

## **WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL AND SUFFERING?**

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**Apologetics 2025**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. In 2004, a 9.1 magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Indonesia. This triggered a tsunami with waves as high as 100 feet. The tsunami hit the coasts of India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and other countries. It killed 250,000 people, and displaced millions.
2. If there is a God, and if He is all-powerful and loving, then why did He allow that?
3. This is called the problem of evil. It's a problem because it causes people to doubt God's love, His power, and even His existence.
4. Author Philip Yancey called it the problem that won't go away.
5. The Scottish philosopher **David Hume** put articulated the argument like this: "Is God 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? From whence then is evil?" *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Richard Popkin (Hackett, 1980); p. 63.
6. This is a giant of a problem.
7. In fact, theologian **John Stott** said, "The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation."
8. How can we take on a giant? What did David do? He heard there was a giant who was calling into question God's existence and power. He didn't run away. He went to the creek and chose five smooth stones and put them in his pouch, and went out to meet the giant.
9. **1 Samuel 17:49** David put his hand in the bag, took out a stone, slung it, and hit the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown to the ground.
10. Today I want to give you five stones that you can use to kill the giant of evil and suffering.
11. The big word for this is theodicy. A theodicy is an attempt to defend belief in a perfectly good, all-powerful God in spite of the presence of evil in the world.

### **II. FIVE STONES TO KILL THE GIANT OF EVIL AND SUFFERING**

1. **Evil and suffering don't disprove God's existence.**
  - i. Skeptics say, "I don't see a good reason for God to allow evil and suffering. Therefore, God must not exist."
  - ii. But there is a big problem with this argument.
  - iii. Just because you don't see a good reason for God to allow for evil and suffering doesn't mean there isn't one. For example, let's say you take your family camping, and you are looking for your little girl. If you look in the tent and don't see her, then it's reasonable conclude that she isn't in the tent. But what if you are looking for fleas. If you look inside your tent and

don't see any fleas, is it reasonable to conclude that there aren't any there? No. Because fleas are tiny and very hard to see. It's possible that there are fleas in the tent even if you don't see any. In the same way, it is possible that God has a good reason to allow for evil and suffering even if you don't see it.

- iv. Most people are able to look back at some of the hard times in their lives and see a good reason for it – how it was for the best. Why couldn't it be possible that from God's vantage point, there are good reasons for all the hard times in our lives?
- v. **Romans 11:33** Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!
- vi. This verse points to two important truths about God.
  - 1. God is all-knowing.
    - a. "Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God!"
    - b. His knowledge is complete, comprehensive, and perfect. He knows everything about everything – the past, the present, and the future.
    - c. By contrast, our wisdom and knowledge and understanding are very limited.
  - 2. God is incomprehensible.
    - a. "How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways!"
    - b. We can understand God enough to have a relationship with Him, but we can't understand God fully.
- vii. Since God is at the same time all-knowing and incomprehensible, then it is possible that He has a good reason for allowing evil and suffering and we just can't see it.
- viii. Philosopher Peter Kreeft uses the analogy of a bear caught in a trap to explain this. Let's say that a bear is caught in a trap and you want to free it. First, you shoot it with a bunch of tranquilizers. Second, once it is safely sedated, you have to push the bear's leg deeper into the trap in order to release the tension on the spring of the trap to release the leg. From the bear's vantage point, you are evil and cruel. But do you want to hurt the bear? No. The bear can't understand why the human is doing what he's doing because he isn't smart enough; he's just a bear. He can't see from the human's perspective. In the same way, isn't it possible that God has a good reason for evil and suffering, but we can't understand because we're just human? We're not smart enough. We can't see from God's perspective.

- ix. Not only do evil and suffering not disprove God's existence, but they actually point to His existence. How so?
- x. If something is evil, then that means there is such a thing as good. If good and evil exist, then that means there is a moral law. And if there is a moral law, then there must be a moral law giver.
- xi. As I said in a previous sermon, this realization is what led C.S. Lewis out of atheism and into Christianity. He noticed that there was a lot of evil and cruelty and injustice in the world, and so he questioned God's existence. But then he asked himself, "Where did I get this idea of justice?" On the one hand, he could just give up on the idea of justice and say that objective morality doesn't exist. But if he did that, he would undermine his primary argument against God – how could God allow evil? On the other hand, if he admitted that morality is objective, that good and evil are real, then that means there has to be a moral law giver – God. Eventually he could see that evil and suffering are a more powerful argument for God's existence than against.

## 2. God didn't cause evil and suffering.

- i. The Bible doesn't give us a complete answer as to why God allows evil and suffering, but it does tell us where evil and suffering originate.
- ii. When God created the first humans there was no evil and suffering.
- iii. But Adam and Eve sinned against God, evil and suffering entered the picture. This event is called the fall. From that moment on, all human beings were born in sin, inclined to sin, unable to not sin.
- iv. **Romans 5:12** Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.
- v. As well, God put a curse on all of creation.
- vi. **Romans 8:20** "For the creation was subjected to futility"
- vii. The fall resulted in the birth of two kinds of evil:
  - 1. Moral evil:
    - a. Moral evil occurs when people break God's laws, such as murder, adultery, lying, and stealing.
  - 2. Natural evil:
    - a. Natural evil includes natural disasters like forest fires, earthquakes, tornadoes, and hurricanes.
- viii. Both natural and moral evil result in human suffering. But according to one estimate, 95% of the suffering in the world is the result of moral evil. In other words, while it is hard to understand why God would allow evil and suffering. But 95% of it would disappear if people would just stop sinning.
- ix. The next question is, "Why does God allow people to sin?" The answer is that God created people to have a love relationship with Him. Love

requires free will, and if people are free to love, they are also free to ignore and even hate God. When people chose to sin against God, it caused evil and suffering to enter the world.

- x. You might ask, “Couldn’t God have created people with the ability to love Him, but without the ability to sin?” It is true that God is all-powerful, but that doesn’t mean that God can do anything. The Bible says there are several things God can’t do. God can’t lie (Titus 1:2). He can’t be tempted or tempt others to sin (James 1:13). He can’t stop being God or cease to exist. He can’t make mistakes. And He can’t make contradictions. He can’t make  $1+1=3$ , or make a square circle. And He can’t give people free will and eliminate the possibility of sin. A world without sin is a world without free will, and that means a world without love and relationships.
- xi. So God did not cause sin. Humans did.

### 3. God allows suffering for the greater good.

- i. At this point you might say, “Okay. Evil and suffering don’t disprove God’s existence. And God didn’t cause evil and suffering. But couldn’t He intervene and prevent the suffering in the world?”
- ii. God allows suffering for the greater good. There are good things that God wants to accomplish that require suffering. I’ll give you two examples.
  - iii. First, God uses suffering to turn people to Himself.
    - 1. Sometimes the only way to get a person’s attention is through suffering.
    - 2. **Philosopher Peter Kreeft** “What is the meaning and purpose of suffering in history? The meaning and purpose of suffering in history is that it leads to repentance. Only after suffering, only after disaster did Israel, do nations, do individuals turn back to God.”
    - 3. **C. S. Lewis** said, “God whispers to us in our pleasure. He speaks to us in our conscious. But He shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God’s megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”
    - 4. This is my mom’s story. She was a single mother, far from God, and not interested in spiritual things. But in a freak accident her two-year-old daughter was killed. That experience broke her, and opened her heart to spiritual things, and she became a Christian.
    - 5. How else does God use suffering for good?
  - iv. Second, God uses suffering to grow our character.
    - 1. God’s purpose for your life is not your comfort, but your character development. And character development requires pain.
    - 2. This shouldn’t be hard to understand. Teachers, parents, coaches, physical therapists, etc. all know that pain is required for people to grow and develop.

3. When I played basketball practice was often very painful. The coach would make us run until we dropped. One particular running drill was called a suicide. But it was good because it prepared us to compete and win come game time.
4. If you want to get in physical shape you have to get in the gym and hit the weights and get on the treadmill. It's a painful process, but if you stick with the process you will feel and look better.
5. As a parent it's tempting to remove all pain and hardship from my kids' lives. But I know that's not good for them. Without pain and hardship, they will never grow to be strong, virtuous, and happy adults.
6. It's the same with you. God uses suffering to grow your character.
7. **Romans 5:3-4** "And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope."
8. **Frank Turek and Normal Geisler** "If you think about it, you'll find that virtually every valuable lesson you've ever learned resulted from some hardship in your life. In most cases, bad fortune teaches while good fortune deceives. In fact, you'll not only learn lessons from suffering, but it's practically the only way you can develop virtues... You can't develop courage unless there is danger. You can't develop perseverance unless you have obstacles in your way. You won't learn how to be a servant unless there's someone to serve. And compassion would never be summoned if there were never anyone in pain or in need." (*I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*, 391)
- v. Suffering is necessary to draw us to God and to develop our character.
- vi. If we can see how suffering is necessary in some instances, then it is possible that all the suffering that God allows is necessary for a greater good, a greater purpose.

#### 4. One day God will end all evil and suffering.

- i. Some may ask, "Why didn't God create a world without evil and suffering?" He did. Originally the earth was a perfect paradise. But human beings ruined it and all of creation was broken. It's not His fault.
- ii. But the next question is, "So, why doesn't He fix everything and make it perfect again?" He will. That's His plan.
- iii. **Revelation 21:1, 4** "1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away."

- iv. The Bible teaches that one day Jesus is going to come back, and when He does the world as it is will be burned up and destroyed, and a new earth will be created that will be perfect. And that's where Christians will spend eternity with God.
- v. "Why doesn't He do it now?" One reason is that God is merciful, and He is giving people time to repent.
- vi. **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance.
- vii. When Jesus comes back, He is going to judge everyone (2 Cor 5:10). Those who believe in Jesus will go to heaven, and those who don't will go to hell. So, He hasn't come back yet because He wants to give people as much time as possible to repent.
- viii. In other words, this is not the end of the story. Criticizing God for how He has handled evil and suffering is like reading halfway through a novel and criticizing the author for not resolving the plot (Lee Strobel, *Case for Faith*). History is not over. God is not finished. He has a plan to resolve it all.

#### **5. God wants to help you endure suffering.**

- i. Let's do a quick review. The existence of evil and suffering a giant of a problem. So far we've looked at four smooth stones that can take down this giant.
- ii. First, evil and suffering don't disprove God's existence, because just because you can't see a reason why God would allow evil and suffering doesn't mean there isn't one. As well, evil and suffering actually point to God's existence, because if evil exists, then good exists, and if good and evil exist there must be a moral law, and therefore a moral law giver – God.
- iii. Second, God didn't cause evil and suffering. Does God allow evil and suffering? Yes. But He didn't cause it. Evil and suffering in the world are the result of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden. The only way God could have prevented evil and suffering would have been to create humans without free will, but that would eliminate the possibility of love and relationships.
- iv. Third, God uses suffering for good. Even though God didn't cause evil and suffering, He does allow it for good. For example, He uses suffering to draw unbelievers to Himself, and to help believers grow in Christlike character.
- v. Fourth, one day God will end all evil and suffering. One day God will bring all evildoers to justice and then recreate a new heaven and earth with no evil and suffering.
- vi. Now let's look at one final stone to kill the giant problem of evil and suffering: God wants to help you endure suffering.

- vii. God doesn't just have a plan to end evil and suffering in the distant future, He wants to help you with your suffering right now. How? God wants to help you with your suffering in seven ways.

**1. Presence.**

- a. **Psalm 23:4** Even when I go through the darkest valley, I fear no danger, for you are with me.
- b. When you become a Christian, God's Spirit goes to live inside of you, and He never leaves.
- c. That means that whatever you go through, you are not alone. God is with you. He sees and knows exactly what you are facing.

**2. Love.**

- a. **1 Peter 5:7** Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you.
- b. When you suffer you never have to ask, "Doesn't God care about what happens to me?" Absolutely He does.
- c. The Bible says that God even watches over the sparrows, and not one sparrow falls to the ground without His consent. And you are worth more than many sparrows (Mt 10:29-31). If He cares about the sparrows, then He cares about you.
- d. You are important to God. You matter to Him.
- e. Think about a parent. Parents don't want their children suffer. When your child suffers, you suffer too. You are God's child. He doesn't want you to suffer. And when you suffer, He suffers too.
- f. Just because God is allowing you to suffer doesn't mean He doesn't care. It just means that He has a plan for your suffering that you don't understand.

**3. Prayer.**

- a. **Hebrews 4:16** Therefore, let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need.
- b. One of the worst things is when you go through a hard time on the weekend. The doctor's office is closed. The car mechanic is closed. The A/C repairman is off. God is never off. And He has given you a direct line of communication to Him called 24/7 called prayer.
- c. And in some instances, His desire is intervene in your situation; to rescue and deliver you. All you have to do is pray.

**4. Comfort.**

- a. **2 Corinthians 1:3** "he comforts us in all our affliction"

- b. God doesn't always remove us from suffering, but He promises to always comfort us in affliction.
- c. The word "comfort" means to come alongside someone and give them strength and courage so that they can cope with their affliction.
- d. When you suffer, God gives you joy and peace. He reminds you that He loves you. He reminds you of all His promises for you. He wraps His arms around you.

**5. Assurance.**

- a. **Romans 8:28** We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.
- b. God will allow you to suffer. But here's the best promise in the Bible. God promises to use your suffering for your good. All your suffering.
- c. You might have doubts. "There's no way that God can use this for my good." Your God is too small. Let me remind you that one time God took the worst thing that ever happened and turned it into the best thing that ever happened. He took the murder of God's own Son, and turned it into the salvation of mankind. If God can turn the worst into the best, then He can use your suffering for your good.

**6. Hope.**

- a. **Romans 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.
- b. You will have to suffer in this life. But your suffering, no matter how bad it is, cannot compare with the glory of heaven.
- c. Hope is an essential Christian concept. It is not optimism, or wishful thinking. It is not like saying, "I hope it doesn't rain tomorrow." Biblical hope is the confident expectation that God will fulfill His promises. And the greatest Biblical promise is heaven. That one day we will die and our suffering will end, and we will spend eternity in heaven with God.

**7. Purpose.**

- a. **James 1:27** Pure and undefiled religion before God the Father is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained from the world.
- b. Not only does God want to help you in your suffering, but He has a purpose for you. He wants to work through you to help others who are suffering. He wants you to be like the Good



Samaritan; when you see someone suffering, don't walk past them; don't turn away; don't shut your eyes; be the body of Christ. Be His hands, His feet, His mouthpiece and help.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

1. The problem of evil and suffering is indeed a giant. Evil and suffering are real, and they are terrible.
2. And the Bible doesn't answer all of our questions. There are no easy answers when someone is in the darkest valley of their life. The Bible doesn't tell us everything we want to know about suffering.
3. But it does tell us enough to satisfy us until we get to heaven.
4. And while God doesn't give us all the answers to our questions, He does give us Himself. He offers His help, His presence, His love, His help in whatever we face.
5. In other words, after years of walking with Christ and facing many hard times myself, this is what I've learned about evil and suffering: I don't know why, but I know God, and He is good. He proved that by sending Christ to suffer for our sins. God didn't just allow evil and suffering. He chose to enter into our suffering to rescue us. That's a good God.