

The question of suffering is an old one. Judges 6:13 - Gideon's question, Job 3:23-26 Psalm 10:1

People ask 'If God is all good, and all powerful, why does he allow suffering?'

The Atheist answer is, 'there is no reason to life, and no reason for suffering. The weak don't survive.'

We must be honest, at times we do not understand and maybe we shouldn't understand here on Earth.

1 Corinthians 13:12 Even the souls 'under the altar' (intermediate state?) didn't find answers Rev 6:9-10

The two categories of suffering, resulting from the evil in the World.

A) Moral evil (Roman 3:10, 23) e.g. Crime, cruel dictators, Events that happen from someone's will

B) Natural evil (Romans 8:22) e.g. Earthquakes, disease Events without any apparent reason

Questions

What questions have you asked about suffering? What have people said to you?

Causes of suffering All suffering on Earth is a result of the Fall Genesis 3

There was no suffering before the fall. Augustine - God created man 'able to sin'.

After the Fall, our chemistry changed e.g. ageing process, human heart changed, with a bias to sin. The nature of the whole planet changed. 3:17-18 natural disasters part of this.

Particular Examples, a) Punishment for sin, can lead to suffering 1 Corinthians 11:30

b) Consequences of our own actions. Humans were told of the consequences of sin Genesis 2:17.

c) Collective suffering, a whole nation or people can suffer e.g. Jews taken to Babylon, famine in Israel

d) Demonic suffering (Cannot be blamed for all, but it is real) Acts 5:15 John 8:44

The absolute root of all suffering is sin, however it does not mean in an individual's life, suffering is a result of their own sin. Matthew 5:45 (Common grace & Common suffering) John 9:1-3, Luke 13:1-5

Why does God allow suffering to continue? Some of these ideas go towards an answer.

1. God develops our faith through suffering. See the people of faith in Hebrews 11 To set our heart and focus on our real home and hope 1 Peter 4:12-13,

2. God allows us to live with the consequences of our actions. Galatians 6:7-8

Sin has changed everything. People choose to make decisions that causes suffering in others.

3. God's uses suffering as a way of getting our attention. e.g. Jonah, Psalm 119:67 & 71

4. If God intervened in some circumstances, where does the line fall when he didn't? If God prevented droughts then why not volcanoes? If babies protected, why not teens?

5. Mankind as a whole, learns things through suffering e.g. Titanic, medicine

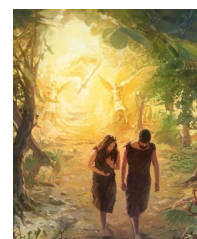
6. The time is not yet, but will happen when God will say enough is enough, and wrap things up.

7. Our inner most character is God's prime concern, not our comfort here on Earth. Character is shown in the worst of times. Suffering can bring us to brokenness, and make us totally dependant on Him.

8. At times of crisis people find one another, and bond, and the best of us can come out. 2 Cor 1:3-4

9. Suffering makes us realise the frailties of life, and loosens our grip on the present. Read Ecclesiastes!

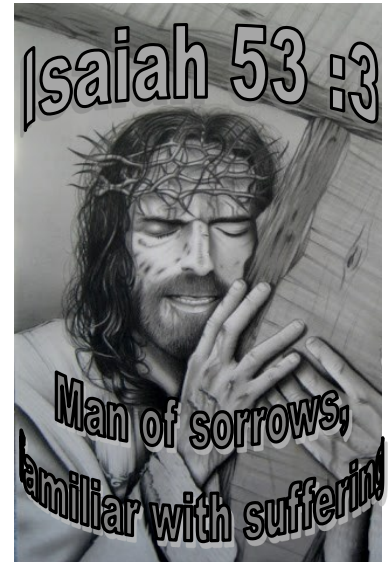
10. Although God is not the author of evil and suffering he does allow it, and uses it to reveal himself to the World. On the cross as Jesus suffered, but it showed both the wrath and mercy of God.



Jesus, the greatest sufferer of all God became man John 1 :14 Hebrews 2 :18

He suffered in some of the following ways;

1. Family relationships John 7 :3-5
2. Rejection by his peers Luke 4 :28-30
3. Living conditions Matthew 8 :20
4. Laughed at and mocked Matthew 9 :34
5. His disciples often failed him and misunderstood him Mark 6 :52, 8 :14
6. Humiliation Matthew 27 :28-31
7. Injustice and unfair trial Matthew 26 :59-60
8. Emotional torment Mark 14 :33
9. Physical pain Matthew 27 :32-35
10. Spiritual separation from father Matthew 27 :46



Issues for us to wrestle with

How we regard suffering depends on how we view our relationship with God. Do we love and trust him whatever?

We are not God's pets, where he is just concerned we have a happy, fun-filled life on Earth.

Do we feel subconsciously that if we're good, God owes us?

God wants a real relationship, but we can want God to be fair, as we see fair?

God is sovereign, he is actively in charge. Ephesians 1 :11, Proverbs 16 :13, 21 :1, Acts 4 :27-28

Questions

What can we learn from Jesus, as we face our suffering and the issues above?

Our response to suffering

Many scriptures point out the end results of trusting God and enduring through difficulties. Like the refining process for precious metals, the heat of trials produces beauty, 1 Peter 1:6-7 James 1 :2-4

Suffering is a tool to teach us things.

The Bible tells us that even Jesus Christ learned through the things He suffered (Hebrews 5:8-9).

"Jesus does not promise to take us out of the fire, But promises to get in the fire with us" - Charles Coulson

Our strength in suffering. God promises to be with us always and to provide us with what we need.

Matthew 11:28-29, 1 Peter 5 :7, Romans 8 :18 & 28

Our challenge in the face of suffering

Suffering is also a test for those not suffering too. Matthew 14 :14, Luke 4: 18-19, Galatians 6 :2

We can use our suffering experiences to help others through our identification with them.

Common misunderstandings about suffering

1. Suffering can be avoided by having a lot of faith.
2. Suffering makes us a victim.
3. Suffering is a punishment for my sin.
4. Suffering is to be pursued.
5. Suffering can be fully understood in this life.



Next Deeper
May 9th
'End Times'

How will it all end? Revelation 21 :3-4