

# WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

Text:

Introduction:

- I. “Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People?”
- II. Why do the **wrong people get hurt**? Why do the **wrong people die young**?
  - A. Why was **Ed Raymer** killed in the jungles of Vietnam?
  - B. Why was **Debbie Smith** killed in a car wreck when she was only in the seventh grade?
  - C. Why did **Tim Wadlington** die of cancer shortly before he was to begin his Freshman Year at Florida College?
  - D. Why did **Michelle Guiler** die in just a very few days of spinal meningitis?
  - E. Why was **Jeannine Sim’s** husband murdered in his own driveway in September 1991 and her house destroyed by a tornado Nov. 21, 1992?
  - F. Why was my **Uncle Marvin** murdered by his own hired hand?
  - G. Why was **Ryan Andrew Diestelkamp** born without a brain?
  - H. Why did **my Mama** get breast cancer?
  - I. Etc.
- III. **Where is God when it hurts???**
  - A. If God is minimally **fair**, let alone **loving** and **forgiving**, why is there **so much suffering** in this world of ours?
  - B. Why does a **righteous God** permit the **righteous** to **suffer**?
  - C. If He loves me, **why do I hurt so much** sometimes?
- IV. These are **questions** that man has wrestled with since the beginning of time
  - A. **Gideon** Jud. 6:11-13
  - B. **Jeremiah** Jer. 12:1-4
  - C. **Habakkuk** Hab. 1:1-4, 13
  - D. *Thomas Carlyle*: “The worst of God is that He does nothing!”
- V. The existence of suffering is a **philosophical problem** for both saint and sinner alike

- A. It is likely that no charge has been made with greater **frequency** or with more telling **force** against theism (belief in the existence of God) than that such is unable to adequately explain **the occurrence or the existence of evil**
- B. The Bible describes God as being:
1. **Omniscient** (all-knowing & all-wise) Psa. 139:1-6; Isa. 40:12-14; Jer. 10:12; Rom. 11:33-36
  2. **Omnipotent** (all-powerful) Job 42:2; Psa. 115:3; Jer. 32:17; Mt. 19:26; Rev. 19:6
  3. **Omnipresent** (all-present) Psa. 139:7-16; Pr. 15:3, 11; Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28
  4. **Omnibenevolent** (all good) Psa. 33:5; 100:5; 119:64, 68; 145:9; 1 Jn. 4:16
- C. But how can **this description** of God be **harmonized** with **the conditions** that we witness in the world around us?
- VI. This is one of the atheist's **fundamental arguments** against the existence of God
- A. Quotations:
1. *Epicurus* [Greek Philosopher (342?-270 BC)]: “God either **wishes** to take away evils and is **unable**; or he is **able** and **unwilling**; or he is neither **willing nor able**, or he is both **willing and able**. If he is **willing** and **unable**, he is **feeble**, which is not in accordance with the character of god; if he is **able** and **unwilling**, he is **envious**, which is equally at variance with god; if he is neither **willing nor able**, he is both **envious** and **feeble**, and therefore, not god; if he is both **willing and able**, which is alone suitable to god, from what source then are **evils**? or why does he not **remove** them?” (Bold emphasis added, quoted by Thomas B. Warren, *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?*, p. 4)
  2. *David Hume* [Scottish Philosopher (1711-1776)]: “Epicurus’s old questions are yet unanswered. Is he **willing** to prevent evil, but **not able**? Then he is **impotent**. Is he **able** but **not willing**? Then he is **malevolent**. Is he both **able and willing**? Whence then is **evil**?” (Bold emphasis added, quoted by Thomas B. Warren, *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?*, p. 4)
  3. *Oscar Wilde* [Irish Poet and Dramatist (1854-1900)]: “There is **enough suffering** in the streets of London to **disprove God**.” (Bold emphasis added, quoted in Jimmy Tuten, “The Problem Of Human Suffering,” *Guardian Of Truth*, June 21, 1984, 28:12:358)
  4. *Walter Coffman*: “The problem of suffering is crucially important because it shows **the God of popular theism does not exist**.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Faith of a Heretic*, n.p., quoted in Jimmy Tuten, “The Problem Of Human Suffering,” *Guardian Of Truth*, June 21, 1984, 28:12:374)
  5. *Wallace Mattson*: “Only **one argument** is offered as a positive reason for believing that **God does not exist**. It is that his existence is **incompatible** with **imperfections** in the world.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Existence of God*, p. 135, quoted in Jimmy Tuten, “The Problem Of Human Suffering,” *Guardian Of Truth*, June 21, 1984, 28:12:374)

6. *B. C. Johnson*: “A house catches on fire and a six-month-old baby is painfully burned to death. Could we possibly describe as **‘good’** any person who had the **power to save** this child and yet **refused to do so**? God undoubtedly has this power and yet...he has refused to help. **Can we call God ‘good’?**” (Bold emphasis added, *The Atheist Debater’s Handbook*, 1981, n.p., quoted in Brad T. Bromling, “Human Suffering And A Loving God,” *Reasoning from Revelation*, August 1990, 2:8:1)
- a. Several years ago, after a **young man’s fiancée was brutally murdered** only a few hours before they were to be married, he cried out in agony, when his friends tried to comfort him, **“There can’t be a God, there just can’t be”** (*Houston Post*, August 29, 1981, 6B, quoted in Mark Mayberry, “The Problem Of Suffering,” *Christianity Magazine*, Oct. 1985, 2:10:297)

B. Summary:

1. If God is **all-knowing, all-wise, all-good, all-present** and **all-powerful**, why should there be **any suffering** in a world which He created and over which He rules?
  - a. If God were **all-knowing** and **all-wise**, He should have known how to create a world where there is **no pain**
  - b. If He were **all-good**, He would have wanted to create a world where there is **no pain**
  - c. If He were **all-powerful**, He could have created a world where there is **no pain**
  - d. **BUT THERE IS PAIN!**
  - e. Therefore, (the atheist concludes) **there is no God**
2. In other words, the **existence of evil** cannot be logically harmonized with the **existence of a Supreme Being** possessing the qualities and characteristics of deity

VII. The problem of pain is an **enormous problem** because:

A. Suffering comes from so many **different sources**

1. The seeming capriciousness of **Nature**
  - a. **Hurricanes**
  - b. **Tornadoes**
  - c. **Earthquakes**
  - d. **Floods**
  - e. **Blizzards**
  - f. Etc.

2. **Man's inhumanity to man**

- a. **Murder**
- b. **Rape**
- c. **Assault**
- d. **Apathy**
- e. **War**
- f. Etc.

3. The suffering we **bring upon ourselves** because of our:

- a. **Ignorance**
- b. **Indifference**
- c. **Carelessness**
- d. **Thoughtlessness**
- e. **Lawlessness**
- f. Etc.

B. Suffering comes so many times for **no apparent rhyme or reason**

1. It comes to:

- a. The **righteous** and the **wicked**
- b. The **young** and the **old**
- c. The **weak** and the **strong**
- d. The **innocent** and the **guilty**
- e. The **good** and the **bad**
- f. Etc.

C. Suffering is so **widely distributed** throughout the human family

1. No experience is more **universally peculiar** to mankind than that of suffering (cf. Rom. 8:19-23)

- a. **Disappointments, distress, disease, disaster, and death** all seem to be an intrinsic part of our existence
- b. To one extent or another, suffering is **the common lot of all**
  - 1) **Rich man, poor man, beggar man, thief**

2) The **butcher**, the **baker**, the **candlestick maker**

c. None of us can avoid the **problem of pain**, because sooner or later, each of us will play **one of the roles** in the story of Job:

1) The **sufferer**

2) A **family member**

3) A **friend and comforter**

D. Suffering is **so great**

1. There is **so much pain** in this world of ours

a. The **known suffering** is nothing more than **the tip of the iceberg**

b. The **unknown suffering** is no doubt beyond our wildest imagination

1) We will never know how many **suffer in silence**

2. Even if on some grounds it might be granted that God would be justified in allowing **some suffering**, there is **so much suffering** that belief in an **omniscient, omnibenevolent, omnipotent, and omnipresent** God becomes **incredible** it seems

VIII. The problem of human suffering is a **universal problem**

IX. And the universal question is **WHY???**

X. I certainly don't have **all the answers**, but Paul tells us we are to **walk by faith**, not sight (2 Cor. 5:7), and **true faith** does not require an **immediate and complete understanding** of the workings of God (cf. Job 13:15)

XI. But I do believe that I can **say some things** that will be **helpful** to you, even though there will still be many **unanswered questions** when we conclude this study

XII. As we try to answer the question "**Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People?**," our basic approach will be that of "**faith seeking understanding**"

A. Given the elements of **Christian faith**, can **some sense** be made out of **suffering**

B. Given the facts of **revelation**, can we see any "**method in this madness**"?

XIII. To even attempt to explain the problem of pain, we must view suffering from the **perspective of eternity**

A. Psa. 73:3: <sup>3</sup> For I was **envious** of the boastful, When I saw the **prosperity** of the **wicked**.

B. Psa. 73:16-17: <sup>16</sup> When I thought **how to understand** this, It was **too painful** for me— <sup>17</sup> Until I went into the **sanctuary of God**; Then I **understood their end**.

- C. Psa. 73:25-26: <sup>25</sup> **Whom have I in heaven but You?** And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. <sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart fail; But **God is the strength** of my heart and my portion forever.
- D. **This Life Ain't All There Is!!**
- E. The skeptic distorts the problem of **human suffering** by ignoring the **eternal and spiritual dimensions** involved
- F. I'm convinced that when we **accept what God has revealed** in His word about the problem of human suffering, there is **every reason to believe in, love, and serve a God** whose ways are past tracing out (Rom. 11:33-36), even though many of our questions remain unanswered

**Body:**

**I. THE NATURE OF SIN Helps Us Explain The Problem Of Pain**

- A. The Bible teaches that **sin has its consequences** (Psa. 7:15-16; 9:15); Hos. 8:7; 10:13; Gal. 6:7-8
  - 1. Suffering is often a **consequence** of sin
  - 2. **Misdeeds** often cause **misfortune**
- B. In fact, all of the suffering in this world is the **indirect result** or consequence of sin
  - 1. All was bliss before **The Fall**
  - 2. But **suffering** entered into the world as a **consequence** of sin
  - 3. We live on a "**cursed earth**" because Adam and Eve sinned in the very beginning cf. Gen. 3:16-19; 5:29; Rom. 8:19-23
  - 4. **We die** as a result of sin:
    - a. **Spiritually** Rom. 5:12-16
    - b. **Physically** 1 Cor. 15:20-23
- C. Much of the suffering in this world is the **direct result** or consequence of sin
  - 1. More than half of the **traffic fatalities** in this country are the result of drinking and driving
  - 2. **Disease** and even **death** are often the result of **drunkenness** (cf. Pr. 23:29-35)
  - 3. Many of our **teenagers** are dying because of the evils associated with **drugs**
  - 4. **Venereal disease** is just one of the consequences of **immorality**
  - 5. People are dying of **AIDS** as a result of **homosexuality, immorality, or drug addiction**

6. Much of the **hunger** in third world countries is the result of **corrupt governments** and **false religion**
  7. Etc.
- D. But it is not true that all of the suffering in this world is the **direct result** or consequence of sin
1. The **wicked prosper**, despite their wickedness (Job 21:7-18; Psa. 73:1-22); Jer. 12:1-2
  2. The **righteous suffer**, not only despite their righteousness, but sometimes because of it Jn. 15:18-21
    - a. **Job** (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3)
    - b. **Joseph** (Gen. 37:12-28; 39:7-20)
    - c. **Jeremiah** (Jer. 11:21; 20:1-2; 38:6)
    - d. **Jesus** (Isa. 53:3-5, 7-9)
    - e. **James** (Acts 12:1-2)
  3. There is not necessarily any **direct connection** between suffering and sin
    - a. The **Galileans** Lk. 13:1-3
    - b. The **eighteen** Lk. 13:4-5
    - c. The **blind man** Jn. 9:1-3
    - d. **Paul** (Acts 28:3-5)
  4. Job's friends were wrong. Their proclamation: "**Piety pays and perversity punishes**" (Job 4:7-9) does not tell the whole story
    - a. While this proverb is **often true**, it is not **always true**
  5. **Crushed hopes, shattered dreams, and broken bodies** are not necessarily signs of **God's anger** or of **His punishment** for sin

## II. THE NATURE OF MAN Helps Us Explain The Problem Of Pain

- A. God created man for the purpose of:
  1. **Sonship** with Him
  2. **Brotherhood** with his fellowman
- B. When God chose to create man, He chose to make him a **free moral agent**, not a puppet or a robot

1. He gave man a **free will** (Gen. 2:16-17; 4:6-7; Ex. 32:26; Dt. 11:26-28; 30:15-20; Josh. 24:14-15; 1 Ki. 18:21; Isa. 1:18-20; 7:14-16; 66:4; Mt. 11:28-30; 13:14-15; 23:37; Jn. 5:39-40; 7:17; Heb. 11:24-25; Rev. 22:17)
2. Thus, when man chooses to love and serve God, it has **real significance**
3. **Mark Mayberry**: “Would you like to be **married** to a **toy doll**? There would never be any **arguments** or **conflict**, but there wouldn’t be any **true love** either! God obviously thought it was **worth the risk** to create us with a **free will**. We can choose to **obey** or **disobey**. When we **obey God**, we **glorify** Him more than **a puppet** ever could.” (Bold emphasis added, “The Problem of Suffering,” *Christianity Magazine*, Oct. 1985, 2:10:297)

C. But the **freedom to choose** necessarily implies **things to choose between**

1. The free moral agency of man inevitably means that man can choose **evil** as well as **good, right** as well as **wrong**, etc.
  - a. If a man is free to become a **son of God** and a **brother to his fellowman**, he is also free to refuse
  - b. If a man is truly free to choose **the good**, when the bad is equally possible, then he must be free to choose **the bad** as well
  - c. If we are not free to **choose evil**, then we are not free to **choose good** either
2. Thus, as free men, we are **free to act**:
  - a. **Carefully** or **carelessly**
  - b. **Wisely** or **unwisely**
  - c. **Fairly** or **unfairly**
  - d. **Selflessly** or **selfishly**
  - e. **Lovingly** or **unlovingly**
  - f. **Godly** or **ungodly**
  - g. Etc.

D. Not even God, having created man a **free moral agent**, can **keep man from exercising his freedom** without infringing upon his nature as a man

E. Thus, **when God gave man free will, He opened the door to suffering**. It could be no other way!

F. So, suffering is sometimes the price we must pay for **free will**

III. **THE NATURE OF SOCIETY Helps Us Explain The Problem Of Pain**

A. We sometimes suffer because we **live together** in a world with others who have **free will** also



1. *C. S. Lewis*: "...the **possibility of pain** is **inherent** in the very existence of a world where **souls can meet**. When souls become **wicked** they will certainly use this possibility to **hurt** one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for **four-fifths of the sufferings of men**. It is **men**, not God, who have produced **racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs**; it is by human **avarice** or human **stupidity**, not by the churlishness of nature that we have **poverty** and **overwork**." (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 89)
- B. When it was decided that men should **live together** upon the earth, it became inevitable that **the innocent would sometimes suffer**
1. We are affected by the **attitudes, actions, and associations** of other people
  2. We sometimes reap **the consequences of others' sins** Ex. 34:6-7
    - a. **Joseph** was sold into slavery, because his brothers chose to exercise their free will in a cruel way (Gen. 37:18-28), and he was imprisoned by Potiphar, because Potiphar's wife chose to lie (Gen. 39:7-20)
    - b. **David's child** died as a consequence of David's sin with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:14-23)
    - c. **Tamar** was raped by her half-brother Amnon, because Amnon chose to sin (2 Sam. 13:1-19)
    - d. **Thousands** of innocent people from 80 different countries, died in the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, because we all have free will and we live together upon the earth
    - e. This is why **millions** have suffered down through the ages.
  3. This is unfortunate and it may seem unfair, but it is the price we must pay for **freedom** and **fellowship**
- C. But consider **the alternative**
1. Living together with others brings many of the most **cherished blessings** known to man
  2. To **live alone** on some **desert island** and thus **avoid the sufferings** that come because of our **association** with other human beings would be a **terrible price** to pay
    - a. "It is **not good** that the man should be **alone**..." (Gen. 2:18)
    - b. You see, **solitude** brings **suffering**, too
- IV. **THE NATURE OF SATAN Helps Us Explain The Problem Of Pain**
- A. Satan will sometimes **use suffering** in an effort to **destroy our souls**
1. He was the one who **afflicted Job** (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7)

2. The woman with the “spirit of infirmity eighteen years” was **bound by Satan** (Lk. 13:11, 16)
  3. Peter describes the sick that Jesus healed as being “**oppressed of the devil**” (Acts 10:38)
  4. Paul’s thorn in the flesh was a “**messenger of Satan**” (2 Cor. 12:7)
  5. Satan was responsible for the **persecution** of the **radiant woman** and the **man child** (Rev. 12:1-6, 13-17)
- B. So, as we wrestle with the problem of human suffering, we must not forget that there is a **powerful, malevolent being** who sometimes **uses suffering** in an effort to destroy our souls
- C. But we should not **lose heart**, because while Satan is **powerful**, he is not **more powerful** than:
1. **God** (1 Jn. 4:4)
    - a. When Satan afflicted Job, he was only allowed to do what **God permitted** him to do (Job 1:12; 2:6)
  2. **Christ** (Jn. 14:30)
    - a. Jesus repeatedly demonstrated **His power over Satan** during His Personal Ministry by **casting out the demons** that afflicted innocent people, and He was able to do that only because He had first **bound the “strong man”** (Mt. 12:28-29)
    - b. And Jesus **defeated Satan** once and for all at **Calvary** Heb. 2:14-15
  3. **Christians**
    - a. James declares that if we **resist** him, he will **flee** from us (Jas. 4:7)
    - b. If we put on **the whole armor of God**, we can **stand** against the wiles of the devil (Eph. 6:10-18)
- D. And the Bible declares that:
1. God will not allow us to be **tempted beyond our ability** to bear (1 Cor. 10:13)
  2. Even the **suffering** that is **initiated by Satan** can be used by God to make us **better people** (2 Cor. 12:7-10)

## V. THE NATURE OF GOD Helps Us Explain The Problem Of Pain

- A. There are some **preliminary observations** that we need to make:
1. God is **infinite** in all of **His attributes** (wisdom, knowledge, power, justice, goodness, love, etc.)

- a. Thus, as **finite beings**, our judgment must necessarily differ from that of an infinite Being
  - b. We cannot even begin to **fathom His ways** Isa. 55:8-9; Rom. 11:33-36
  - c. Thus, what seems to us to be “**good**” may not be good in His eyes, and what seems to us to be “**evil**” may not be evil
2. God’s **characteristics** are **compatible** with one another
    - a. God’s **love** will not obliterate His justice
  3. God will do only what is **in harmony** with the **absolute perfection** of His nature cf. 2 Tim. 2:13
    - a. There are certain **self-imposed limitations** on God
      - 1) It is impossible for **God to lie** (Num. 23:19; Tit. 1:1-2; Heb. 6:18)
      - 2) God cannot be **tempted to sin** (Jas. 1:13)
      - 3) God cannot **condone evil** (Hab. 1:13)
      - 4) God cannot **deny Himself** (2 Tim. 2:13)
      - 5) Etc.
    - b. God’s **person** and His **practice** must be in **perfect agreement**
      - 1) **What He does** must be the reflection of **all that He is**
    - c. **Harmony** must prevail between His **character** and His **conduct**, His **attributes** and His **actions**
- B. With these observations in mind, may I suggest that the **characteristics of God** help to explain the problem of pain
1. God is **all-knowing** and **all-wise**
    - a. This means that He knows whatever it is **possible to know**
    - b. He knew that man would (or at least could) **fall into sin** before He ever created the universe 1 Pet. 1:18-20
    - c. And wanting to **save man** from the just **consequences** of his own sins, He knew that man would need an environment, a “**vale of soul-making**,” in which to develop **moral and spiritual character** and thus come back to Him
    - d. He knew how to **create just such a world**
  2. God is **all-powerful**
    - a. This means that He can do whatever it is **possible to do**

- 1) But there are **some things which simply cannot be done** at all -- they are **not subject to power**, not even to infinite power
- 2) God cannot:
  - a) Make a **four-sided triangle**
  - b) Make a **square circle**
  - c) Make a ball that is **black all over** and **white all over all** at the same time
  - d) Make something **be** and **not be** at the same time
  - e) Make a **rock** so large that he can't **lift** it
- 3) *C. S. Lewis*: "His Omnipotence means power to do all that is **intrinsically possible**, not to do the **intrinsically impossible**. You may attribute **miracles** to Him, but not **nonsense**. This is no limit to His power. If you choose to say 'God can **give a creature free will** and at the same time **withhold free will** from it,' you have not succeeded in saying *anything* about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words '**God can.**' ....It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of **two mutually exclusive alternatives**; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because **nonsense remains nonsense** even when we talk it about God." (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 28)
- 4) *Note*: We need to use **great caution** in defining those **intrinsic impossibilities** which even Omnipotence cannot perform
  - b. He will do only what is in **keeping with His character**
  - c. We tend to think that God should be **perfectly free to act** as we would want to act if we had **unlimited power**, but there are some things that even **God cannot do**
    - 1) No power, not even infinite power can create a being who is a **free moral agent** and who is yet beyond even the possibility of **sinning**, and sin often causes **suffering**
3. God is **just**
  - a. He demands that His creation (man) **be like Him** in moral character Mt. 5:48
  - b. He cannot **overlook man's disobedience**
    - 1) Although He **loves** the sinner, He **hates** the sin
  - c. He must **insist on what is right**

- d. To say that **man is under obligation** to do what God's law requires of him is also to say that God must **demand that performance** and must **impose penalty** when that demand is not met

1) If God lacked **hatred for evil**, He would lack **real love for good**

4. God is love

- a. As a loving Father, God seeks for our **ultimate good**, and He wants to **mold us** and **make us** into that which we ought to be

1) *C. S. Lewis*: "We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a **Divine work of art**, something that **God is making**, and therefore something with which He will **not be satisfied** until it has a **certain character**." (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 42)

- b. We could liken **God's love for man** to that of:

1) An artist's love for **his masterpiece**

a) *C. S. Lewis*: "One can imagine a sentient [conscious, ksk] picture, after being **rubbed** and **scraped** and **recommenced** for the tenth time, wishing that it were only a **thumb-nail sketch** whose making was over in a minute. In the same way, it is natural for us to wish that God had designed for us a **less glorious and less arduous destiny**; but then **we are wishing not for more love but for less**." (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 42-43)

2) A man's love for **his dog**

a) *C. S. Lewis*: "...man **interferes** with the dog and **makes it more lovable** than it was in mere nature. In its state of nature it has a **smell**, and **habits**, which frustrate man's love: he **washes** it, **housetrains** it, **teaches** it not to steal, and is so enabled to **love it completely**. To the puppy the whole proceeding would seem, if it were a theologian, to **cast grave doubts on the 'goodness' of man**: but the **full-grown** and **full-trained** dog, **larger, healthier, and longer-lived** than the wild dog, and admitted, as it were by Grace, to a whole world of affections, loyalties, interests, and comforts entirely beyond its animal destiny, would have no such doubts." (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, pp. 43-44)

3) A father's love for **his son**

a) The father uses his authority to **make the son** into the sort of human being he rightly wants him to be

4) A man's love for **a maiden**

a) Love demands **the perfecting** of the beloved

- b) When we fall in love with a woman, do we cease to care whether she is **clean** or **dirty**, **fair** or **foul**?
  - c) Love may, indeed, love the beloved when her **beauty is lost**: but not **because it is lost**
  - d) Love may **forgive all infirmities** and love still in spite of them: but Love cannot **cease to will their removal**
- c. True love must sometimes **inflict pain**
- 1) *C. S. Lewis*: “When Christianity says that God loves man, it means that **God loves man**: not that He has some ‘disinterested,’ because really indifferent, concern for our welfare, but that, in **awful and surprising truth**, we are the **objects of His love**. **You asked for a loving God: you have one**. The great spirit you so lightly invoked, the ‘**lord of terrible aspect**,’ is present: not a **senile benevolence** that **drowsily wishes you to be happy in your own way**, not the **cold philanthropy** of a conscientious magistrate, not the **care of a host** who feels responsible for the comfort of his guests, but the **consuming fire** Himself, the Love that made the worlds, **persistent** as the artist’s love for his work and **despotic** as a man’s love for a dog, **provident** and **venerable** as a father’s love for a child, **jealous, inexorable, exacting** as love between the sexes.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, pp. 46-47)
  - 2) *C. S. Lewis*: “The problem of **reconciling human suffering** with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a **trivial meaning** to the word ‘love,’ and look on things as if man were the centre of them. **Man is not the centre**. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, pp. 47-48)
  - 3) *C. S. Lewis*: “To ask that **God’s love** should be **content with us as we are** is to ask that **God should cease to be God**: because He is what He is, His love must, in the nature of things, be **impeded** and **repelled** by **certain stains** in our present character, and because He already loves us He must labour to **make us lovable**.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 48)
  - 4) *C. S. Lewis*: “...whether we like it or not, God intends to give us **what we need**, not what we **now think we want**.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 53)
  - 5) *C. S. Lewis*: “We may wish, indeed, that we were of so little account to God that He **left us alone** to follow our natural impulses -- that He would give over trying to train us into something so unlike our natural selves: but once again, **WE ARE ASKING NOT FOR MORE LOVE, BUT FOR LESS**.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 44)
- d. Because God loves us, sometimes **He inflicts pain**

- 1) It was true in **OT times** (Pr. 3:11-12)
  - a) He fed the Israelites **manna in the wilderness**, so they would learn to trust Him (Dt. 8:2-5)
  - b) He caused **the erring nation of Israel** to suffer in an effort to bring it to repentance (Amos 4:6-12)
- 2) It was true in **NT times** (Heb. 12:5-13; Rev. 3:19)
- 3) I know of no reason to believe that it's not **still true today**
  - a) If He did this in the **past**, why wouldn't He still do this **today**? Does He love us any less?
- e. But if God brings us **pain** to **chasten** us:
  - 1) It is certainly not because **He delights in doing so** (Lam. 3:31-33)
  - 2) It is because **He loves us**
  - 3) It is only because we **do not correct ourselves** 1 Cor. 11:31-32
  - 4) It is only to **help us**
    - a) To wake us up
    - b) To motivate us to reflect on our lives and our relationship to Him
    - c) To encourage us to repent and return to Him if we are straying
    - d) To mold us and make us into the image of His Son
    - e) Etc.

## VI. THE NATURE OF THE WORLD Helps Us Explain The Problem Of Pain

- A. The world that God created in the very beginning, He said was **“very good”** (Gen. 1:31), but that world has **changed**
  1. We live on a **“cursed earth”** as a consequence of **the Fall**
  2. Significant **climatic changes** have almost certainly occurred as a result of **the Flood**
- B. But it was never God's intention to provide man with a **hedonistic Paradise** but with an **environment** best suited for **man's moral and spiritual development**
  1. The presence of pleasure and the absence of pain are not the supreme ends of this world
- C. This world was designed to be man's **“vale of soul-making”**
- D. As a **“vale of soul-making,”** this world must possess **certain characteristics:**

1. It must provide for man's **basic physical needs** (i.e. air, water, food, shelter, clothing, etc.)
2. It must allow man to be a **free moral agent**
  - a. There must be a **certain "distance"** between man and God
    - 1) Man must not be **so close** to God that he is so **overwhelmed** by the immediate presence of God or by the evidence for His existence that it is impossible for him to avoid believing in God
    - 2) He must not be **so far away** from God that he **cannot be drawn to Him** by the existing evidence
  - b. The ideal environment would **reveal God to man** without **overwhelming him** so that he was not really free to choose
    - 1) Thus this world **veils** God to some and **reveals** God to others
3. It must be **law-abiding**
  - a. This world must be law-abiding to provide an environment for a **rational moral response** by man
  - b. **Moral experience** cannot occur in a **chaotic environment**, and if there is no lawful relation between action and reaction, then there is **chaos**
    - 1) *Stuart Hackett*: "**Moral experience** depends...upon **rationality**, since morality is, in the final analysis, the rational conduct of life: but the **rational conduct of life** would be **impossible** in a world not sustained by **regular laws** and explicable in causal terms." (Bold emphasis added, quoted by Thomas B. Warren, *Have Atheists Proved There Is No God?*, p. 53)
  - c. The fact that the **laws of Nature** are so precise and so reliable is one of the things that makes this world **livable**
  - d. For this to be an **orderly universe**, the laws of Nature must be **unchanging**
    - 1) There can be **no exceptions** for nice people
    - 2) How could we **live in this world** if there were?
  - e. We sometimes suffer because **law has been broken somewhere**, by someone, at sometime
  - f. A **law-abiding universe** presents us with **certain problems**, but a **nonlaw-abiding universe** would present us with **even more**
4. It must allow man to **learn the things** that he most needs to learn
  - a. He needs to learn that life is both **certain** and **uncertain**
    - 1) It is certain that this world is not our ultimate and **permanent home**



- 2) It is uncertain in that we do not know when our **period of probation** here will end
  - a) This **ignorance** should serve to **stimulate** every man to strive to be in a **right relationship** with God at all times
- b. He needs to learn that life is both **significant** and **insignificant**
  - 1) It is significant in that it is man's **one and only probationary period** in which to decide to serve God cf. 2 Cor. 5:10; Heb. 9:27
  - 2) It is insignificant when compared with **the issues of eternity**
    - a) The rewards in this life cannot compare with the rewards in the life to come
    - b) The suffering in this life cannot compare with the suffering in a devil's hell
    - c) How long I live is not nearly as important as how I live
    - d) What happens to my body is not as important as what happens to my soul
5. It must be a challenging environment
  - a. Man needs such an environment in order to be able to **develop morally and spiritually**
6. Etc.
- E. *C. S. Lewis*: "Perhaps this is not the '**best of all possible**' universes, but the **only possible one.**" (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 35)

## VII. THE NATURE OF THE CASE Helps Us Explain The Problem Of Pain

- A. This means that **none of these factors alone** can satisfactorily explain the problem of human suffering; it is only when we **consider all of these factors interacting with one another** that we can begin to make, at least, some sense out of suffering
- B. It is a consideration of the **various factors** involved that helps to answer some of the **objections** and/or **questions** that are often raised
  1. Objection: "Why doesn't **God intervene** on behalf of His people to shield them from suffering?"
    - a. Certain **assumptions** are implicit in such a question
      - 1) There is **a God to intervene** (otherwise the question would be meaningless)
      - 2) God has **an interest in man** (otherwise His intervention would not be expected)

- 3) God has **the ability to intervene** and end the problems of universal and personal suffering
  - 4) God **ought to intervene**
- b. Well, God can and does **intervene**, at times, on behalf of His people
- 1) The **promises** of God and the **prayers** of the saints presuppose the intervention of God through His **providence**
- c. But this is not to say that God should **automatically shield His servants** from suffering
- 1) His failure to act **when, where, and how** we think He should is not an indication of **His malevolence**
    - a) Job
    - b) Joseph Gen. 45:5, 7-9; 50:19-20
    - c) Jesus Mt. 27:41-43
      - 1] The implication: Deliverance would demonstrate God's devotion and Christ's desirability
      - 2] The problem: God could not save man from sin and spare His Son from suffering
      - 3] The truth: The people were wrong
  - 2) There may be several very **good reasons** as to why God does not or cannot **spare His people** from suffering
- d. If God promised **immunity from suffering** to all those who follow Him, many would serve Him out of **convenience** and not **conviction**
- 1) Men would be tempted to become "**sons of God**" solely to **avoid pain**
  - 2) They would "**follow God**" as a kind of **cosmic insurance policy**
  - 3) They would be foolish not to, if they were automatically protected from **disappointments, distress, disease, disaster, and death**
- e. How would God **spare His servants** from all suffering since He has given man **free will**?
- 1) *C. S. Lewis*: "It would, no doubt, have been possible for God to **remove by miracle the results of the first sin** committed by a human being; but this would not have been much good unless He was prepared to **remove the results of the second sin**, and of **the third**, and so on forever. If the **miracles ceased**, then sooner or later we might have reached our **present lamentable situation**: if they did not, then a world, thus continually **underpropped** and **corrected** by Divine

interference, would have been a world in which **nothing important ever depended on human choice**, and in which **choice itself would soon cease** from the certainty that one of the apparent alternatives before you would lead to no results and was therefore not really an alternative.” (Bold emphasis added, *The Problem Of Pain*, p. 71)

- f. The Bible teaches that **suffering has a part to play** in developing **moral and spiritual character** Psa. 119:67, 71
2. Objection: “What possible reason could there be for **natural disasters**?”
- a. I don’t have a **fully satisfactory answer**. I doubt that anyone does
  - b. This objection is based on the idea that God should “**pull the thorn from the paw of a limping world**”
    - 1) But **correcting the “ills” of the world** is not as simple as some would have us believe. It would be much more like a **surgical operation** in which the **entire nervous system** is removed than the **extraction of a single thorn** from a single paw
    - 2) It is impossible to “**extract**” a **single “evil”** from the totality of the universe without **affecting the other elements** involved
  - c. May I suggest that even “**natural disasters**” may have a part to play in soul-making
    - 1) They remind us that **life is unpredictable** (Jas. 4:13-17)
    - 2) They remind us that **the most important things in life are not things** (Lk. 12:15)
    - 3) They remind us of **our own frailty and weakness** (Psa. 39:4)
    - 4) They remind us that **God is the only refuge in a crisis** (Psa. 46:1)
    - 5) The **unpredictability** with which they strike should cause every man to carefully **consider his relationship to God**
3. Objection: “If the **immutable laws of Nature** contribute to the problem of human suffering, why must they be **constant** or why didn’t God give us some **different laws** to govern the universe?”
- a. If the laws of Nature were not **constant**, life would be **impossible** in such a **chaotic environment**
  - b. If the universe was governed by **different laws**, they would have to be **very strange laws** indeed. And such would result in just a **different kind of chaos**
    - 1) Various items in the world would be forced to have at one time a **certain property** and not to have that property at another time

- a) If a man were **dying of thirst**, water would have to have the properties which it now has, but if he were **about to drown**, it would have to take on a different set of properties
4. **Objection:** “If God knows that His **silence**, His **delay**, and His **inaction weaken the faith** of many, why doesn’t He **speak** or **act** and **vindicate** Himself?”
- a. God cannot act **contrary to His nature** cf. 2 Tim. 2:13
- b. He has **spoken**
- 1) Although God has not **revealed all things**, He has **revealed some very important things** about the problem of human suffering cf. Dt. 29:29
- a) We certainly know more than Job did
- 2) He has **assured us of His love** once and for all time at **Calvary** Rom. 8:31-39
- a) *Jim McGuigan:* “This man [Paul, ksk], in essence, has told us: ‘If I had **children** and they were **starving to death**, bellies distended, eyes sunken, too weak to cry, but able yet to beg with their eyes for food, of me their father who could provide nothing; if that were the case, **I’d remain unconvinced that God didn’t love me**. If I had a **wife raped** and humiliated before my very eyes; and her cries for help were going up endlessly to her husband who could only watch in frustration. **This wouldn’t convince me that God doesn’t love me**. And if they were **torturing me** until I was on the verge of insanity; and if I pleaded with blood-red earnestness to God to bring this all to a halt, and prayed to no avail -- **this wouldn’t convince me that God doesn’t love me!**” (Bold emphasis added, *The Book Of Romans*, pp. 260-261)
- b) When the problem of human suffering causes us to **doubt the love of God**, we need to **look back to the barren heights of Golgotha** when God said: **“I DO love you. I will ALWAYS love you. TRUST ME!”**

**Conclusion:**

- I. The mystery of human suffering is beyond our **complete comprehension**
- A. We are finite creatures
- B. God has not revealed all the answers (Dt. 29:29)
- C. When all is said and done, there are questions we still can’t answer -- especially questions like:
1. Why **ME**?
2. Why **THIS**?

3. Why **NOW**?

II. But we can be assured that there is **One who knows the answers**

- A. [Read “The Persian Rug”]
- B. [Read “The Divine Weaver”]
- C. *George A Barton*: “One **goes on** then with a **happy heart**, not because **life’s problems are solved**, but because he **lives in the companionship** of One who **knows the solution.**” (Bold emphasis added, Commentary of the Book of Job, p. 13)

III. God does know about **our sorrow** and **our suffering**, and **He cares** (Lk. 12:6-7; Rev. 2:2, 9, 13)

- A. [Read “Does Jesus Care?” (HFW, #466, SS, #485)]
- B. He has **a bottle** for our tears Psa. 56:8
- C. We are **inscribed** on the palms of His hands (Isa. 49:14-16)

IV. One of these days, our questions will be answered

- A. [Read “Some Time We’ll Understand,” (SS, #472)]

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	<b>Date</b>	<b>Church</b>	<b>City &amp; State</b>
1.	08/26/84	Crandall	Crandall, IN
2.	01/12/86	Ray’s Branch	Bowling Green, KY
3.	11/29/92	Wallisville Rd.	Highlands, TX
4.	04/21/96	Bratislava	Bratislava, Slovakia
5.	09/07/97	Galena	Galena, IN
6.	09/14/97	Brookmead	Johnson City, TN
7.	10/14/01	Beulaville	Beulaville, NC
8.	11/11/01	Steinhatchee	Steinhatchee, FL
9.	12/07/16 (Wed. 7:00 p.m.)	East Columbus	Columbus, MS
10.	12/14/16 (Wed. 7:00 p.m.)		
11.			

**BEFORE YOU CAN DRY ANOTHER'S TEARS --  
YOU TOO MUST WEEP!**

Let me not live a life that's free  
From "the things" that draw me close to Thee --  
For how can I ever hope to heal  
The wounds of others I do not feel --  
If my eyes are dry and I never weep,  
How do I know when the hurt is deep --  
If my heart is cold and it never bleeds,  
How can I tell what my brother needs --  
For when ears are deaf to the beggar's plea  
And we close our eyes and refuse to see,  
And we steel our hearts and harden our mind,  
And we count it a weakness whenever we're kind,  
We are no longer following the Father's way  
Or seeking His guidance from day to day --  
For, without "crosses to carry" and "burdens to bear,"  
We dance through a life that is frothy and fair,  
And "Chasing the rainbow" we have no desire  
For "roads that are rough" and "realms that are higher" --  
So spare me no heartache or sorrow, dear Lord,  
For the heart that is hurt reaps the richest reward,  
And God enters the heart that is broken with sorrow  
As He opens the door to a brighter tomorrow,  
For only through tears can we recognize  
The suffering that lies in another's eyes.

--Helen Steiner Rice

## THE DIVINE WEAVER

My life is but a weaving  
Between my Lord and me;  
I cannot choose the colours  
He worketh steadily.

Ofttimes He weaveth sorrow  
And I in foolish pride,  
Forget that He seeth the upper,  
And I the under side.

Not till the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly,  
Shall God unroll the canvas  
And explain the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful  
In the Weaver's skillful hand,  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.

--Author unknown (Quoted by Herbert Lockyear, *Dark Threads the Weaver Needs*, p. 37)

## WE REST IN HIS PERFECTION

I do not know what next may come  
    Across my pilgrim way;  
I do not know tomorrow's road,  
    Nor see beyond today.  
But this I know -- my Saviour knows  
    The path I cannot see;  
And I can trust His wounded hand  
    To guide and care for me.

I do not know what may befall,  
    Of sunshine or of rain,  
I do not know what may be mine,  
    Of pleasure and of pain;  
But this I know -- my Saviour knows,  
    And whatso'er it be,  
Still I can trust His love to give  
    What will be best for me.

I do not know what may await,  
    Or what the morrow brings:  
But with the glad salute of faith,  
    I hail its opening wings;  
For this I know -- that in my Lord  
    Shall all my needs be met,  
And I can trust the Heart of Him  
    Who has not failed me yet.

--E. Margaret Clarkson (Quoted by Herbert Lockyear, *Dark Threads The Weaver Needs*, p. 51)



## THERE'S NOT A GRIEF, HOWEVER LIGHT

There's not a grief, however light,  
Too light for sympathy;  
There's not a care, however slight,  
Too slight to bring to thee.

Thou who hast trod the thorny road  
Wilt share each small distress;  
For he who bore the greater load  
Will not refuse the less.

There's not a secret sigh we breathe  
But meets thine ear divine,  
And every cross grows light beneath  
The shadow, Lord, of thine.

Life's woes without, sin's strife within,  
The heart would overflow,  
But for that love which died for sin,  
That love which wept with woe.

--Jane Crewdson (Quoted by Herbert Lockyear, *Dark Thread The Weaver Needs*, p. 29)

## THE PERSIAN RUG

When they are making a Persian rug, they put it up vertically on a frame, and little boys, sitting at various levels, work on the wrong side of it. The artist stands on the right side of the rug, the side on which people will tread, and shouts his instructions to the boys on the other side. Sometimes a boy will make a mistake in the rug....”What happens when a boy makes a mistake?” “Quite often the artist does not make the little boy take out the wrong color. If he is a great enough artist, he weaves the mistake into the pattern.”....You and I are working on the wrong side of the rug. We cannot watch the pattern developing. I know I put in the wrong color very often. I put in black when God meant red, and yellow when He meant white; and the other workers with whom I make my rug make mistakes, too. Sometimes I am tempted to say, “Is there *Anybody* on the other side of the rug; am I just left to make a mess of my life alone? Is there *Anybody* there?” Then, through the insight which comes back with returning faith, I realize that instead of making me undo it all or letting my life’s purpose be ruined, God puts more in. I wonder if sometimes He alters the pattern? It isn’t what it might have been; but because He is such a great artist I haven’t spoiled everything. So, at the end, when He calls me down off my plank and takes me round to the other side, I shall see that just because He is such a great Artist, no mistakes of mine can utterly spoil His plan. If only I will work with Him, “simply trusting every day,” I think one day I shall find my mistakes and my calamities and my distress and my failures and all my pain, woven into the pattern, and I shall say, “It is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.” Some such faith I must have to believe in a God of love who puts us into a world where things can go so utterly wrong.

--Leslie D. Weatherhead, *Why Do Men Suffer?*, pp. 134-135

## THE MUSIC OF A REST

“There is no music in a rest” but there is the making of music in it. In our whole life-melody the music is broken off here and there by rests and we foolishly think we have come to the end of the theme. God sends a time of forced leisure, sickness, disappointed plans, frustrated efforts, and makes a sudden pause in the choral hymn of our loves; and we lament that our voices must be silent, and our part missing in the music which ever goes up to the ear of the Creator. How does the musician read the rest? See him beat the time with unvarying count, and catch up the next note true and steady, as if no breaking place had come between.

Not without design does God write the music of our lives. Be it ours to learn the tune, and not to be dismayed at the rests. They are not to be slurred over, not to be omitted, not to destroy the melody, not to change the keynote. If we look up, God Himself will beat the time for us. With the eye on Him, we shall strike the next note full and clear. If we sadly say to ourselves, there is no music in a rest, let us not forget there is the making of music in it. The making of music is often a slow and painful process in this life. How patiently God works to teach. How long He waits for us to learn the lesson.

--John Ruskin (Quoted by Herbert Lockyear, *Dark Threads The Weaver Needs*, pp. 122-123)