

# THE PROBLEM OF Suffering

Does God know that we Suffer?



## If God is All-Powerful, All-Knowing, and Good, Why is there Suffering?

### Theodicy: The problem of Evil

“Why does God allow so much evil in the world?” That seems like a fair question doesn’t it? God is omnipotent, omniscient, and perfectly good...so why doesn’t He do something about all the evil in the world? If He is all-powerful, He could stop it if He wanted, and if He is all-knowing, He certainly knows what’s going on. So why doesn’t He get rid of all the evil?

That sounds like a fair question, but it really isn’t. So far we have learned two important facts. 1. God is Holy, and 2. We are completely sinful. So, if we take these two things into

consideration, the right question is not, “Why does God let it happen,” but “Why hasn’t God let it happen to me yet?”

Many people wonder why God doesn’t just get rid of all the evil in the world. However, most people never ask the question, “What if God decided to start with me?”

You see, Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” Likewise, Genesis 6:5 says, “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil

continually.” That means you and I are evil to the core. Without the Spirit of God, we would be among those who God destroys.

### A World of Suffering

Earthquakes, Tornadoes, Hurricanes

Disease, tragedies, death

Wars, conflict, injustice

Crime, murder, abuse, wickedness

### Luke 13:1-9



There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? 3 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. 4 Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? 5 I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. 6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. 7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? 8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

"Why would God allow this to happen to me?"



## Asking the Wrong Questions...

There are many philosophical explanations to the question, but it would be better to simply let the Bible answer the question. People in the crowd directly asked Jesus these questions, and Jesus directly answered them. "There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." (Luke 13:1).

So, get this picture in your mind. Some Galileans were offering their sacrifices to God. They were serving and obeying God when along comes Pilate and kills them. They die at the very moment they are obeying God's command so that their own blood mixes with the blood of their sacrifices.

I can see the crowd looking at Jesus and saying, "Why did God allow this to happen?" It was common (and still is) for people to think that those who suffer something like this must be inordinately sinful. That is why God allowed it. But, Jesus responds, And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (v. 2-3)

Jesus inferred that all of us deserve punishment and suffering. To make matters worse, Jesus brings up another

awful account of accidental disaster. He says, "Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (v. 4-5)

According to Jesus, we are asking the wrong questions. The question is not, "Why did God allow that to happen to them?" The biblical question should be, "Why hasn't God allowed it to happen to me?" It shouldn't be amazing that sinful man experiences the ramifications of the fall, which we all so rightly deserve. What should be amazing is that, for the most part, something horrible has not happened to every one of us. We all deserve it.

Bad things happen, not always because individuals are more sinful than others, but because all mankind and all of creation was plunged into sin because of our rebellion. When people came to Jesus and asked "why?" Jesus responded by saying, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." We must come to grips with the biblical fact that punishment is deserved.

Every single one of us deserves the wrath of a Holy God. Therefore, it isn't amazing when suffering happens. It is amazing when it doesn't!  
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## Reasons People Suffer

### 1. People suffer because God is punishing sin

The law and evil exist to drive one to guilt over his sin and press him toward the Savior, especially when one sees the punishment meted out more obviously against someone else.

### 2. People suffer as a result of sin done against them by others.

Man is utterly sinful. Therefore, he often expresses his sin by transgressing against others.

### 3. The greater good and redemptive suffering.

God uses trial and pain to grow us spiritually (James 1:3-4), and conform us to Christ's image (Romans 8:28-29).

### 4. Mystery, as in Job and Ecclesiastes.

Sometimes we are simply not given the answers. God sometimes glorifies himself through suffering (John 9:2-3). Likewise, the suffering of Job is given no explanation other than that God is glorified.

## Man's Assumption

Because of sin, God owes mankind nothing. From the moment we sin, we forfeit our rights to life (Eze. 18:20).

Every breath we take is a gift of God. No man has a "right" to life, happiness, or pleasure. It is simply an act of God's grace that we are allowed to experience these things. Yet, man feels he deserves them



## Asking the wrong questions continued...

The only reason people are spared from evil and suffering at any moment in time is because of the patience and grace of God. The people listening to Christ were brought face to face with the



reality that at any moment, judgment could fall on them too. But why has it not? Why has God allowed them to live and others die? Jesus answers with

a parable.

And he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?' And he answered him, 'Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.' " (Luke 13:6-9)

Jesus compares us to a fig tree that bore no fruit. God is our creator and He alone has the right to command us. We are to bear fruit for Him, which is something we cannot do without regeneration and the Holy Spirit. So, God has every right to come and "cut down" the fig tree. He has the right to bring judgment at any moment on those who bear no fruit. Not only was the fig tree not bearing fruit, but it had never borne fruit. It was completely worthless. The owner of the vineyard told the vinedresser, "Why should it use

up the ground?" It wasn't doing anything but taking up space.

In the same way, sinners can do nothing righteous in and of themselves. Even the good things that we do are stained with sin. God cannot accept any work as payment for our sin, because every work we offer is stained with that same sin. He can only accept a perfect payment. At every moment of every day, God would be righteous and good to bring judgment on those who sin against Him (which is all of us!) All of creation would proclaim His goodness if He destroyed me right now. But He doesn't in most cases. Why? The question is not, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" The question is "Why hasn't something bad happened to me already?"

The answer is simple...Christ. Jesus is the vinedresser who intercedes for the barren fig tree. He tells the owner of the vineyard to give the tree time and let him cultivate it, dig around it, and fertilize it. He says, "give me a year to cultivate it and it will bear fruit." For twenty-nine years, Jesus said of me, "give him more time." I cared not for the things of God, nor for serving or loving Him. I loved only myself and did what I wanted. Judgment could have rightly fell on my at any time through my life, and if it had fallen, God would have been righteous and good to do so. However, Christ was interceding, saying, "give him more time." Then, in 2003, Christ saved me.

## Think About This:

### What We Deserve...

At every second that clicks by on the clock, we all deserve punishment and wrath. We deserve the just penalty of all our sin. God would be righteous and good to destroy us at every moment of every day.

### What We Get..



More often than not, however, we do not experience the just punishment of God. We live our lives enjoying

family, friends, the pleasures of food, and the beauties of life. We enjoy fun activities and live very comfortable lives. Yet, this is not what we deserve. We deserve to experience nothing but righteousness and judgment. But most of the time we don't.

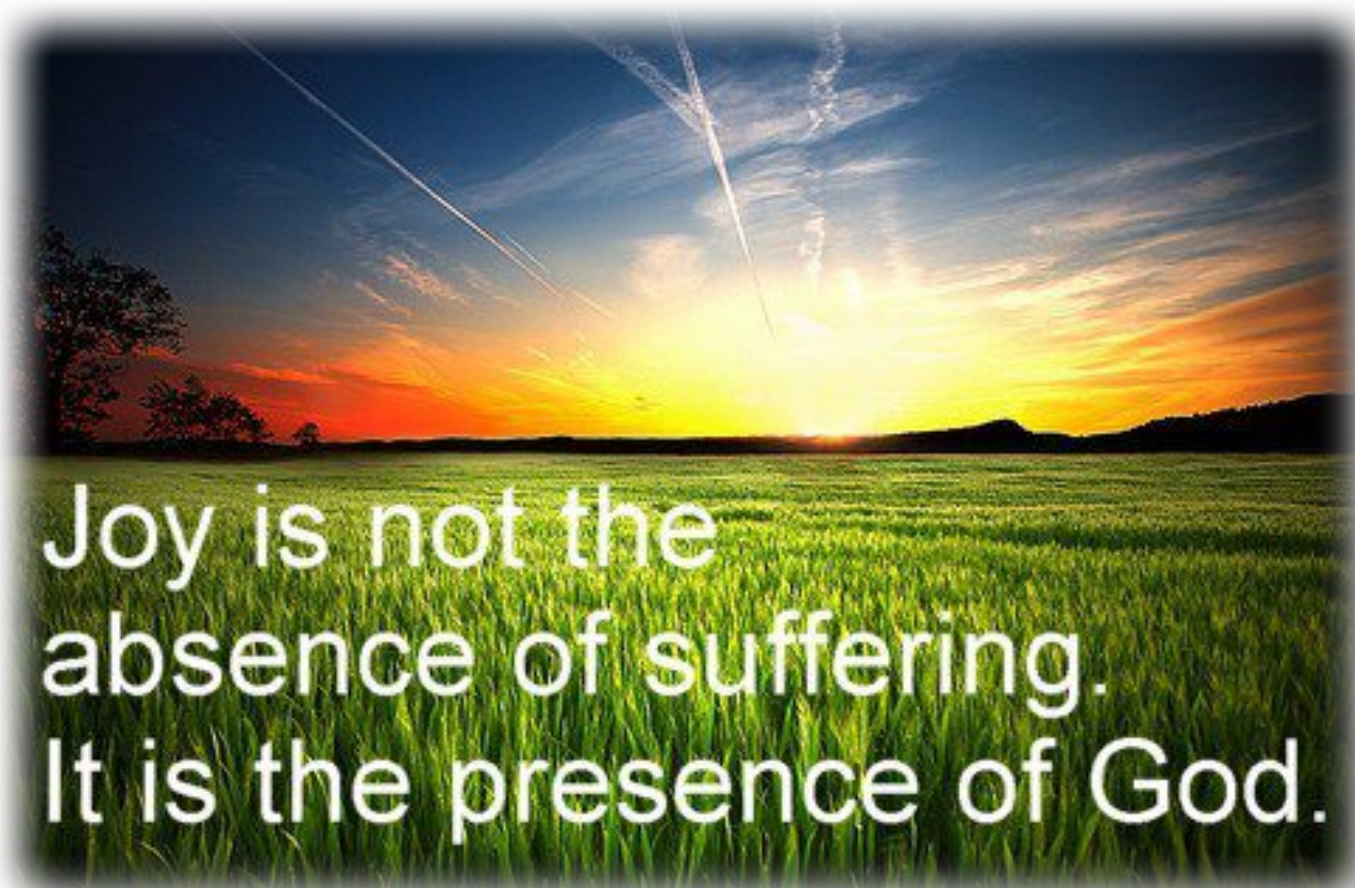


### WHY?

We live mostly comfortable lives because of what Jesus did for us. Jesus paid for every moment of pleasure we experience. Every time we enjoy our family, our lives, or the beautiful things of the creation, we are experiencing the grace and mercy of God which was bought and paid for by the blood of Christ. He gave this to you. Every moment of your life is a gift.







Joy is not the  
absence of suffering.  
It is the presence of God.

### Asking the Wrong Questions continued...

Now, every time believers sin, Christ is interceding at the right hand of the Father with the perfect sacrifice of His death. It is not amazing that there are tsunamis, tornados, sickness, accidents, and all manner of suffering. It is amazing that these things have not overtaken me yet. It is amazing that God, more often than not, says, "I will give you more time."

A young man once asked a wise, older man, "Why doesn't God just destroy all the evil in the world?" Seems like a valid question doesn't it? The wise man looked at the younger man and asked, "What if God decided to start with you?" Do we want Him to destroy ALL evil, or just the really really bad stuff? Where do we draw the line? Should he kill the murderers and pedophiles only? What if He decided to kill all the liars and gossipers too? What if He decided to kill every person who ever entertained an evil thought? How much evil should He do away with?

The question is not, "why does God allow it?" The question is, "Why hasn't He allowed it to happen to me yet?"

### God is in Control

By faith, we know that God is all-powerful and all-knowing. This means that nothing comes into the believer's life that does not pass through the hands of God first. So, we can rest assured that if suffering comes, it is for our good (Rom. 8:28).

God alone knows the big picture. He sees the end and the beginning. We can only see what is going on right now and what has happened before. The baby doesn't understand that the shot at the doctor's office is for his own benefit. All he knows is the pain it causes. In the same way, we don't understand the benefit of our suffering. All we know is that it is painful.

Ask yourself this question. "If God showed you that your trial would result in your spiritual growth, a closer walk with God, and the ability to help others, would you do it?" If God is our priority, we would. Understand this, believers DO NOT suffer for no reason. God has a purpose and a plan for our good.



And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. 29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Romans 8:28-29

## Study Questions

1. A common question is, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" According to Scripture, who classifies as "good people?"

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2. The basic assumption many people have is that we all deserve good, long lives with no troubles or heartaches. Is this assumption accurate? What do we deserve?

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3. When people asked Jesus the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" How did He respond? (Luke 13:3, 5)

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4. In the parable of the barren fig tree, which Jesus uses to explain suffering (Luke 13:6-9), What happens to the tree that produces no fruit?

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5. Why is the fruitless tree spared for a time?

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6. For a moment, think about the worst thing that has ever happened to you. How has God used that experience for your good?

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7. If God showed you that a horrible trial would eventually work for your ultimate good, would you concede to allow it? Why or why not?

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8. According to 1 Peter 1:6-7, what does the "trial of our faith" produce for God?

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9. According to Romans 5:3-4 what does the "trial of our faith" produce in us?

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10. Understanding the two truths from 1 Peter 1:6-7 and Romans 5:3-4, do you think trial and tribulation in a believer's life may be a good thing? Why or why not?

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11. Read James 1:3-4. Here, James tells us that the trying of our faith works patience in us. How does James say we should respond to this trial of faith (verse 4)?

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12. If someone were to say to you, "God is not loving because He allows so much evil to happen in the world," How would you respond?

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