

Would a good God allow suffering? By Thailer Jimerson

The Problem of Suffering

Friedrich Nietzsche once said “To live is to suffer...” Though some have found great meaning to the deep questions of life through suffering, some, understandably, have not responded as well. Some have grown strong from it. And most of us simply cannot understand it. Why is there this problem of suffering in the world? Why is there so much suffering? Why did 9/11 happen? Why are there people who want to hurt others? Why do so many people die in terrible ways? Why did the bombing at Boston happen? Indeed, how can a good God allow suffering? Because of suffering, some have cast off faith altogether.

Origin of Suffering

When and why did suffering occur? We can read in the first few chapters of the Bible, in the book titled ‘Genesis,’ that God had created a perfect world. He had done all things well – he placed man and woman in the garden of Eden, a paradise of sorts; no pain, no sin, no suffering. And God gave them a law, but they were deceived, went after wrong desires and broke that law. They disobeyed the great and loving Creator of the universe. Now notice how God punishes them for their disobedience in **Genesis 3:16-19**:

To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your *pain* in childbearing; in *pain* you shall bring forth children....And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ *cursed* is the ground because of you; in *pain* you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

We can see here the introduction of pain and suffering and the ground being cursed for man because of their sin against God. Pain and suffering exist in this world because this is an imperfect world; a world of sin. We inherited (not the guilt) but the consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin. And because of *our* sin, we suffer the greatest pain imaginable, even if we may be currently blind to it, which is separation from our God and Father.

Now there are obviously a lot of downsides to pain. It’s a negative by default – what good is it? Right? But let’s consider just for a moment perhaps one valuable use for pain and suffering in the world. Consider this quote from Ravi Zacharias:

“There is a very real and rare disease in which you feel no pain CIPA (Congenital Insensitivity to Pain with Anhidrosis). And you and I might think, ‘Wow. What a way to live!’ No. You can put your hand on a burning stove and talk to somebody and not know that your hand is burning. You could step on a rusty nail while playing a game and not know that that has punctured your skin and poisoning your blood stream. You can take on deadly diseases through the breakage of the skin or whatever without knowing it. I saw this girl’s (Ashlyn Blocker) mother interviewed on television and she ended her interview by saying, ‘My prayer to God every night is ‘Lord, please let my Ashlyn begin to feel pain.’ If within our finite minds, within these materialistic bodies, pain is a symptom of what’s gone wrong and a reminder to correction – *is it impossible for an infinite God to bring pain, even within our hearts and minds and our sensitivity of the soul to direct us to the Redeemer and the One who transforms the heart that is severed and broken from Him which is the ultimate kind of pain?*”

Our daily pain and suffering is just a parable of something greater that’s wrong in the universe: our separation from God that needs correcting. And he will, in the end, solve all problems of pain. For our God promises a day when he will “wipe away every tear from [our] eyes, and death shall be no more,

neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore..." (**Revelation 21:4**).

But ultimately, can we answer the 'Why?' of pain for certain? I've attempted to provide some possible reasons – but maybe they're unsatisfactory. It is possible that we might have to live without a satisfactory answer. Moses said of God, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever..." (**Deuteronomy 29:29**). And if we're given to being upset at God because of pain and suffering, consider this. The author Tim Keller makes a good point concerning this. He says, "If your God is big enough to get mad at because of suffering, then he's also big enough to have a reason for that suffering." Just because we can't think of a viable reason for suffering to exist, doesn't mean there isn't one. God's ways are high. The prophet Isaiah tells us, in **Isaiah 55:8, 9**, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." We have to trust God for who he is.

Does God Care About the Suffering?

Now let me say one final thing. For those of us who are absolutely plagued with the question "*How can a good God allow suffering?*" and have been pushed down and defeated from ever having faith because of suffering, think about this. Again, we may not know what suffering is supposed to mean in our world or about God. But we know one thing it does **NOT** mean. The fact that suffering exists does not mean that God does not care. *It does not mean that God does not care about you.* And here's why: God relates to everyone in suffering because God himself came down into a world of suffering, in the form of man, to live the regular life of man and to suffer and die an excruciating death on the cross for the sins of all men (and women). The fact that Jesus Christ the son of God was mocked, spit upon, tortured and crucified forever symbolizes God's shout of "I care about **you!**" It's a shout that echoes in the form of Mark's words:

"the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. And they will *mock him, spit on him, and flog him and kill him.* And after three days he will rise." (**Mark 10:33, 34**)

Jesus was nailed to the tree to pay the price of forgiveness, to grant us a new life in God and to offer eternal fellowship with our Creator. And he calls us all to lead a life of suffering for the good of all peoples. Won't you follow the God that suffered and died for you?