Why Would a Good, All-Powerful God Allow Suffering?

- God sometimes allows suffering in order to bring about a greater good. (Philippians 1:12–14)
- God sometimes allows evil and suffering through...
  - The free will of human beings (Job 19:1–3)
  - Natural order (earthquakes, death, etc.) (Job 1:18–19)
  - Evil spirit beings (Job 2:7)
- God always has a good purpose for our suffering. His purposes can vary greatly. (James 5:11)

Sometimes...
- He allows suffering to expose our sin.
- He allows suffering to build our character.
- He allows suffering to produce much good.
- He allows suffering to change our perspective.
- He allows suffering to bless our future.

What Is the Cause of Evil and Suffering?

There is no single clear cause for the evil and suffering in the world, and many variables can be involved. Therefore, several factors have to be considered in answering this question. However, it is clear that evil and suffering are the result of at least five different elements that may occur independently or in conjunction with one another. Ultimately, evil and suffering are...

1. The result of our choices (Genesis 3:23)
2. The result of the choices of others (Romans 5:18)
3. The result of some evil spirit beings (Genesis 3:4–6)
4. The result of natural order (Genesis 3:16–17)
5. The result of God’s permissive will (Genesis 2:16–17)

God’s Purpose for Pain

The Bible says...

- Suffering—when we are being disciplined—is a great demonstration of God’s fatherly love.
  “The Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son” (Hebrews 12:6).

- Suffering disciplines us—just as children are disciplined—for our good, to conform us to His character.
  “For they [our fathers] disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness” (Hebrews 12:10).

- Suffering—when we respond the right way—brings us into right relationship with God and produces supernatural peace.
  “No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

- Suffering brings glory to God—amazing, spectacular glory—when He performs a miraculous healing.
  “Jesus said, ‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it’” (John 11:4).

- Suffering keeps us humble—preventing some of us from becoming conceited. The apostle Paul said...
  “In order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me” (2 Corinthians 12:7).

- Suffering requires us to live our lives being dependent on God’s power—we would not do so otherwise! In Paul’s weakened state, the Lord said to him...
  “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).
What Is the Root Cause of Anger toward God?

- **Wrong Belief:** “It’s not fair for God to allow good people to suffer.”

- **Right Belief:** “God sometimes allows suffering to touch the lives of people, but He does so only for a greater good both in this life and in the life to come.”

  “Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.”

  (James 1:12)

God Uses Suffering in Our Lives

- To expose our sin (1 Peter 4:1–2)
- To build our character (Romans 5:3–4)
- To produce much good (Romans 8:28)
- To change our perspective (2 Corinthians 4:8–10)
- To bless our future (Matthew 5:10)

God Cares about Your Suffering

- He is close to you when you are brokenhearted. (Psalm 34:18)
- He stays around you in the midst of trouble. (Psalm 34:7)
- He keeps a record of your grief and keeps hold of your tears. (Psalm 56:8)

Key Verse to Memorize

“Those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”

(1 Peter 4:19)

Key Passage to Read

Romans 8:18–25

The Sovereignty of God

Seek God in prayer for discernment in your circumstances.

(James 5:13)

Open your heart to God with complete honesty about your feelings. (Psalm 55:22)

Verify your belief in God’s love for you. (Lamentations 3:32)

Expect God to change your life through the truth He reveals to you. (Psalm 119:45)

Realize that God is all-powerful and sovereign over your circumstances. (John 19:11)

Expect God to work through all things to prove your faith and to bring Him praise, glory, and honor. (1 Peter 5:10)

Invest time in studying Scripture and in prayer. (Psalm 119:15–16)

Gain an eternal perspective of God’s purposes for your present pain. (John 9:3)

Never allow bitterness to grow in your heart. (Habakkuk 3:17–18)

Turn to the indwelling Christ, who provides you with His power for victory. (Philippians 4:13)

Yield to God’s sovereignty. You may never understand or have any answers for your suffering. (Proverbs 3:5–6)

“He changes times and seasons; he deposes kings and raises up others. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.”

(Daniel 2:21)

How to Answer the Skeptic Who Asks, “Can God Do Anything?”

Can God create a rock so heavy that He cannot lift it? However you answer this yes or no question, you know you are wrong.

- If you answer, “No, He cannot make a rock that He cannot lift,” you have just denied His omnipotence.
- If you answer, “Yes, He can make a rock that He cannot lift,” again, you have just denied His omnipotence. So, how do you answer this question? Simply state, “God has the power to do anything that is consistent with His divine character.”
- Likewise, God cannot do anything that is counter to His divine character. The Bible actually lists certain actions that are impossible for God, such as ...  
  - God cannot lie. (Hebrews 6:18)
  - God cannot be tempted. (James 1:13)
  - God cannot cease to exist. (Psalm 102:25–27)
Can God make a one-sided triangle?

• If you answer “No,” a skeptic could ask this follow-up question:  
  — “Does that mean God is not all-powerful?”

• Before you answer a question, first evaluate whether the question is logical or not. Simply state:
  — “This question is illogical because by definition a triangle must be three-sided.”
  — “This simply means God can do anything consistent with His divine character—anything that is logically possible.”

  “Do not answer a fool according to his folly,  
or you yourself will be just like him.  
Answer a fool according to his folly,  
or he will be wise in his own eyes.”  
(Proverbs 26:4–5)

Questions and Answers

“Doesn’t the existence of evil prove that God is not a good God?”

The existence of evil does not negate the existence of a good God any more than darkness negates light or death negates life. Some things are better defined by the contrast of their opposites. Since both good and evil clearly exist, a good God must necessarily exist. What else is the source of good?

God in His goodness and in His timing will deal with evil and those who promote evil.

“The evildoer has no future hope,  
and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out.”  
(Proverbs 24:20)

“Why do Christians sometimes suffer for doing good?”

Evil is always in opposition to good. By its very nature, evil will seek to harm and destroy those who do good. The only real peace to be found in the midst of suffering is in the One who has made us to be at peace with God.

In His time, this Prince of Peace will do away with evil and thereby secure total peace for all eternity for His followers. He Himself suffered for doing good. As His followers, we at times will also experience suffering for doing good. Jesus said ...

“If the world hates you,  
keep in mind that it hated me first. ...  
If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.  
If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also.”  
(John 15:18, 20)

“Some people say, ‘Everyone is born good.’ Is this true?”

The straightforward answer is “No.”

“Surely I was sinful at birth,  
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”  
(Psalm 51:5)

Related Topics ...

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