

What Does God Allow Suffering?

by David Cook

TITLE:	What Does God Allow Suffering?
BIBLE BOOK:	1 Peter 4 : 12-19
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SUBJECT:	Suffering
SERIES:	Questions For God
OBJECTIVE:	The question of suffering is one often raised by people. Many non-Christians will ask how God can allow people to suffer. Of course, they neglect to note that we are in a sinful, fallen world brought about by our own sinful natures. David Cook address this in his series, "Questions For God?"

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Introduction

1 Peter 4.12-19

Theme -God has a purpose for allowing His people to go through times of suffering to make us more like Christ and to encourage us to reach out to others.

When was the last time you asked God, "Why is this happening to me?" "What is going on in this world?"

My sister and husband love the Lord deeply and desire to raise up children who will do the same – yet she recently miscarried at 5 months and is in deep depression. Why God?

At a recent visit to the doctor he says, "I have bad news...it's cancer." Why God?

A Christian couple who seemed to be full of life and life is now getting divorced. Why God?

You've worked hard all your life with your company – now you are laid off – Why God?

The question of how an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God can allow evil to exist is a question that sticks with people regardless of their religious beliefs. Philosophers and seekers alike have offered some possible answers:

God does not exist. (Non-existent)

God does not know. (Not all knowing)

God does not care. (Not all loving)

God is powerless to do anything about it. (Not all powerful)

Suffering is difficult from every angle. When someone we love is suffering – sometimes the best thing we can do is be present and listen. In our attempt to define what God is doing we sometimes say, “God is in control,” “The Lord’s ways are not our ways,” “God works all things out for good to those who love Him.” These are quotes that are easy to say to others, but a bit more difficult to accept when we are the one who is hurting and suffering.

Charles Templeton was an outstanding preacher of a few decades ago. His preaching was so powerful and faith so strong that he was Billy Graham’s right-hand man, until a few years ago when he suddenly renounced his faith and became a self-avowed atheist. Why did Templeton do that? He said he was in an airport when he picked up a copy of Life Magazine. In that magazine he saw a story about a famine going on in Africa. A photograph accompanying the article showed a woman who was nothing but skin and bones holding her dead baby in her arms. The woman was looking skyward as if to ask God, “Why?” Templeton said at that moment he decided that a God that could send rain and save millions of people but who would not was not a God he could love and serve, so he walked away from the faith.

A question that penetrates deeply into our hearts is, “Why Does God Allow Suffering?” This morning, I want to share 4 reasons why there is suffering and evil in this present world – although this is not an exhaustive list. I also want to share how you can experience real hope in the midst of suffering.

I. Why Is There Suffering?

A. Sinful

One reason there is suffering in this world is in the category we’ll call the Sinful. Sometimes people say, “If God is a God of love, why didn’t He create a perfect world?” “Why did he create mankind knowing he would rebel against His Creator?” Understand God did create a perfect world in the beginning. On the first day – God created light. On the second day – God created sky and water. On the third day – God created land and seas. On the fourth day – God created us the sun, moon, and stars. On the fifth day – God created fish and birds. On the sixth day – God created animals to fill the earth along with man and woman. On the seventh day – God rested. Genesis 1.31, “Then God looked over all he had made and he saw that it was excellent in every way.”

Read a little further in Genesis 2 through 3 and you will discover Adam and Eve. God blessed them with a perfect environment – they had purpose, provision, and enjoyed His Presence. However, they chose to rebel against God and brought the penalty of sin upon themselves. Because they sinned against God, everyone human being born into this world is born with sinful nature. We naturally do what we want to do rather what God would always have us to do.

Think about this category, the Sinful. Just as God gave Adam and Eve the choice to walk with Him and enjoy the abundant life He provided – He gives us that choice today. For instance, a man is blessed by God with great athletic ability. He trains hard and makes His way to the top. However, instead of using his God given talent to witness for God and blessing others, he gambles away his money, gets hooked on narcotic drugs, and dies a premature death in a drunk driving accident. All the while he could have enjoyed his wife, family, others, yet he made the sinful choice over the selfless choice. Much suffering in our world is due to ourselves!

In his book, “The Problem of Pain,” C.S. Lewis in his book makes the point, “When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another, and this, perhaps accounts for 4/5ths of the suffering of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs...”

We make choices everyday that build up or tear down. We make the choice to eat junk over health

foods, to sit on the couch over exercise, to worship God or deny God. God does not create us as robots, rather He creates human beings and gives us the responsibility of living His way or our own way. God gives us the opportunity to enjoy His care and be useful in His creation, yet He never forces or makes us choose Him. He wants a love response and we must make that choice ourselves.

B. Solar

A second reason suffering exists in this world, we will call, the Solar. Almost daily we see pictures of devastating hurricanes, tornadoes, tsunamis, fires that bring great devastation to the earth and bring many lives to tragic deaths. Why doesn't God do something about this? Certainly He could. The Bible says in Colossians 1.17 that Jesus Christ, "holds all creation together." In the gospels we read of Jesus' disciples being in awe of Him because even the winds and seas obey Him.

None of us will forget Hurricane Katrina or the Tsunami of 2004 that swallowed Asia. As great as this world is – it is flawed. Many people get angry with God when these natural acts take place, but fail to praise Him as He blesses them in abundance with rain, sun, food, shelter!

Also realize that just as mankind suffers because of sin and is longing for the day of God's complete deliverance and freedom, so God's creation is also suffering and longs for the day when all will be perfect! The Bible teaches not only was mankind affected by Adam and Eve's sin in the garden, but God's creation as well. God is not through with this world yet. Romans 8.22-23, "For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

Martin Lloyd-Jones offered this wonderful insight, "I wonder whether the phenomenon of the Spring supplies us with a part answer. Nature every year makes an effort to renew itself, to produce something permanent; it has come out of the death and the darkness of all that is so true of the Winter. In the Spring it seems to be trying to produce a perfect creation, to be going through some kind of birth-pangs year by year. But unfortunately it does not succeed, for Spring leads only to Summer, whereas Summer leads to Autumn, and Autumn to Winter. Poor old nature tries every year to defeat the "vanity" of the principle of death and decay and disintegration that is in it. But it cannot do so. It fails every time. So it goes on "groaning and travailing in pain together until now."

C. Satanic

A third reason for suffering in this world is under the category of the Satanic. Please understand, there is an enemy in this world who stands opposed to all that is of God and good and His name is Satan. Just as the Savior came to bring us life in the abundance, Satan comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Consider what Satan did to Job. Satan appeared before God and begins to accuse Job's integrity and faith. To summarize he said, "God, the reason Job worships and serves You is because You have been so good to him. Let me take away everything he has and He will curse You!" God allows Satan to take the family, health, and wealth of Job. While this broke Job's heart it did not break his hope. He said, "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." In Chapter 2, Satan is still going after Job inflicting him with painful boils and sores. Job's wife said, "Curse God and die." Job said, "Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and not anything bad?"

Just as Satan attacked Job, don't be surprised when he attacks you. If you belong to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ – God is your Owner and Satan can't stand that truth. While the Devil cannot cause you to be separated from the love of God, he wants to make you weak and impotent in the things of God. 1 Peter 5.8 says, "Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." Let me remind you this one reason why it's so important to stay close to God and stay in church. Satan is working today through lies, deceptions, fear, immaturity, false teaching, etc. Be on guard – stay sober – stay humble before God and others. God is greater than Satan – The greater One lives inside you! (1 John 4.4)

D. Spiritual

A fourth reason for suffering in this present world is the Spiritual. Many people are making their lives miserable because they have turned their back on God – His love, mercy, forgiveness that is

available. They are doing life on their own. They've never found freedom inwardly through confessing their sins and placing their faith in Jesus Christ alone for peace with God. The blood of the cross of Christ is the answer.

II. What Can I Do About Suffering?

I believe many of our sufferings can be traced back to these three categories – Sinful, Solar, Satan, Spiritual. Is there anything we can do about suffering? How can I rise above my pain, the evil that's been done to me, the suffering that's causing me to lose heart and hope? Let me encourage you with the Wonderful Word of God.

A. Be Prepared

First, understand that God can use suffering in our lives For Your Good and His Glory– Be Prepared. Do you remember Joseph in the O.T.? His brothers sold him to slavery and gave him up to die. He spent years forgotten in prison and was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife of rape. He went through seven years of famine in the land. Yet, Joseph understood the character of God much better than most of us. He knew that God could take what man meant for evil and could turn it around for good. Genesis 50.20, "As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people." With the suffering, grief, pain you are facing – as hard as it may seem – trust in God, not in your circumstances. Many people find a new vitality in their walk with God as they undergo suffering.

B. Be Positive

Second, God has promised us that we will have suffering in this world because we stand for Him and forsake the world so – Accept Suffering – Be Positive. 1 Peter 4.16, "...it is to no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by His wonderful name!" Pastor Fred Winters was shot and killed in the pulpit of his church preaching the Word just over a month ago. He left behind a godly wife and two wonderful daughters. On CBS Cindy Winters said, "I do not have any hatred or even hard feelings (toward the killer)...We have been praying for him. She went on to say, "I know that the same way God got me through last Sunday, he's gonna get me through next week and he's gonna get me through the next 10 years. God has been my rock and I know that when I get to those really dark, painful days, he's gonna be there for me and my daughters..." (Many people in suffering get full of self pity – we've all done that – but it won't eliminate the pain of suffering – you can make a choice to rejoice).

Also, this past week Miss California, Carrie Prejan most likely would have been crowned Miss USA – but her strong stance for marriage being between one man and woman cost her the crown. A day later she was asked by NBC's Matt Lauer if she could take back her answer and go down the middle of the road and win the crown – would she take it back? She said, "No. I'm not here to be politically correct – but Biblically correct." Carrie went on to say, "Now, I can go and tell young people how to stand firm for your beliefs." She may not have won the popular vote on earth, but she won in Heaven!

C. Be Patient

Third, we have a God who understands your pain and suffering – Be Patient. The Lord Jesus Christ suffered more than anyone else ever has or ever will. Living a sinless life, on the cross he bore every sin, sickness, pain, evil of all time.

Friends, family, feelings, even those of faith may tell you God doesn't care what you are going through – He is distant. That is not true. God does not always do what we want Him to do in our lives right away. He doesn't heal our every hurt right away! We have to put in all in His merciful hands. In fact the Bible says, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those who are crushed in spirit." Psalm 34.18. Where is God when (cancer, baby has birth defects, divorce, your family is crushing you) – With You!

Read the Bible and find that God does some of his best work with broken things and broken people. Do you remember the little boy who offered Jesus broken bread and fishes? How many did this meal feed in Jesus' hands? 5,000! Do you remember that before Abraham was the father of many nations, he and Sarah were barren for 25 years? Do you remember the Apostle Paul was broken on a missionary journey in Asia – he and his team were “crushed,” “completely overwhelmed,” “thought we would never make it through,” “expected to die,” – yet he said this happened that they may learn to trust in God who raises the dead!

How can we be patient in suffering? Understand that the comfort of God does not mean instant deliverance from difficulties – but His faithful love, strength, encouragement will be there. He comforts you so you can comfort others with the comfort you have received from Him!

D. Be Peaceful

Fourth, the Lord Jesus Christ has already overcome and gives us the victory through Him – Be Peaceful. 2 Timothy 2.8, “Never forget that Jesus Christ was a man born into King David’s family and that he was raised from the dead. This is the Good News I preach. 9 And because I preach this Good News, I am suffering and have been chained like a criminal. But the Word of God cannot be chained.”

I would be doing injustice and lying to you if I promised you a life of no suffering, no sorrows, or shame on this earth. But I can promise you on the Authority of the Word of God – because Jesus lives I can face tomorrow with peace in my heart. Because Jesus lives, life is worth living! Because Jesus lives I’m looking forward to eternal life with Him and all His blood bought people ruling and reigning with Him. To all who put their trust in Him – He’s promised an eternal life of no more suffering, no more tears, no more sorrow or pain!

This world will do all it can to get you down, defeated, dismayed – but remember Jesus is risen and one day you also will appear with Him in glory!

III. Conclusion

We’ve seen that some of the suffering we go through today is caused by our own sin, solar forces, Satan, spiritual. These are some reasons God allows suffering. Also, we found hope in the Word of God. We can be prepared, be positive, be patient, and be peaceful as we undergo great difficulties and pain in this life. Why? God is faithful. God is with you and is close to you through it all. Call upon Him. Trust Him.

I want to close with this powerful promise today from 1 Peter 5.10, “In his kindness God called you to his eternal glory by means of Jesus Christ. After you have suffered a little while, he will restore, support, and strengthen you, and he will place you on a firm foundation. All power is his forever and ever. Amen.” (Credit is given by Pastor David Cook to Dr. Steve Jackson of New Song Community for portions of this outline.)