

## **Suffering: Why Does God Allow Us To Suffer? (2)**

**By Mark Hatfield**

### Introduction

**ILLUSTRATION:** A lead character in the spy novel you're reading is in a terrible fix. They've got him tied up and are planning to torch the cabin where he's hidden away. You lean forward in your chair as the action intensifies, wondering how he'll escape. Then villains drench the foundation of the cabin in gasoline. With a single match, a bright yellow blaze envelops the walls in seconds. The hero is trapped. He calls for help. He tries to loosen the cords that cut into his wrists. He kicks against the chair and tries to bash it against the wall and break free, but nothing works. Soon smoke billows into the room. He's overcome by the thick, dark clouds. He passes out. Within a few minutes his barely breathing form is engulfed in flames, and the hero is gone.

What? Dead? That can't be! You look to the next chapter, thinking he will have escaped somehow. Or maybe the cabin sequence was a dream. But the hero is dead. The bad guys have won. Evil triumphed. You hurl the book across the room. "It's not fair! Why didn't the author write a better ending? Why did the good guy lose? That's not the way it should end!" But the author didn't write it that way. He allowed the hero to die.

---Garry Poole *How Could God Allow Suffering and Evil*.

1. That's how life is most of the time, Right? When a little boy dies of leukemia in spite of thousands of prayers, it seems as if the story isn't ending the right way. When a young girl dies in a car accident and the rest of her life is stripped away by a drunk driver, it seems like somebody made a big mistake. When a close relationship ends and you feel the crushing blow of disappointment, you wish someone would rewrite the story line. Since God is the author of life, many people are asking in times of grief, "why isn't He down here writing a better story for me?"
2. We are not the first to ask these kinds of questions. Habakkuk, who was an Old Testament prophet said, "Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Habakkuk 1:13) How do you think God would have answered those questions? We will look at the answers in this lesson.
3. Our first lesson in this series on suffering involved understanding evil and where it came from. The only conclusion that we can come to is; that God made evil possible and men made evil actual. In other words, God made all things very good (Gen. 1:31) and gave man a choice to follow Him or flee from Him. Man fled from God and His will, and this choice to do wrong introduced evil to the world. When mankind is separated from a holy and good God, there is suffering, pain and death in our lives.
4. When we suffer and experience personal pain, we might begin to ask "why?" or we may conclude that life isn't fair.
5. Most people are more interested in finding a solution for their pain or relief from their suffering, rather than gaining an understanding for why things happen the way that they do. But when we understand evil, our relief is found in the Lord (Psalm 34:8-19).

6. While it may seem easy to give to a sufferer a simple Bible answer in an unfeeling way, the Bible tells us to go beyond the explanation and weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). This is exactly what Jesus did in His life on earth (John 11:35).
7. Please do not think at any moment that we are downplaying suffering in this series, because we all suffer and know that it is real. Understand that our heart goes out to you in whatever you are dealing with and that we do want to give an honest answer to the questions that we have about suffering being allowed by God.

#### I. What Can God Do About Evil?

##### A. God could destroy us.

1. He is all powerful and very capable of wiping out the human race. He brought us in and He can take us out. (Perhaps you have said that to your children)
2. In the Old Testament God demonstrated that He could wipe out whoever He wanted because of sin. In one case, He only spared 8 people. But sin continued on through those whom God spared.
3. Think about it. If there weren't any people, no one would hurt anyone and no one would get hurt. But does that really solve the problem of sin and restore our relationship with God? No, if we are wiped out as sinners, we just die and go to hell where we are eternally separated from God.
4. Nature could produce volcanic blasts, the earth could quake beyond measure and sicknesses could spread into cities and villages taking out every human being on the face of this earth.
5. We all look at this and realize that this is not a legitimate solution.

##### B. God could handpick the evil people and eliminate them.

1. All murderers, rapists, terrorists and even liars - any truly wicked person - would be gone.
2. Even those, whose hearts were filled with wicked imaginations to plan and commit evil, God would eliminate them as well.
3. Then the rest of the world could live in peace and harmony. As a matter of fact, it would be heaven on earth and God could just make earth His home.
4. But we all see the problem with this scenario. All have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Therefore all would be destroyed.

##### C. God could step in and override everything that is evil.

1. When a bullet has been fired from a gun at another human being, God could step in and stop the speeding bullet like a superhero (SuperGod) or the person who gets shot could just get up, grin and go on with life like a cartoon character who brushes off every tragic event that transpires (Wyle Coyote and Roadrunner).
2. Our choices would make no difference in the world. We could jump off of a bridge and play in the street (like mom and dad warned us not to do) and know that God will not let us suffer. We become in this case, the super-mankind...immortal beings on earth. This is foolishness of course.

##### D. God could choose to completely stay out of things and let us fend for ourselves.

1. In this scenario we are playing the survivor game. We have to make choices that we think are best and see how things unfold. We would live in a world without morals where we would compete for the survival of the fittest.

2. God would merely sit by idly and watch with disinterest and be totally uninvolved completely unconnected with our existence.
  3. But we all know that since God is a loving Creator this is not an option.
- E. God could periodically step in and be partial to certain individuals.
1. God could make a difference at times of His choosing to minimize evil and its consequences.
  2. We could never know what He was up to. One day He might be protecting us from all evil and the next day allowing us to suffer greatly.
  3. This is contrary to what the Bible says about God showing no partiality with men.
- F. God could come here and learn what it is like to suffer and then seek to redeem us.
1. God could put on flesh so that He could feel pain. God could come down and suffer loss while knowing what it is like to struggle in daily life. God could...
  2. That is exactly what God did through Jesus Christ. He left heaven, was born into this world to see what it is like to live here and die here. In His life, He experienced loneliness, sorrow, hurt, pain, and even an excruciating death. .
  3. Jesus came to earth to live like we live, but he died so that we can live like He lives in heaven. The Bible says He can sympathize with us being tempted in all things like we are and He waits for us to come to Him for salvation (Heb. 4:15-16; 5:8-9).
  4. Don't let anyone or anything make you believe that God does not understand what you are going through. The reason He made a plan of redemption is based upon the fact that evil is against His nature and He doesn't want us to suffer the consequences of sin. He gave His Son to die in our place so that we can live eternally with Him in heaven.
  5. Garry Poole says, "It seems that God allows evil so men and women who are separated from him can have an opportunity to turn back. If he eradicates all evil, he also stops the process by which people can come to him and eliminates the possibility of winning their hearts."
  6. Isn't it true that when we suffer we cry out for help? The Bible says God wants us to come to Jesus and find grace to help in time of need. Our suffering makes us long for something better.

## II. What Is God Doing About Evil?

- A. God is going to judge this sinful world, but now he waits patiently
1. The apostle Peter wrote, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise", which speaks to His return to judge sinners and put an end to evil. He continues, "as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9)
  2. In essence, the reason that God hasn't fulfilled some of our requests for sin to be punished and wickedness to cease is because some of us would die spiritually because we are asking God to destroy the very thing that is still in our hearts.
  3. God is saying "Repent...I am waiting patiently because I don't want you to spend eternity in hell."
  4. The very fact that we despise suffering shows you the advantages of seeing evil firsthand and then having God invite us to reject it in favor of His blessings (Revelation 21:1, 3-7)

5. Once you accept that God will one day free us from suffering if we will follow Him, it is so much easier to deal with our daily struggles. While God waits for the repentance of sinners, we wait for the redemption of our souls. But right now, since unrighteousness exists, we will often encounter difficult circumstance where we are asked to overcome and be faithful to God in spite of our suffering.
  6. One author put it this way, "People who refuse to let God into their lives have no promises in the Bible from him about finding any hope or benefits from suffering."
- B. God is allowing Satan to tempt us and trusting that we will do what is right.
1. When Satan came before God to question the integrity of Job, God trusted that Job would not be moved by the temptations and tragedies that Satan would hurl at him.
  2. Job lost his children, his servants, his possessions and even his physical health. God had nothing to do with it, except that he allowed the devil to act within His limitations.
  3. Job was considered to be one of the most righteous men of his time, so why did he suffer? The Bible tells us that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear and with each temptation He makes a way of escape (I Cor. 10:13).
  4. Even though Job was accused of sin as the cause for his infirmities and loss, he was just and upright before God. At this time, his own wife asked him to curse God for all that he had suffered, but he would not (James 1:2-4, 12).
  5. Job tried to question God at one point and God's answer was basically, "Job I know what is best for you...just keep trusting me no matter what" (Job 23:10)
- C. God is seeking to do mighty things through our suffering
1. When a baby is born blind, you would normally question why something like this might happen.
  2. A situation with a man who was born blind was discussed in John 9:1-7, where the people with Jesus asked if this man or his parents had sinned to cause his vision to be lost.
  3. Jesus responded that sin was not the cause of this circumstance at all, but so that God could demonstrate His power in this man's life. Jesus healed him.
  4. How many of us have experienced amazing stories of the way in which those with physical ailments and handicaps have beat the odds and done amazing things with their lives to the glory of God?
  5. It has been said that the pessimist (a negative person) sees the difficulty in every opportunity, while the optimist (a positive person) sees the opportunity in every difficulty. Let us turn our grief into glory for God.
- D. God wants us to know that even though we suffer here, there is something better.
1. In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, we see the rich man living a wealthy prosperous life, while Lazarus is sick with sores at the rich man's gate. Every day the rich man was selfish and did not help Lazarus, therefore Lazarus suffered greatly until he died.
  2. Notice at the end of Luke 16:19-31, that we are told that when they both died they received a judgment for the life that they lived. The rich man was in torment and Lazarus was finally comforted.
  3. While it may be hard to sit back and look at the injustices of the world, those who are hungry, cold, desperate etc. Remember that it is only for this short life that we suffer and as long as we live for the Lord, we have a home with Him.

4. I don't know about you, but I will take a few short years of suffering for an eternity of God's presence and the blessing that He bestows. Even so, when we suffer as a Christian we are sharing in the suffering of the Lord (Rom. 8:17) and it is said our reward will be great in heaven when we are persecuted for righteousness sake (Matthew 5:10-12).
5. C.S Lewis once wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts to us in our pains. Suffering is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world". As a just God, he cannot stop suffering, because He warned Adam that if he disobeyed Him, that death would be the consequence.
6. All pain, grief and decay can be attributed to our actions against God. But since salvation is available in Christ, God is sounding forth the message, "Come with me if you want to live". We need to learn from suffering and be moved to be reunited with God.

#### Conclusion

1. The story of God and humankind and evil isn't over. There's a grand finale yet to come, and it would be unfair to judge the "author" without letting him write the last chapter. The good news is, he already has the "rough draft" and it's found in the Bible - we know how the story is going to end. Some of the details will become clear only in the future, but based on what God has shown us already, we can trust him for a great ending.
2. The Lord will defeat Satan and his evil schemes. The righteous will go on into eternity with God where we will suffer no more, while those who are lost will be cast into an eternal pit of torment with the devil and suffer pain forever.
3. It is important that we realize that we are the cause of our own suffering, and that God is trying to promise and provide a place where we can escape it all.
4. The only way to get to that place is through Jesus Christ who suffered in our place while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8).
5. Philip Yancey wrote, "God did not exempt even himself from human suffering. He too hung on the gallows, at Calvary, and that alone is what keeps me believing in a God of love.
6. Will you commit the keeping of your soul to a faithful Creator not matter what you are going through right now (I Pet. 2:21-24)