

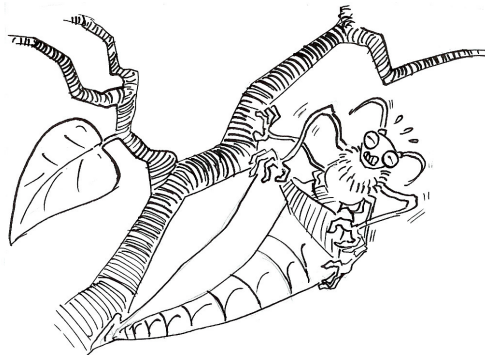
# Why is there so much suffering and evil in the world? (Part II)

## CHAPTER 8

### 16 SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO BETTER UNDERSTAND SUFFERING AND EVIL FROM A CHRISTIAN POINT OF VIEW

1. **Suffering is not always evil.**

Often, it is a good thing in the human experience and essential for our survival. Have you ever watched a butterfly struggling to get free from a cocoon?



It doesn't look like it is having a good time. In fact, it looks like it is suffering. But, if you feel sorry for it, intervene and tear the cocoon open to set the butterfly free, it will die. The struggle strengthens the butterfly so it can survive.

2. **Suffering can develop our character and lead us to maturity.**

*“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4)*

Someone once asked Michelangelo, “How can you take a huge hunk of granite and turn it into David?” He answered, “That hunk of granite *is* David. I just have to remove everything that does not belong.” How can God take a sinful, imperfect, flawed human being and make them into a mature, complete, Christ-like person who is the very image of God on earth? God has to remove everything that does not belong and that process is often painful, but necessary.

3. **Death is not intrinsically evil.** – The death of bacteria is required to have fertile soil. The death of plants and animals are required for other animals to survive. It would not be desirable, given the earth's limited resources, for there to have been no physical death among humans.

4. **But... “What about the death of a child?”**

“If God is good and can do anything...  
How do you explain the death of a child?”



First of all, it is important to be reminded that...

**If there is no God, then there is no explanation.**

**If there is no God, there is no answer to this question.**

**If there is no God, when a child dies there is no hope for the family to ever see that child again.**

However, from a Christian point of view, when a child dies the family can still have hope, peace, strength and comfort. Here are 4 reasons why...

**A. God created the child’s life; he has the power to give the child life again.**

The Bible tells about a man named Lazarus who died. His sister, Martha, went to talk to Jesus and said ... “*‘Lord,’ Martha said to Jesus, ‘if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’*” (John 11:21-26)

**B. When a child dies he or she goes to Heaven which is a better place than our world.**

The apostle Paul stated ...“*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far...*” (Philippians 1:21-24)

The following verses indicate that when a child dies, he or she goes to be with God in Heaven. (2 Samuel 12:21-23; Matthew 18:2-4, 19:13-15; Romans 9:11; 1 Corinthians 14:20; Deuteronomy 1:39)

**C. God can comfort the family who lost the child.**

To the family and loved ones, God can be the comforter and healer. David (who himself lost a child) wrote... “*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.*” (Psalm 23)

**D. The Bible promises us that the separation caused by death is only temporary for those who are Christians.**

*“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

**5. Although God is not the cause of evil, he has the power to use evil to bring about greater good.**

How would the nation of Israel survived the famine if Joseph had not been sold into slavery by his brothers and if he had not been imprisoned unjustly?  
Joseph said in the end ...

*“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”* (Genesis 50:20)

The ultimate example of how God used evil and suffering for greater good is **the cross!** In this case, God used evil and suffering to defeat Evil, death and Satan.

**6. Suffering helps us realize that we need God.**

*“We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. **But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.**”* (2 Corinthians 1:8-9)

Suffering can cause us to repent and bring us closer to God and that is the best thing that can happen in life.

C. S. Lewis writes ...*“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”*<sup>ii</sup>

7. **Your suffering can help you understand the suffering of others.**

*“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows.”* (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

8. **Suffering can allow the communication of God’s Word where it would not otherwise be possible.**

*“If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation...”* (2 Corinthians 1:6)

9. **Sometimes it takes suffering to bring about the salvation of someone else.**

Again, the ultimate example of this is Jesus. *“For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit...”* (1 Peter 3:18)

10. **Sometimes we suffer because of personal sin.**

*“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction...”* (Galatians 6:7-8; See also Hebrews 12:5-11)

11. **God never intended for this world to be our ultimate home.**

*“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth...Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”*  
(Hebrews 11:13-16)

12. **Life and good health are gifts from God.**

Skeptics who doubt God because of the problem of suffering rarely stop to ask, *“Where does life and good health come from in the first place?”*

Scottish theologian James S. Stewart writes *“It is the spectators, the people who are outside, looking at the tragedy, from whose ranks the skeptics come; it is not those who are actually in the arena and who know suffering from the inside. Indeed, the fact is that it is the world's greatest sufferers who have produced the most shining examples of unconquerable faith.”*<sup>iii</sup>

**13. When skeptics or atheists ask, “Where is God when people suffer?” – Believers can rightly respond, “Where is atheism when people suffer?”**

Christianity offers hope, peace and comfort in the midst of suffering. What does atheism offer that comforts us or gives us hope in the midst of suffering? The question is sometimes raised, “Where was God during the Holocaust?” An appropriate response can be, “Where was atheism during the Holocaust? Was it not the natural outworking of atheism that fueled the Holocaust?” In fact, “if we are indeed the random product of evolution then aggression and domination are in themselves good things, because at least they assure survival of the fittest. Certainly, mindless evolution is ‘red in tooth and claw’ to quote Tennyson.”<sup>iii</sup>

**14. All suffering is temporary if you are a Christian.**

When sin, death, pain, natural disasters, evil and all the powers of darkness do all they can do ...God has the last word! Our sufferings are finite. God is infinite.

The Bible mentions that "*our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" (Romans 8:18)

*“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”* (Revelation 7:13-17)

*“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’”* (Revelation 21:3-5)

**15. God is not finished yet!**

*“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)

Justice delayed is not justice denied. "*Criticizing God for not punishing evil people right now is like reading half a novel and criticizing the author for not resolving the plot.*"<sup>iv</sup>

*"How can a finite human be sure that God would not tolerate certain short range evils in order for more long range goods that we couldn't foresee? Would you agree that the difference between us and God is greater than the difference between us and a bear? Imagine a bear in a trap and a hunter who, out of sympathy wants to liberate him. He tries to win the bear's confidence, but he can't do it, so he has to shoot the bear full of drugs. The bear, however, thinks this is an attack and the hunter is trying to kill him. He doesn't realize that this is being done out of compassion. Then, in order to get the bear out of the trap, the hunter has to push him further into the trap to release the tension on the spring. If the bear were semiconscious at that point, he would be even more convinced that the hunter was his enemy who was out to cause him suffering and pain. But the bear would be wrong. He reaches this incorrect conclusion because he's not a human being. Now, how can anyone be certain that's not an analogy between us and God? It is at least possible that a loving God could deliberately tolerate horrible things because He foresees that in the long run more people will be better and happier than if He miraculously intervened. God has shown us how this can work. The Cross of Christ. Here is a situation of how the very worst thing ended up resulting in the very best thing that has ever happened in the history of the world."*<sup>v</sup>

**16. We can know that God understands our suffering and our heartaches because he experienced human suffering.**

*The Lord told Moses, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and **I am concerned about their suffering.**" (Exodus 3:7)*

***"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin."** (Hebrews 4:15)*

God, who created all things, subjected himself to natural laws and human vulnerability. He took the pain of his creation onto himself. He became hungry, thirsty and tired (See John 4:6, 19:28). He wept over the death of a friend (John 11:35). He knew temptation of every kind. He knew the agony of being lied about, betrayed, misunderstood, abandoned, abused and beaten. He even experienced the cruelest form of death.

Suffering and pain did not spare the very Son of God. God conquers not in spite of the dark mystery of evil, but through it.<sup>vi</sup>

God's answer to the problem of evil is that he came right down into it, experienced it, then conquered it.

## **"The Long Silence"**

(from John Stott's book *"The Cross of Christ"*)

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly - not with cringing shame, but with belligerence. "Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?" The words came from a thin, starving young girl. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror ...beatings ... torture ...death!" In another group, a man lowered the collar on his shirt revealing an ugly rope burn on his neck, "What about this...I was lynched for no crime, for no reason other than the color of my skin." All across the plain there were hundreds of such groups, each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in the world. "How lucky God was to live in heaven, where all was sweetness and light...no weeping, no fear, no hunger, no hatred...What did God know of all that humans had been forced to endure in this world?... " they were saying. So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he or she had suffered the most -- a Jewish person, a black person, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, several with various forms of disabilities -- at last they were ready to present their case...it was rather clever. They pronounced that before God could be qualified to be their judge, he would have to endure what they had endured. Their decision was ... God would have to be sentenced today. Sentenced to live on earth and to live as a man who would suffer. "Let em' be born a Jew!" "Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted!" "Let him know what it is like to be hungry!" "Let his work be so difficult that even his family will think he is out of his mind when he tries to do it!" "Let him be betrayed by his closest friends!" "Let him face false charges!" "Let him be tried by a prejudice jury!" "Let him be convicted by a cowardly judge!" "Let him be tortured!" "Let him see what it means to be so terribly alone and then let him die! Let him die so that there can be no doubt that he died!" "Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it." As each leader pronounced the portion that he or she would add to the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people... "Yes, yes, it's only fair! It's only right!" "If he would judge us, he must face what we faced" ... And when the last had finished pronouncing their sentence...**there was a long silence...**

No one dared utter another word. No one could even move. For suddenly, it dawned upon them all. That God had already served his sentence and that God would judge no one in whose shoes he had not already walked in.<sup>vii</sup>

***If you want to know what God is like...Look at the cross! Jesus, God in the flesh, suffered and died so that you could have forgiveness for your sins, and that you could spend eternity in a place without suffering and evil.***

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## NOTES

<sup>i</sup> C.S Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1966), 138.

<sup>ii</sup> Warren W. Wiersbe, *Classic Sermons on Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1984), 92.

<sup>iii</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Cries of the Heart* (Nashville: Word Publishing, 1998), 214.

<sup>iv</sup> Peter Kreeft , as quoted in Lee Stroble, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 2000), 43.

<sup>v</sup> Peter Kreeft , as quoted in Lee Stroble, *The Case for Faith* (Grand Rapids: ZondervanPublishingHouse, 2000), 32.

<sup>vi</sup> Ravi Zacharias, *Is There Meaning in Evil and Suffering?* (Video: Faith and Science Lecture Forum, Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, 1999).

<sup>vii</sup> Adapted from John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove. IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 336.