

## Good from Evil

Great stories of love, unselfishness, and sacrifice are almost never the result of ideal circumstances or played out against the backdrop of an ideal setting. Rather, such inspiring stories come out of circumstances that are difficult, life-threatening, horrendous, or in some other way far from ideal.

Those of us who believe in God believe that He is always about the business of using bad for good. *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”* (Romans 8:28)

In my 39 years of ministry as a pastor I can't recall a single person who turned to God or started attending church because of some good fortune such as winning the lottery, coming into an inheritance, getting a great job, or going a year with no major medical issues. But I have seen many people draw near to God or start attending church for the first time, or for the first time in a long time, because of some difficulty or tragedy that came into their lives. Tim Keller stated in a Fox TV network interview, “Suffering helps you reorder your loves.” The great Christian thinker C. S. Lewis stated that God whispers to us through our pleasure and shouts to us through our pain.

John Ortberg wrote, “If you ask people who don't believe in God why they don't, the number one reason will be suffering. If you ask people who believe in God when they grew most spiritually, the number one answer will be suffering.” (*Soul Keeping*, E-book loc. 2658)

Pain and suffering is a part of the human condition, but God has His reasons for allowing it, reasons that we cannot fully comprehend. Our struggles in this fallen and broken world can make us bitter or better. They can drive us from God or to God. We often can't control what happens to us, but we can control how we respond to it. How we respond to pain and suffering is a choice that each of us has to make.

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**FAITH  
FILES**

## Reasons Enough for Belief

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**#006**



**The Problem  
of  
Pain**

**David J. Claassen**

## Faith Files

Series: *Reasons Enough for Belief*

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#006

### The Problem of Pain

If God exists, why doesn't He get rid of all pain and suffering? He certainly could perform miracle after miracle, nipping each eruption of pain, suffering, and evil in the bud. Or He could do a major miracle and get rid of it all at one fell swoop.

If God is not all-loving or is not all-powerful, it stands to reason there's pain and suffering; He either doesn't care or can't do anything about it if He does care. But if God is all-loving and all-powerful, why is this such a hurting world? That's the traditional way of expressing the problem of pain and suffering.

The psalmist put it this way in his prayer to God: *"Why do you hide your face and forget our misery and oppression?"* (Psalm 44:23-24) We struggle to believe in an all-loving and all-powerful God in the face of pain, suffering, and evil in this world.

### Our Common Experience

Sometimes when people face tragedy or suffering they wonder if they're being punished. The reality is that pain and suffering is the common experience of all people of all time, both good and bad.

Jesus said, *"In this world you will have troubles..."* (John 16:33) If you study the great characters of the Bible you'll find that they all faced much grief and suffering, many times the result of doing the right thing and being obedient to God. Even Jesus suffered. Referring to the coming life of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah stated, *"He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain."* (Isaiah 53:3) It's good to note that the key symbol of the Christian faith is the cross, a symbol of suffering. Author Tim Keller stated on the Fox TV network, "Suffering is actually at the heart of the Christian story."

### Kinds of Pain and Suffering

It has been estimated that something like 90% of the pain and suffering in this world is due to people hurting people. Think of war and the uncounted numbers who flee from war, displaced, hungry, and homeless, often living in the squalor of vastly overpopulated refugee camps. Think of the selfishness that results in economic injustices. Think of the robberies, murders, and rapes. Think of the hurt we cause each other in our relationships,

particularly those nearest to us and those we love the most. God gets blamed for a lot that's not His fault!

Yes, suffering is also caused by earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes, tornados (one devastated my home town of Parkersburg, Iowa), and floods. Such natural disasters are even called acts of God, but God can't be blamed for all the harm they cause. In some cases people have put themselves in harm's way (by building along a river that regularly floods, for instance).

True, in other cases people aren't to be blamed; they're innocent victims. The Bible indicates that this is a fallen world, that because of the free choice of people to turn away from their Creator creation itself has been profoundly affected in negative ways. The apostle Paul wrote about that. *"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pain of childbirth right up to the present time."* (Romans 8:22)

### The Price of Love

It has been argued, however, that God could have made us so that we wouldn't do bad things to each other, with the additional ramifications of that causing us to live in a fractured, broken world. But think about it: the same freedom that allows a person to pat another person on the back is the same freedom that allows a person to stab another person in the back.

If God went around stopping all evil behavior among people, we really wouldn't be free. Just exactly whose freedom to do what should God take away from us? If God controlled all human behavior we would be puppets, not people. The freedom to do loving acts toward one another, and to please God, only have meaning if we have the option to *not* do loving acts and to do evil. Evil, pain, and suffering are the price of having free choice.

### God's Help

Those of us who believe in God believe that He helps us in this world of pain. The psalmist declared, *"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."* (Psalm 34:18) Let me repeat the quote of Jesus I used earlier, but this time I'll include His entire statement. *"In this world you will have troubles. But take heart! I have overcome the world."* (John 16:33)

God does not always promise to keep us from trouble, but He promises to keep close to us in trouble if we choose to take Him up on His offer. Tim Keller wrote, "Suffering is unbearable if you aren't certain that God is for you and with you." (*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller, p. 58)