. This back-and-forth highlights two opposing positions: suffering as divine retribution for sin versus suffering despite innocence, implying divine unfairness. Del highlights a picture showing Elihu (on the left, hand on head), the younger observer who listens quietly throughout most of the book. Unlike the three friends, Elihu speaks with wisdom and discernment at the end, and God does not rebuke him.

(42:49 - 44:22) God's Presence and the Faulty Premise in Suffering

A key point is that God is present and listening to the entire dialogue—He hears the friends' accusations against Job, Job's accusations against them and against God, and Elihu's words. This counters the common feeling during suffering that God is distant or has abandoned us; Job sometimes accuses God of turning away or even wishes God would leave so the suffering might end. Yet Scripture affirms God as El Roi, the God who sees. He remains near, hearing every word, though He does not intervene until the book's conclusion. Del identifies a common faulty premise that people often fall into when addressing suffering—one that should be avoided—and suggests it is a mistake believers make frequently.

(44:22 - 46:20) The Faulty Premise in Job and Its Modern Echoes

Del identifies a major faulty premise that believers must avoid when addressing suffering, whether in their own lives, their families, or in neighbors as relationships are built. The primary faulty premise held by Job's three friends is that suffering is always the result of personal sin, and conversely, personal righteousness will always bring physical blessings and prosperity. The friends repeatedly accuse Job of hidden sin, insisting that his calamities prove guilt and that repentance would restore his blessings. This same premise persists today, even among some who claim the name of Christ: certain pastors teach that physical blessings (wealth, health) come from righteousness—often tied to giving more money or having enough faith—while lack of blessings or

the presence of suffering indicates insufficient righteousness or faith. Suffering, in this view, stems from personal sin, and repentance plus greater faithfulness will eliminate it and bring physical restoration.

(46:21 - 48:00) Job's Special Situation and the Larger Story of God

While Job's friends operate from this faulty premise, the book reveals a unique context: from chapters 1 and 2, Scripture states that Job was blameless before God, yet he became part of a larger cosmic story involving the accuser (Satan), whom God permitted to afflict Job. Job himself, while insisting on his innocence, falls into a related faulty premise: because he is blameless, he believes he deserves physical blessings and prosperity, so his suffering implies God is unjust. God eventually confronts Job, leading him to repent of speaking without full understanding—he acknowledges he cannot see all of God's purposes or plans. Del emphasizes that humans are often caught up in a larger story they cannot fully perceive, and God is sovereignly working out His purposes even through suffering.

(48:00 - 49:55) Jesus' Teaching on Suffering and the Rejection of Retribution Theology

To illustrate this point further, Del turns to Luke 13, where people tell Jesus about Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices. Jesus directly challenges the assumption that their tragic deaths meant they were worse sinners than others, asking if the listeners think the Galileans suffered because they were greater sinners. He answers emphatically, "No," and warns that unless they repent, they too will perish. He then references another tragedy—the eighteen killed when the tower of Siloam fell—and applies the same correction: their deaths did not indicate greater sinfulness. Jesus dismantles the idea that physical suffering or tragedy correlates directly with personal sinfulness or lack of righteousness, while affirming universal guilt under a fallen nature and the urgent need for repentance.

(49:55 - 51:59) Categories of Suffering and the Need for Wisdom in Engagement

From Job and the rest of Scripture, believers learn to approach suffering with wisdom and discernment, especially when engaging neighbors. Suffering can arise from several sources: (1) personal poor choices (e.g., lung cancer from long-term smoking); (2) the evil or poor choices of others (e.g., abuse of a spouse or children, or atrocities like the Holocaust); (3) natural evil (disasters or diseases not tied to moral agency); and (4) the larger sovereign story of God, where suffering serves purposes beyond human understanding. As believers, it is essential to recognize that all suffering—regardless of secondary causes—occurs under God's sovereign hand and within His purposes. This perspective shapes the believer's response: to honor and glorify God even amid unexplained pain. When speaking to neighbors, especially non-believers or believers without a solid biblical worldview, wisdom and discernment dictate how (and whether) to express this truth.

(51:59 - 53:37) Job's Repentance and the Danger of Expecting "Deserved" Good

Job exemplifies this truth: God calls him blameless, yet he suffers intensely as part of a larger divine narrative. When Job accuses God of injustice, God responds by pointing to the vastness of creation and Job's limited understanding ("Were you there...?"). Job ultimately repents, recognizing his place in God's bigger story and the call to glorify God even without full comprehension. Del observes that much complaining during suffering stems from an underlying belief that we deserve better than

what we are experiencing. This entitlement mindset must be confronted with biblical truth, requiring careful wisdom when addressing others in pain.

(53:37 - 55:24) Jesus and the Man Born Blind: Suffering for God's Glory

The faulty premise reappears in John 9, where the disciples ask Jesus whether a man born blind sinned or if his parents did. Jesus rejects both options, declaring, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." The man's lifelong suffering was not retribution but an opportunity for God's glory to be revealed through his healing. This points ultimately to Christ Himself, as described in Isaiah 53: a man of suffering and familiar with pain, despised and rejected, who bore our pain and carried our suffering. Jesus' suffering was part of God's eternal plan, established before the foundation of the world, to redeem humanity.

(55:24 - 57:14) Believers Sharing in Christ's Sufferings and the Purpose of Trials

Romans 8 teaches that if believers are children of God, they are heirs with Christ—if they share in His sufferings, they will also share in His glory. Present sufferings are not worth comparing to the coming glory. Other passages reinforce this: Romans 5 speaks of boasting in hope and glorying in sufferings because they produce perseverance, character, and hope. 1 Peter 4 instructs believers not to be surprised by fiery trials, as they test faith and allow participation in Christ's sufferings, leading to joy when His glory is revealed. Suffering for righteousness (not as a criminal) is a blessing, with the Spirit of glory resting upon the sufferer.

(57:14 - 58:10) Increasing Persecution and the Call to Praise God in Suffering

These truths are especially relevant in the current cultural moment in Western civilization, where Christians who stand for righteousness, truth, and goodness face growing persecution. Del cites Jack Phillips, the Denver baker repeatedly targeted for his biblical convictions, as an example of suffering resulting from faithfulness. Believers should not be ashamed when suffering as Christians but should praise God, recognizing that such trials align with sharing in Christ's sufferings and anticipating future glory.

(58:10 - 59:23) The Connection Between Christ's Suffering and Resurrection

Del highlights the scriptural connection between the suffering of Christ and His resurrection, emphasizing that this link is central to understanding the ultimate solution to evil and suffering. In Mark 8, Jesus teaches His disciples that the Son of Man must suffer many things, be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, be killed, and after three days rise again. Luke records Jesus explaining that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, fulfilling what is written. Paul, in Acts 17, reasons from the Scriptures in the synagogue over three Sabbaths, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. In Acts 26:22–23, Paul declares he says nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Messiah would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, proclaim light to both His own people and the Gentiles. Ultimately, the resolution to evil and suffering is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(59:23 - 1:00:50) 1 Corinthians 15 and the Victory Over Death

Del turns to 1 Corinthians 15 to underscore the hope tied to the resurrection. He reads that the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and believers will be changed. The perishable body—this flesh subject to aging, dementia, pain, agony, and suffering—must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When this happens, the saying will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your sting?” This passage points to the final triumph over suffering and death through Christ’s resurrection, transforming the perishable into the imperishable and conquering mortality itself.

(1:00:51 - 1:01:44) Preview of Next Sessions and Closing Logistics

Noting the close tie between suffering and the resurrection, Del announces that the next webinar, occurring the week before Easter, will focus on the resurrection—the claims of Jesus and the evidence surrounding it. He mentions he has written 40 articles on the resurrection, covering the 40 days between the resurrection and Christ’s ascension, which will serve as a resource. He then hands the session over to Marc Fey. Marc thanks everyone for attending, acknowledging the sacrifice of their time, and explains that a follow-up email will include the recording link and slides from the livestream. He directs participants to the website www.delltackett.com/webinars-2 for any missed previous webinars or events.

(1:01:44 - 1:02:51) Closing Prayer by Dr. Tackett

Dr. Tackett closes with prayer, thanking God for His Word and for revealing Himself, particularly through the difficult yet precious book of Job, which helps believers understand who God is and who they are. He prays that in times of suffering—when there is a tendency to complain against God or others—believers would instead glorify Him, proving His character to others. He acknowledges the likely presence of suffering among the participants and prays that God would open their eyes and ears, draw them closer to Himself, and enable them to give Him glory even amid pain. The prayer concludes by ascribing all glory to God, not to humans, and is offered in Jesus' name. Amen.

(1:02:52 - 1:03:03) Final Remarks and Invitation for Questions

Dr. Tackett thanks everyone for joining and mentions he will stay on a little longer. He invites participants to submit any questions via the chat if they wish to ask something before the session fully concludes.