



Why does God allow so much evil and suffering in the world?



Addressed by
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no easy answers

Tough questions, by their very nature, don't have easy answers. It would be a mistake to assume that they do. It would be even more of a mistake to assume that if we simply read enough scripture or listen to enough people we will find a formula, or verse, or idea which will make everything better. We serve of a God of reality. Easy answers to tough questions, even when given with the best of intentions and for the best reasons, will do more harm than help because they often sacrifice authenticity in favor of easy justification.

The plain and simple answer to the question

"Why does God allow so much evil and suffering in the world?"

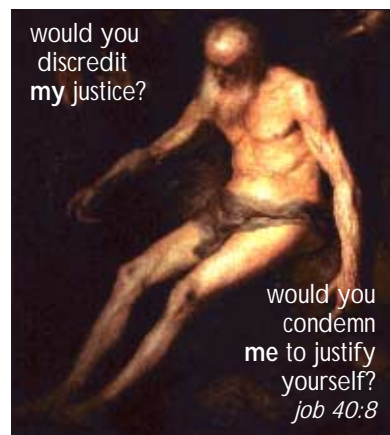
is that we don't know why.

He **doesn't** tell us.

He **doesn't** explain himself.

He **doesn't** offer any justification,

and cautions us against offering our own.



There is, I think, a message in this silence. When we consider the depth of knowledge that God chooses freely to make known in his word, that fact that he does not address our question of suffering and evil with the same depth of information, style and genre points to something. At the very least, as Job learned, it points to the fact that we are not God and cannot understand the things he can. It also points to the fact that regardless of the reasons for evil and suffering, our response to it is what most concerns God, and on this subject is far from silent.

dangerous comfort

In times of profound suffering or in experiencing evil, it easy for us to allow our view of God, ourselves and our situation be totally shaped by our current experience. When we suffer, and especially when we comfort those who suffer, Scripture offers several cautions which we must not forget.

In the midst of suffering and evil, we are always to remember that:

Suffering and evil are **hostile invaders** into God's good world and they will have **no place** in his new creation.

Suffering and evil **are** in fact **terrible things**. We do not help ourselves, or those we love, if we offer a pale, **weak caricature of true faith** by too easily glossing over, or sugar coating the real pain, hurt, rejection, and questions which evil and suffering cause.

There is **nothing** in our lives, in our thoughts, or in our hearts that **we cannot bring to God**. The constant message of the Psalms and Prophets is that we are to bring all that we are to God for his help, comfort and healing.

Suffering is **not a meaningless activity**, controlled by fate, chance or even, ultimately, by the Enemy of Our Souls. There is no suffering we experience which is beyond God's ability to **use for his glory**.

God's comfort for those who experience suffering and evil is **not to deny** that it exists, **or pretend** that its effects are shallow. Rather we are to patiently, in hope, look forward to the time when they will be **abolished permanently** (Revelation 21:1-4).

divine comfort

false assumptions



One of the most interesting things about Job is that he had friends who were willing to stand by him in his hour of suffering. One of the saddest things about Job also that he had friends who were willing to stand by him in his hour of suffering. To a man and almost to a word, they gave him bad advice and very little comfort.

The Besieged Man

Part of the reason for this is that God was working in a way so contrary to any that they had ever seen before, they could not understand him. Who would have guessed that God's honor was on the line in the trials that faced Job? Who knew that Satan was seeking a victory over God in what seemed like divine judgment? Job certainly didn't, and as far as we know never did.

Simply because we do not understand why suffering and evil have fallen on us does not mean that our obligation to trust God has lessened.

The Blind Man

As Jesus passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." Having said these things, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. (John 9:1-7)



One of the things I love about this story is how far everyone misses the mark: the disciples, the Pharisees, the blind man's parents. Everyone it seems is unable to understand that at certain times and in certain situations God uses difficult things solely for the purpose of his glory.

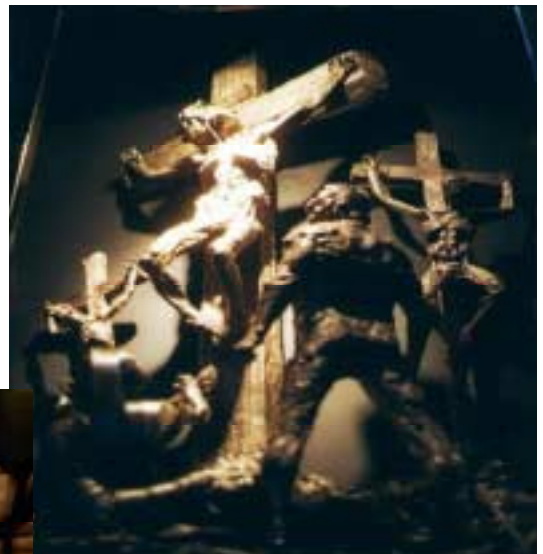
There are deep places of faith that can only be reached by suffering. And there is a profound authenticity and power in the life-story of someone who has lived in the deep places.

in the face of unspeakable suffering and evil: the cross

The situation of suffering and evil in the world would, ultimately, be too much were it not for the simple fact of the cross. Whatever else may be said about our God, it is beyond question that he knows what it means to suffer loss. When confronted with tragedy and evil, we can look to a Father who knows what it is like to have his Son, who had done nothing wrong, brutally, cruelly, and violently murdered. Through the incarnation, our God has entered a world of suffering and evil



and tasted them at their bitter worst in order to redeem us and abolish them forever.



It is this view that must always shape our responses to suffering and evil.
British pastor-theologian John Stott is right when he suggests:

We have to learn to climb the hill called Calvary, and from that vantage-ground survey all of life's tragedies. The cross does not solve the problem of suffering, but it supplies the essential perspective from which to look at it. Since God has demonstrated his holy love and loving justice in a historical event (the cross), no other historical event (whether person or global) can override or disprove it. This must surely be why the scroll (the book of history and destiny) is now in the hand of the slain Lamb, and why only he is worthy to break its seals, reveal its contents and control the flow of the future.



The Cross of Christ, p. 329

life-story

When have you experienced evil or suffering in your life?

What was that experience like?

What would you tell someone who is experiencing a similar situation based on what you have heard this morning and your own experience?