

A Christian Primer on Suffering

Why talk about suffering?

1. It is relevant.
 - a. It spans the history of human existence from Genesis to Revelation.
 - b. All individuals in all cultures suffer.
2. It presents a challenge to non-believers. Sam Harris.
3. It presents a challenge to our faith.

***** "I must add, too, that the only purpose of this book is to solve the intellectual problem raised by suffering; for the far higher task of teaching fortitude and patience I was never fool enough to suppose myself qualified, nor have I anything to offer my readers except my conviction that when pain is to be borne, a little courage helps more than much knowledge, a little human sympathy more than much courage, and the least tincture of the love of God more than all."**
C.S. Lewis from the preface to his book "The Problem of Pain" 1940. overhead.

What is suffering?

1. Physical affliction or infirmity: Pain, fatigue, hunger, thirst or cold etc.
2. Emotional affliction: Sorrow (grief), distress, despair or panic etc.
3. Spiritual: Sorrow (grief).

Who suffers?

1. God

- a. God the Father: Gen. 6:6, Is. ch 1 (esp. 12-15), Is. 42:14.
- b. God the Spirit: Eph. 4:30.
- c. God the Son: Is. 53, Luke 22:44, Mark 15:15-37.

2. Humans

- a. Individually: Gen. 3:16-19 Eve and Adam, Jonah 2:1-3, Acts 7:54-60 Stephen, 2 Cor. 11:24 & 25 Paul.
- b. Collectively: Ex. 1:8-14 Israel (the nation), 2 Kings 10:1-17 Ahab and his family, Rev. 6:9-11 the martyrs.

3. **Creation:** Gen. 3:16, Rom. 8:18-22.

4. **Satan/demons:** Gen. 3:14 & 15, Rev. 20:10.

Why does God suffer?

1. Cause: The sin of humans, the rebellion of those created in His image. Gen. 6:5-13, 1 Peter 2:21-24.
2. Purpose: To redeem Adam's seed, to mediate a new and permanent covenant for our sakes, to bear our sins and punishment, to sanctify us, to make us like Him. Rom. 5:17-21, Heb. 9:24-28, Is. 53, Heb. 10:12-14, 2 Cor. 3:17 & 18.

***** Isaiah 53 overhead**

Why do humans suffer?

1. We deserve it. (Eg. Gen. 6:6-11 and 7:17-24, the flood.

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- a. Sin in the unsaved can lead to just judgement and condemnation. Matt. 25:31-46. Rom. 2:11&12. Rev. 21:8.
- b. Suffering in the unsaved can lead to fearful humility and salvation. Jonah 1:4-14

My mother's testimony.

- c. Sin in the saved leads to discipline from God, followed by repentance and the joy of restored fellowship with God. Psalm 94:12, Prov. 3:12.
2. We are impacted by the sin and the consequences of the sin of others. Joshua 7, Jonah 1:4-14. Adam and Eve's sin impacted all of humankind.
3. We are being refined, molded and conformed to the image of Christ. Psalm 66:8-12, James 1:2-4.
4. We are hated, accused and persecuted for our right relationship with God.
***** Job 1:1-12, John 15:18-26 & 16:1-4 overhead.**
5. We are image-bearers of God. He suffered, therefore we will suffer. He identified with us in His baptism and therefore we are joined to Him in His suffering.

What is our response to our suffering? (Focus on Christians)

1. Identify the **cause** and the **purpose** of your suffering.

***** John 9:1-11 overhead.**

Please refer to the "Decision Tree of Suffering" tool.

2. As a subject of the Lord Jesus Christ respond appropriately.
 - If you identify that you are in sin recognize that your suffering is likely the discipline of a loving Father. He desires to have fellowship with you and that can be restored by you confessing your sin, repenting and making restitution if necessary. Eg. repay those that you stole from, serving jail time if you broke the just laws of the land, etc. (Be wary of the false guilt that the Accuser is responsible for.)
 - If you are being persecuted for the gospel or "punished" for your faith imitate Christ forgiving those who crucified Him. Imitate the disciples who, "...rejoiced that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name." Acts 5:41 ***Don't stop teaching and preaching and living the gospel of Jesus the Christ!*** Acts 5:42.
 - If your suffering can best be explained as a consequence of a fallen world, eg. cancer, COVID, age related illness, etc recognize that these trials are addressed by James 1:2&3. The refining process is often painful but necessary to wean us from the pleasures of this world. Psalm 66:8-12.
3. Finally, don't suffer alone. Don't let a brother or sister in Christ suffer alone. Rom 12:15, 1 Cor. 12:26 &27.

The story of my personal conviction as I researched this topic.

*****Matthew 26:36-46 overhead.**

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Conclusion

The story of human suffering starts in Genesis Chapter 3 with first 2 people and continues through human history. In the final book of the bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ we have a promise, through which we apprehend hope that a loving, faithful and gracious Father will eliminate suffering.

*****Revelation 21:1-7 overhead.**