

**Why is there so  
much pain &  
suffering?**



# Why is there so much Pain & Suffering?

*“In the wake of so much suffering and death it is impossible to believe that God really exists!”* **The Independent**

This sounds a strong argument, but before we get too excited, if the Independent was right and God does not exist – where do pain and suffering come from?

**Why natural disasters?** Without God the Big Bang is the best explanation as to how the universe came into being. The planet on which we live is merely the result of fortunately collisions of atoms, held together by forces whose strength we cannot begin to comprehend... it's no wonder that our planet's surface creaks and groans with the strain placed upon it. We ought to expect earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes etc.

**Why disease?** Without God, we arrived on this planet after billions of years of evolution. Changes occurred within individual cells that gave our ancestors an advantage that allowed them to survive in a hostile environment where every other cell/creature was fighting to survive. These changes, called “mutations”, still occur today but are destructive – it is no wonder that cells breakdown and bodies cease to function properly.

**Why violence and aggression?** Without God evolution is the only explanation as to how and why we are the way we are. Richard Dawkins reluctantly has to admit we ought not to be surprised when selfishness and violence occur:

*“We get our immorality largely from our Darwinian past. We get our selfishness, we get our drive for self-interest, for ruthlessness, for cruelty perhaps...”*

But there's more to it than that. If we deny God's existence...

- ...our lives have **no value** or significance. Each one of us is a mere statistic, one among 6 billion people who inhabit planet earth.
- ...there will be **no justice**. After the Dunblane shooting, when Thomas Hamilton killed 16 children and their teacher, before turning his gun on himself, one columnist wrote:

*“The worst thing for the parents is the thought that justice will never be done.”*

- there will be **no hope**. This life is all there is, and then we die.

People can claim suffering is the ultimate “proof” that there is no god – but if we remove God from the equation the life that results is very empty. Nor does it accord with how we feel: we believe they **are** special, we **crave** justice, and we **want** there to be something more than this life.

## **But God does exist...**

Let’s now attempt an answer to our question but this time with God in view. This answer is more problematic because of who the Bible tells us God to be: good, loving, kind, AND all-powerful. The problem has been expressed by Oxford Professor C.S.Lewis:

*“If God were good, he would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.”*

There are no easy answers to this. And any attempt will be incomplete – there is SO much that could be said. Nevertheless we start with a brief overview of the Bible.

God created a good and perfectly functioning world, with everything the man and woman would need or could possibly want... with one rule attached: don’t eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – if they did they would die.

BUT, the man & the woman were led to believe that God was neither good nor generous with them. They were encouraged by the devil to do what they wanted to do. And so they ate of the forbidden fruit.

And God did what he said he would do! Justice was served. His punishment was a curse:

- ...on the earth... thorns and the earth creeks and groans
- ...on their relationships – selfishness and a desire to dominate another.

- ...on life itself – decay that ends ultimately in death set in! Bodies would now wear out with age and use, cells would change, and people would die.
- But the ultimate punishment was separation from God for eternity.

This alternative explanation and description of how the world we know and live in came into being is one that also preserves the **dignity of humankind** – it reminds us that we are a special creation by God, made in his image, with innate value and significance; it tells us that God will ensure **justice is served**; and it offers us **hope** – for the Bible doesn't end in chapter 3 of Genesis. 65 books later we have a vision/description of heaven where the frustrations we feel at this life are released:

You see the Bible looks forward in time, to the end of time, and the day when a new era will be ushered in, when a new world will be created... and in this world there will be no groaning of the Earth, no pain or sorrow, no sickness or disease, no greed or wickedness, no tears and no death.

But this is not a full answer. No, it's not enough for those who cry out "Why? Why is this happening to me?"! Consider some of their intensely personal questions:

**“Why me, what have I done to deserve this? (I am after all a good person)”**

The Bible tackles this question head on in the account of the life of a man called Job. If there was anyone who deserved not to suffer it was Job. He is described as the greatest man of his day, a man who walked before God – not sinless, but definitely honourable. He had it all – money, great kids, nice house. Then almost overnight he loses everything – he is the victim of terrorism, theft and natural disaster as all his riches and his children are taken from him. Then to compound it all he contracts a terrible disease.

Job's heart-felt cry of intense anguish is found in Job chapter 3. He has two pleas:

- I'd rather have not been born! No life would have been preferable to this!

- Why did I not die at birth? That would have spared me this pain. I would be at peace.

The Bible is honest. It acknowledges that good people do suffer pain and hardship.

As Job tried to make sense of his lot 3 friends come to help him. Their explanation of Job's pain & suffering, was an OT version of another question we hear today:

### **“Is God punishing me?”**

These friends argue that Job must have done some evil – why else would God be treating him this way. Their logic is expressed this way:

*“As I have observed, those who plough evil and those who sow trouble reap it!” Job 4:8*

The book of Job makes it clear that their theory is wrong. Job IS a good man who has done nothing to warrant such suffering. The answer to this question is: “No, suffering is NOT God's punishment for you!”

Jesus says a similar thing in the New Testament, in Luke 13:1-5. He was asked about the “innocent” pilgrims from Galilee to Jerusalem, killed by Roman soldiers – a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Were they wicked men, receiving their just reward?

“No!” says Jesus, “No more than the 18 men who died when the Tower of Siloam collapsed on them recently!”

But Jesus actually says more than that...

*...do you think that these Galileans were **worse sinners**...*

*...do you think they were **more guilty** than all the others...*

Jesus is here making this shocking claim that **everyone** is wicked. Yes, granted, some people express their wickedness more readily & obviously, but all of us deep down have the capacity for wickedness – all have thoughts that we never want to see light of day.

The message of the Bible is that everyone will one day have to give account of their lives to God. And all need to be ready for that day, by ensuring their sins have been forgiven, removed from the ledger of their life. That's why Jesus says: unless you repent, you too will

all perish! The implication here is that get ready NOW before it's too late – no-one knows the day or hour of their death. The pilgrims, or builders, or the commuters who died on 7/7 – none knew when they woke up in the morning it was to be their last day on earth.

J.C.Ryle was Bishop of Liverpool at the turn of the last century. He observed that pain & suffering (whether it be our own or that of others) forces us to think about death, life-after-death, heaven, God! We ought to do this thinking more often, but in all our joys the last thing we think about is death. Pain & suffering sharpen our thinking. As C.S.Lewis put it:

*“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”*

### **“Why doesn't God do something?”**

Actually God has already done something about pain & suffering. The world we all want, the world we instinctively know we should live in, the world we do not yet have, the world that is free of all pain, suffering and death – it needs someone to open up the way there – someone to overcome the final barrier – someone to defeat death.

God in Christ has done this! History records that Jesus Christ died on a Roman Cross approximately 2000 years ago. And history also records that He rose again from the dead, destroying its power/hold over people.

As we have noted, we are all going to face the judge one day and give account of ourselves. And we will all have to pay the penalty for our wrongdoing. And the wages of sin, the Bible says, is death. But God, in Christ, bore in himself our punishment so we don't have to, because we are so very special to him – he loves us:

*“God demonstrated his love for us – while we were still sinners  
Christ died for us.”*

Here they are – the three things that we long for, given to us by God through his Son Jesus. We can now know with certainty that our life has **value**, that **justice** will be served, and that we can have **hope**.

## **“Does God care?”**

Yes he does! The Bible tells us that God understands how we feel in our pain and suffering – because He suffered more than we could possibly imagine as Jesus came into this world. We are not alone in whatever we are going through. God invites us to cry out to Him, to seek his comfort in our pain, and so to know His love that lasts to eternity.

This booklet began life as a sermon, part of a series preached in autumn 2011 tackling big questions have about God, faith and life.  
We hope you find it helpful.

The original sermon can be listened to on the church website:

**[www.allhallows-church.org.uk](http://www.allhallows-church.org.uk)**

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