Why does God allow suffering?

Apologetics · https://thebiblicalroots.org/answers/why-does-god-allow-suffering/

Few questions are more difficult—or more personal—than this one. If God is all-good, all-powerful, and all-wise, why does He allow evil and suffering? While the Bible does not give a complete explanation for every instance of suffering, it does provide a framework that allows us to trust God's goodness without denying the reality of pain.

Scripture teaches that suffering is not evidence that God has abandoned His creation or that He lacks the power to stop evil. Rather, evil entered the world through humanity's rebellion against God (Gen. 3; Rom. 5:12), and God, in His wisdom and love, has chosen to redeem even the suffering caused by sin. The Christian hope is not that we will understand every reason for our suffering in this life, but that God has entered into our suffering through Jesus Christ and will one day bring it to an end.

The world was not created this way

The Bible begins with a creation that God repeatedly declares to be “very good” (Gen. 1:31). Evil and death were not part of His original design. Human suffering entered the world through mankind's rebellion against God, bringing corruption not only to humanity but to creation itself (Rom. 8:20–22).

This means Christians do not view suffering as “normal” in the sense that it is what God originally intended. Rather, it is part of a fallen world awaiting its final restoration.

Why didn't God simply create a world without evil?

This is one of the oldest questions in philosophy and theology.

A common assumption behind the question is that the highest possible good would be a world with no suffering. Christianity agrees that suffering is a tragic consequence of sin, but it also teaches that there is an even higher moral value: **love**.

The Bible presents love as the greatest virtue (1 Cor. 13:13), the fulfillment of God's commandments (Matt. 22:37–40), and even God's own nature (1 John 4:8). But genuine love cannot be forced or programmed. It must be freely given.

This is where human freedom becomes important. If God created human beings capable of authentic love, He necessarily created them capable of rejecting that love. The very freedom that allows us to love God and one another also makes moral evil possible.

As philosopher Alvin Plantinga famously argued, a world containing genuinely free creatures is more valuable than one populated by beings who can only do what they are programmed to do. While this does not explain every instance of suffering, it demonstrates that the existence of evil is not logically incompatible with an all-loving and all-powerful God.

God's love is more than kindness

When people ask why a loving God allows suffering, it is easy to equate love with making people comfortable or happy. Scripture presents a much richer understanding of love.

Jesus said,

> “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

This is sacrificial love—the kind of love C. S. Lewis called *Gift-love*: a love that seeks the ultimate good of another regardless of the cost to oneself.

God demonstrates this kind of love throughout Scripture. He disciplines those He loves (Heb. 12:6–11). He allows His people to endure trials that deepen their faith (James 1:2–4). Most importantly, He did not remain distant from human suffering but entered into it Himself. Jesus became “a man of sorrows” (Isa. 53:3), suffered unjustly, died on the cross, and rose again to defeat sin and death.

The cross reminds us that God's love is not measured by the amount of suffering He prevents, but by the lengths He was willing to go to rescue those He loves.

Does suffering have a purpose?

The Bible never teaches that suffering is good in itself. Death, disease, violence, and loss are genuine tragedies.

Yet Scripture repeatedly teaches that God is able to bring good out of suffering.

Joseph, after years of betrayal and imprisonment, told his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20). Paul teaches that suffering produces endurance,

character, and hope (Rom. 5:3–5). James says trials mature our faith (James 1:2–4). Even painful discipline can produce “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11).

This does not mean every tragedy has an obvious explanation or that we should minimize another person's pain by saying, “Everything happens for a reason.” Often, we simply do not know why a particular hardship occurs. But Christians believe God is able to redeem suffering without being its author.

What about natural disasters and disease?

Not all suffering results directly from another person's sinful choices. Earthquakes, hurricanes, genetic diseases, and other forms of what theologians call “natural evil” raise equally difficult questions.

The Bible teaches that all creation has been subjected to the effects of humanity's fall and now “groans” as it awaits redemption (Rom. 8:20–22). We therefore live in a world that no longer functions exactly as God originally intended.

Even here, however, God often brings remarkable good from tragedy. Natural disasters frequently reveal extraordinary courage, compassion, generosity, and self-sacrifice. They provide opportunities for people to demonstrate profound love for complete strangers—sometimes even at great personal cost.

While such examples do not explain every tragedy, they remind us that God can bring genuine good even from the darkest circumstances.

Christianity offers more than an explanation

Ultimately, Christianity does more than offer a philosophical answer to suffering—it offers hope.

The Christian faith does not ask us to believe in a distant God untouched by pain. Instead, it proclaims a Savior who suffered with us and for us. Jesus experienced rejection, betrayal, injustice, torture, and death before rising victorious over the grave.

Because of Christ's resurrection, suffering does not have the final word. God promises a day when He will wipe away every tear, death will be no more, and creation itself will be made new (Rev. 21:1–5).

Key Scriptures to Study

- **Genesis 3** — Sin and suffering enter God's good creation.
- **Genesis 50:20** — God brings good from human evil.
- **Romans 5:3–5** — God uses suffering to produce endurance, character, and hope.
- **Romans 8:18–25** — Creation awaits its final redemption.
- **James 1:2–4** — Trials mature and strengthen faith.
- **Hebrews 12:6–11** — God's loving discipline produces righteousness.
- **Isaiah 53:3–5** — The suffering Servant bears our griefs.
- **John 16:33** — Jesus promises trouble in this world but ultimate victory.
- **Revelation 21:1–5** — God will one day remove all suffering forever.

Objections & Misconceptions

Couldn't God have created people who always freely chose good?

Christians have proposed different answers to this question, but many philosophers—including Alvin Plantinga—have argued that genuine freedom necessarily includes the possibility of choosing evil. A world containing authentic love also contains the possibility of rejecting love. Scripture does not fully explain why God created this particular world, but it consistently affirms both human responsibility and God's perfect goodness.

Does suffering mean God is punishing me?

Not necessarily. While some suffering can result from our own sinful choices, the Bible rejects the idea that every hardship is a direct punishment for personal sin (John 9:1–3). Faithful believers throughout Scripture—including Job, Paul, and even Jesus Himself—experienced profound suffering.

If God is all-powerful, why doesn't He stop evil?

God sometimes does intervene, but He has also chosen to permit human freedom and to accomplish His redemptive purposes within history. Christians trust that God will ultimately judge every evil, right every wrong, and bring perfect justice. His patience should not be mistaken for indifference (2 Pet. 3:9).

Wouldn't abandoning belief in God solve the problem of evil?

It may remove the philosophical tension, but it does not remove suffering itself. In fact, without God there is no ultimate justice, no final hope, and no objective basis for calling anything truly

“evil.” Christianity not only acknowledges suffering—it offers both a moral foundation for recognizing evil and the promise that evil will not have the last word.

Why This Matters

Every person will suffer. The question is not whether suffering will come, but whether it has meaning.

The Christian faith teaches that suffering is neither meaningless nor permanent. God can redeem what sin has broken, produce lasting good through present trials, and ultimately restore everything that has been lost. Most importantly, our hope rests in a Savior who entered our suffering, bore our sin, defeated death, and promises a future in which evil and suffering are gone forever.

Recommended Resources

- Alvin Plantinga — *God, Freedom, and Evil*
- C. S. Lewis — *The Problem of Pain*, *Mere Christianity*
- Timothy Keller — *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*
- John Lennox — *Where Is God in a Coronavirus World?*
- Randy Alcorn — *If God Is Good: Faith in the Midst of Suffering and Evil*