

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH
EVIL AND
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HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED

“Where is God when...?”

- innocent children die of preventable diseases?
- terrorists carry out their senseless suicide missions?
- millions live in poverty?
- people wage wars and commit atrocious crimes in the name of religion?
- my loved one dies of cancer?
- I lose my job?

“WHY IS THERE SO MUCH EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THE WORLD?”

Humanity has long wrestled with the existence of suffering and evil. In his book *The Problem of Evil*, Charles Colson writes: “No question poses a more formidable stumbling block to the Christian faith than this, and no question is more difficult for Christians to answer.”¹

SOME POSSIBLE ANSWERS

We hunt for answers and we demand explanations. If we can't find satisfactory answers, we come up with some answers of our own. We think **God must not be there at all**. Or maybe He is there, but **He's not powerful enough** to do anything. Or maybe **He doesn't love us enough** to care about our personal suffering. Eventually we might even reach the painful conclusion that **suffering must be senseless and meaningless**—just the result of random chance.

Are these conclusions correct? Is there another way of looking at suffering?

LOOKING AT SUFFERING THROUGH A JESUS-SHAPED LENS

Every year at Easter, we remember a day two thousand years ago when Jesus Christ—God become man—was nailed to a cross to die. The religious and political leaders of his day rejected Jesus and executed a sentence of death designed to be as cruel, humiliating, and painful as possible. Where was God on that day? God was right there—in the middle of evil, hanging on the cross. All of our feelings of loss, pain, alienation, anger, hopeless, loneliness, despair, injustice, cruelty, conflict, and the horror of impending death were right there at

the cross, where God-in-Christ joined with humanity to experience the harsh reality of evil and suffering.

So let's look at this complex question of evil and suffering through the lens of a suffering Jesus:

1. Jesus' suffering demonstrates the horrific consequences of the bad choices we freely make.

From the cross, the Son of God cried out in agony, “*I'm thirsty*” and, “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (Jn. 19:28; Matt. 27:46). Jesus endured total humiliation, social alienation, and divine abandonment, all because people pursued their own selfish desires with total disregard for God and their neighbours.

Suffering and evil are often caused when we ignore God and disobey His moral laws – whether as individuals, as groups, or as an entire human race. Suffering takes root among us when we abuse and misuse our personal freedom –we play God ourselves! Instead of following God's design to love Him and love one another, we rebel against God and hurt each other. Far too often the pain and agony we experience in life are the natural consequences of what hides inside our hearts. As Jesus said, “*It's from the*

¹ *The Problem of Evil*, Charles Colson, p. 4

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heart that we vomit up evil arguments, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, lies, and cussing. That's what pollutes." (Matt. 15:19)

You might ask, "But why doesn't God stop it?" J. B. Phillips notes in his book, *God Our*

Contemporary, that "Evil is inherent in the risky gift of free will" ². Chuck Colson talks about free will in another way: "In order for God to ensure that we could not sin, he would have had to tamper with our freedom of

will – to create us not as full human beings but as puppets or robots programmed to do only what he wanted. But that would have rendered us incapable of loving God or one another, for genuine love cannot be coerced. Also, without free will, we would not be capable of moral responsibility, creativity, obedience, loyalty, or heroism." ³

In short, when God created us in His own image, He didn't create us as human robots or puppets but as free moral agents who make choices that have eternal consequences and profound impacts on ourselves and others. The tragic death of Jesus the righteous sufferer underlines the painful consequences of our foolishness, when we inflict grievous wrongs on each other in our disobedience of God's moral principles and in our pursuit of selfish desires – acting as if we are God!

2. Jesus' suffering underlines the rigor required to fulfill God's purpose for our lives.

Jesus' last words on the cross were "*It is finished.*" These are not words of resignation or defeat but a declaration of Jesus' faithfulness, loyalty, and determination – qualities that

allowed him to successfully complete the task entrusted to Him by God his Father. Every day of his life, Jesus figuratively "picked up His cross": he faced and overcame temptation to sin, endured harassment, scorn,

and social and personal opposition, and was ultimately betrayed by a friend.

The Lord's Prayer contains a perfect description of the faithful and obedient way Jesus lived His life on earth: "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". The night before he was crucified, an anguished Jesus knelt alone to pray in an olive grove while a few of his closest followers dozed off nearby. He pleading with God to take away the agony that was to come, but in the end, He obediently submitted to God's will. Jesus' example warns us that if we want to live out the character of God, if we persist in doing good and strive to fulfill the purpose of God in our lives, we will face trials and testing.

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² *God Our Contemporary*, J.B. Phillips, p.88

³ *Problem*, p.75-76, 103

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us – a person of flesh and bone who lived and walked the streets of ancient Israel. But he never made a moral blunder, nor misused or abused the freedom His Father had granted to Him.

Jesus suffered and experienced evil because

He loved His Father and did everything to please Him (cf. Heb. 2:14-18; 4:14-16). If we also want to fulfill God's purpose for our lives, should we expect anything different from the treatment

Jesus received? To follow Jesus, to live and love as he lived and loved, is to run against the common human tendency to act selfishly. And if we are running against the tide, we will naturally encounter forces of resistance. Suffering in the midst of doing good according to God's purpose is part of life in our world.

3. Jesus' suffering reveals our hope for the ultimate victory of good over evil.

Two petty criminals were crucified one on either side of Jesus. One mocked Jesus, but the other asked Jesus to remember him in his future kingdom. Jesus reassured him saying, *"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* (Lk. 23:43) Here we catch a glimpse of humanity's natural longing and hope—that good and justice will ultimately defeat evil and injustice and that all things will eventually be made right!

Our abhorrence and disgust for wickedness and suffering is truly a sign of the "eternity God put in our hearts." It's part of our DNA as creatures

made in the image of God to instinctively hope for the victory of good over evil. Suffering reminds us of our God-image-bearing-desire that His original design for Eden, that beautiful and peaceful paradise long since lost, will be

restored at the end of history!

Suffering, evil and death: these things are not the end, but they are an integral part of our life-long journey of hope in the eternal presence and power of God. Jesus

showed us that suffering should not drive us away from God but is a homing device in our souls that pushes us towards God. Suffering underlines the necessity of placing our faith in the God who is in control and who will bring about final vindication as well as the ultimate victory of good over evil.

4. Jesus' suffering magnifies the depth of God's love and forgiveness.

It is virtually impossible to comprehend that even as his heart was breaking under torture and rejection, Jesus never stopped overflowing with love and grace, crying out on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." A totally righteous, innocent and sinless man willingly put Himself in the company of despicable criminals, allowed envious and politically motivated people to torture him, and died an infamous death. In praying for those who put him to death Jesus once again modeled love and compassion for his enemies. Jesus' death shows just how far God was willing to

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Love shines the brightest when we suffer for the ones we love most. To love and be loved involves going to “painful places”! But the depth of Jesus’ love goes beyond the physical and penetrates the innermost part of our souls, restoring spiritual well-being to each of us. It extends even to those who are his enemies! Life with God – eternal life – required Jesus’ death for us, and in His dying we can now experience what it means to truly live with a sense of meaning and purpose, overcoming life’s obstacles with God’s power and provision!

CONCLUSION

God doesn’t want to argue with us, but through the death of His Son on the cross, He speaks volumes! In the midst of our suffering, He challenges us to put aside all the “why” questions and ask the “what” question: “What is God saying to me in this calamity?”

Christian author Philip Yancey suggests that living in God’s world is a bit like an amateur playing chess with a grand master. We follow our own strategy, hoping to find victory in the game, but the master is able to bring the game to a victorious conclusion at any moment. In the same way, God grants us freedom in this life to rebel against his original loving design for the world, but even when we choose to go against Him we ironically end up serving his eventual goal of restoration. God is the Chess Master who lovingly takes our lives – even our suffering – and transforms them into something beautiful. Yancey concludes, “If I accept that blueprint ... it transforms how I view both good and bad things that happen. Good things, such as health, talent, and money, I can present to God as offerings to serve his purposes. And bad things, too – disability, poverty, family dysfunction, failures – can be redeemed as the very instruments that drive me to God.”⁴

⁴ “Chess Master,” *Christianity Today*, 5-22-00, p.112

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– “Chess Master,” Phillip Yancey, *Christianity Today*

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