

the-Gospel.org

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Table of Contents

The Origin of Suffering	1
Suffering Creates Love	4
Suffering Purifies Us	4
Suffering is a Necessary Component of Love	6
Suffering as Punishment	8
Conclusion	9
Foot Notes:	11

Introduction

Unfortunately this is only a web site; if you are suffering right now, you probably need something more, like a human shoulder to cry on. But understanding why God allows suffering, and how He uses it for our ultimate good, may offer comfort. My goals in writing this paper are to give you comfort and encouragement, to help you to encourage others who are suffering, and to answer the question: "Why does God allow suffering?"

The Origin of Suffering

Why Does God Allow Suffering? Those who wonder if there is a God commonly ask this question. Every worldview has to answer this question, including atheism. In fact, atheists have the biggest problem of all because they do not have an absolute standard for defining good and evil. Therefore, the atheist cannot intellectually object to suffering as being bad. For instance, atheistic evolution teaches survival of fittest. It is death and suffering that brought the human race into the world; therefore, suffering is actually good. Like pruning a tree or thinning a carrot garden, in order for the fittest to survive, it can be argued that

suffering, at least the suffering of others, is a good thing. This explains the behavior of Hitler and Stalin. Comparing the human race to a carrot garden, they, and others, can justify the genocide they practiced.

But what if death and suffering are not what brought man into the world?

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: - Romans 5:12

What if, as taught in the Bible, man brought death and suffering into the world? If God is loving, and if God is all-powerful, why does he allow suffering? In the search for the origin of suffering, let us start with the following passage about Adam in the Garden of Eden.

*And unto Adam [God] said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: **cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;***

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.
- Genesis 3:17-19

The Book of Genesis records a change in the earth itself after mans rebellion. Before the fall, the fruit of every tree (except one) was good to eat. There were no thistles or thorns; I believe that there were no poisonous plants either. After the fall, there are still good plants like apple trees, but now there are also evil plants like poison oak. There are good animals like sheep and doves, and evil ones like wolves and asps.

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. - Matthew 10:16

Man's fall may have brought suffering to the earth shortly after he was created; however, is this really the origin of suffering? There are hints in the Bible that somebody else's fall may have caused suffering before the creation of the world. The following passage speaking of the Devil shows this.

*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a **murderer from the beginning**, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for **he is a liar**, and the father of it. - John 8:44*

Satan was evil before the fall of man. When he tempted Eve, he knew she her husband and her children would die. Could Satan also have caused suffering in Heaven?

*And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the **Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth**, and his angels were cast out with him. And **I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the***

power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. - Revelation 12:7-10

This more as an opinion than a fact, but it seems possible that Satan is the father of suffering, and that he caused suffering even in Heaven. When Satan started his rebellion, God could have quashed it, but instead He has chosen to use it for His own glory. [David used Goliath to glorify God;](#)¹ Satan and all his servants will bring glory to God in the same way (no wonder Satan is so mad 😊).

It is only recently that Satan's activities have been contained. Revelation shows us how Satan was cast out of Heaven.

And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. - Revelation 12:11

The serpent introduced suffering to mankind by causing Eve to doubt God's word. He deceived Eve into believing that she would not die if she ate the fruit. This bought the saga to planet earth. While I do not claim to know the details, at some point Satan acquired authority over the earth.

*And the devil, taking [Jesus] up into a high mountain, showed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, **All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it.** - Luke 4:5-6*

Some people argue that Satan lied to Jesus, when he offered Him the world. However, if Satan didn't really have power over the 'kingdoms of the world', this offer would not have been a real temptation to Jesus. Somehow, in the beginning, Satan got [power](#)² over the world. The exciting thing is that the New Covenant is bigger than most people realize. Jesus, through the cross, not only saves all sinners who come to Him, He also kicked Satan out of Heaven, and took all his power away from him.

*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, **All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.** - Matthew 28:18*

It was through His suffering that Jesus got the earth back, and now with Satan gone Heaven has become even better. There is no doubt that God was strong enough to do away with Satan at the very start. He could have just taken His power back, but this may have compromised His own righteousness. Therefore, it was through the cross that God booted Satan out of Heaven.

***Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.** - Revelation 12:12*

The end of all this is that Jesus Christ suffered, overcame, and has inherited all things. If we will follow in His footsteps, that is, if we are willing to suffer, we too will inherit all things.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. - Revelation 21:7

So, while the Devil has caused a lot of suffering, God has turned this around to work for good, at least to those who love him.

Suffering Creates Love

What good is suffering for us sinners? Does God have a happy ending for those who cause suffering? Perhaps the following account in Jesus' life will help us to understand this paradox.

And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment, And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner. And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

*And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; **for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.** - Luke 7:36-47*

To recount: This woman was a sinner. This means she caused suffering, for that is what sin does. When Jesus forgave her, it caused her to have a new heart. Now *her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much.* We are all responsible for the suffering that is now happening on planet earth. God allows this suffering now, in order that Heaven will be a place where we (those who respond to Jesus' offer of forgiveness and have a change of heart) will truly love one another.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. - Revelation 21:4

Suffering Purifies Us

Like atheism, God has a purpose for suffering; unlike atheism, God's purpose is to benefit the one who is suffering. Let us look at some Scripture passages to see how this works.

*But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have **suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.** - 1 Peter 5:10*

It is important to note that Peter starts this verse with the comment that God is calling us to eternal glory. Now imagine how it would be if everyone who is going to Heaven behaved as they did before they were saved. We would still be locking our doors at night. God will not permit this; rather, He intends, as Peter points out, to make us perfect. He is going to use suffering for a little while now, so that we can enjoy His eternal glory forever. Even Jesus, our Lord, suffered and was made perfect.

*Though [Jesus] were a Son, yet learned he **obedience [submission] by the things which he suffered**; And being made perfect [complete], he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him. - Hebrews 5:8-9*

If Jesus went through suffering to be made perfect, how much more should we be willing to submit to God's chastening?

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. - Hebrews 12:11

Chastening may seem grievous while it is being applied; however, you can ask any father who chastens his son consistently, in love, if it does not produce a son who is pleasant to live with. The Bible, especially the Book of Proverbs, is clear on this point.

He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him quickly. - Proverbs 13:24

AND

Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell. - Proverbs 23:13-14

People who do not understand how chastening perfects character often condemn spanking children. They will not sacrifice their momentary comfort for the eternal blessing that good character will give their child. The Lord does not rejoice in our momentary suffering any more than a gardener rejoices in having to prune a tree. Yet, like the gardener, He does it for the sake of producing good fruit. Paul said:

*Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye **sorrowed to repentance**: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. - 2 Corinthians 7:9*

Paul was reminding the Corinthians that the sorrow they went through brought them to repentance. In the original Greek, the word [repentance](#)³ means 'a change of mind'. It is this *change of our mind* that will allow us to be in the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of God to still be heaven. This is God's hope.

*For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same **in hope**. - Romans 8:20*

Paul encourages us in his letter to the Romans:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. - Romans 8:28

This includes suffering. Note that Paul did not say all things feel good; rather, they work for our good. It may be hard to understand this sometimes, especially when we are surrounded by troubles. It's normal not to understand. Even the apostles didn't understand the good that was to come when Jesus was crucified. In fact, they didn't even believe in the resurrection.

*And their [women who saw Jesus after his resurrection] words seemed to them as **idle tales**, and they believed them not. - Luke 24:11*

Later Jesus upbraids them for their unbelief.

Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? - Luke 24:25-26

Today we can see how Christ's suffering worked for our good. Though we may not see how our current suffering works for our good, we must have faith that God knows the answer, and allow Him to accomplish what He wants in our life.

Suffering is a Necessary Component of Love

*[Jesus said:] **Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.** - John 15:13*

When Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this" He meant that no love is greater. If we would remove all suffering from the world, we would have to remove death. By removing death, we would inadvertently remove God's greatest expression of love. Perhaps Jesus was made perfect through suffering because in so doing he became ultimate love.

*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; **for God is love.** - 1 John 4:7-8*

When John says, *He that loves not, knows not God*, does he mean that we are supposed to suffer? To answer this let us look at the beatitudes in Matthew Chapter 5.

*Blessed are the **poor in spirit**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:3*

We should be careful that we read this properly. Some who have been raised in the church without thinking may believe that poor in spirit means that you are a spiritual person. In this passage it means the opposite; blessed are those who recognize that they are spiritually needy.

*Blessed are they that **mourn**: for they shall be comforted. - Matthew 5:4*

The word **blessed**⁴ also means happy. Happy are they that mourn? Yes, the spiritually needy who mourn will be comforted and happy. If God did not allow suffering, He would have to remove not only the mourning, but also the comfort that is to come with it. To some this may seem like a fair trade, but to get rid of thirst is to also get rid of the pleasure of a cold drink. If God took this approach in creating the world, we might have had no suffering, but we would have had few comforts and pleasures also.

*Blessed are the **meek**: for they shall inherit the earth. - Matthew 5:5*

To be meek does not mean to be weak. It means to control your strength, including in times of trouble.

*Blessed are they which do **hunger and thirst after righteousness**: for they shall be filled. - Matthew 5:6*

God knows that there is unrighteousness with its attendant suffering. Though He does not desire it, suffering is necessary for this beatitude to separate a people to Himself who 'hunger and thirst after righteousness'.

*Blessed are the **merciful**: for they shall obtain mercy. - Matthew 5:7*

The Lord also desires a merciful people. The definition of mercy is 'compassionate treatment towards an offender, who is in one's power.' In order to be merciful by this definition, you need someone to offend or cause you suffering first. To remove suffering would be to eliminate mercy. The word translated [mercy](#)⁵ also means compassion. To show compassion means more than to just forgive; it is to reach out and make a difference in the lives of others who are suffering, whether they have offended you or not. Many have asked, why does God allow suffering? Why does He allow children to go hungry? Prepare yourself for the Judgment Day; He may ask you the same question. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

*Blessed are the **pure in heart**: for they shall see God. - Matthew 5:8*

One source of our suffering is from people with impure hearts. To be *pure in heart*, you need to make a conscious decision. God desires to separate to Himself people who have pure hearts, but if you remove suffering, you eliminate choice to be pure in heart and, thereby, this beatitude also.

*Blessed are the **peacemakers**: for they shall be called the children of God. - Matthew 5:9*

The wars and fighting among us also cause suffering. If God removed this suffering, instead of allowing His people to make peace, the blessing of this beatitude would be eliminated. The children of God will be peacemakers.

*Blessed are they **which are persecuted for righteousness' sake**: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. - Matthew 5:10-12

To remove suffering would be to eliminate this last blessing. We have seen how suffering produces a good temperament; it also glorifies God when we willingly suffer for His sake. The apostles themselves are given to us for an example.

*And when they [the religious leaders] had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. And the [apostles] departed from the presence of the council, **rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.** - Acts 5:40b-41*

Paul, who also knew persecution and its suffering from [firsthand experience](#)⁶, said:

*That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, **and the fellowship of his sufferings**, being made conformable unto his death; - Philippians 3:10*

Paul knew that to fellowship with Christ, he must be where Christ was, and he desired to suffer in order to experience Christ.

[Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah:]He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

*But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.
- Isaiah 53:3-5*

God just did not create suffering and then stand back; rather, as we fellowship in His suffering, He fellowships with us in our suffering. This is not just mindless suffering, but rather suffering with the purpose of overcoming. In the next passage, to the church in Laodicea, Jesus said these things - I chasten those I love, I fellowship with those who listen to me, and I expect you to overcome with Me!

As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. - Revelation 3:19-21

Suffering as Punishment

God uses suffering for two reasons. He uses it both for our benefit (this we have already looked at), and for our punishment. For those who reject the love of God, suffering does not come with the promise of any benefit. Just as prison is used not only as a correctional facility, it is also used to protect society from those who will not be corrected. Jesus said that there is a price to be paid for sin: death. This is not a study on God's punishment of the wicked, but it might be worth looking at a few verses.

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. - Romans 6:23

AND

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. - Matthew 12:36

AND

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and

did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. - Luke 12:47-48

While God uses suffering, He is not cruel or sadistic; He does not derive pleasure from our suffering. However, for His righteousness' sake, the unrepentant wicked (those who cause suffering) will not go unpunished.

Conclusion

If this life was all that we had to live for, then our suffering might be meaningless, or disproportional. The Apostle Paul poses the question:

*If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.
- 1 Corinthians 15:32*

But we have the hope of eternal life. When we get to heaven, we will see God's righteousness.

*For I reckon that the **sufferings of this present time** are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. - Romans 8:18*

The question may arise, could God not have used something other than suffering to accomplish His goals? Yes. He is God, and can do what He wants. Nobody can stop Him. Yet, in His eyes, this seemed the best.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith 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. - Isaiah 55:8-9

For now it is not necessary to understand how all suffering works for our good; it is enough to believe that God will make it so. The book of Daniel mentions three Israelites: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. These three were taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, and later were given positions of responsibility. However, one day Nebuchadnezzar required them to bow down to a golden statue. To quote Nebuchadnezzar:

Now if ye [...] fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? - Daniel 3:15

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego probably could not foresee what God was going to do. In fact, though they trusted God, they were not sure that He was going to do anything. The story continues:

*Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. **But if not**, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.*

[...]

Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spoke, and said unto his counselors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God. - Dan 3:16-18, 21-25

Only when it was all over did these three men see how God had been glorified through their willingness to suffer. Some day we, too, will understand the purpose for our own suffering.

I will conclude with two verses:

Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him. - Job 13:15a

AND

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. - Revelation 21:4

Foot Notes:

- [1] 1st Samuel 17:46
*This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; **that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.***
- [2] Thayer Definition: exousia
1) power of choice, liberty of doing as one pleases
2) physical and mental power; the ability or strength with which one is endued, which he either possesses or exercises
3) the power of authority (influence) and of right (privilege)
4) the power of rule or government (the power of him whose will and commands must be submitted to by others and obeyed): universally, authority over mankind
4b) specifically: the power of judicial decisions, of authority to manage domestic affairs
4c2) one who possesses authority, a ruler, a human magistrate
4c2b) the leading and more powerful among created beings superior to man, spiritual potentates
- [3] Thayer Definition: metanoia
A change of mind, as it appears to one who repents, of a purpose he has formed or of something he has done
- [4] Strong's Concordance: makarios
Supremely blest; by extension fortunate, well off.
- [5] Thayer Definition: eleeo'
1) to have mercy on
2) to help one afflicted or seeking aid
3) to help the afflicted, to bring help to the wretched
4) to experience mercy
- [6] Partial list from 2 Corinthians 11:23-27
Frequently in prison
Near death often
Five times received forty stripes save one
Thrice beaten with rods
Once stoned
Thrice shipwreck (a night and a day I have been in the deep)

Beth-Haran Ministries

More studies are available at www.the-Gospel.org
I can be reached for questions and comments at jeffrey@the-gospel.org