

# Why would God allow Evil, Pain, and Suffering?

## Understanding the difference in a head answer and heart response

Many Christian scholars claim that the issue of evil and suffering is one of the hardest to deal with. While there are philosophical responses to the issue, they can sound trite and insensitive to someone who is grieving or suffering. It is important to understand that if you are trying to answer this question for yourself or someone else the difference in a head answer and a heart response. While someone may tell you something that with your mind you can say makes logical sense, it may seem empty to the emotions and pain your heart is going through. Be mindful that in answering this question that there is a head answer, but also a heart response that should not be overlooked.

If someone asks you a question about why God allows evil or suffering, they may have a personal reason for doing so. Instead of rushing in with a head answer, ask the question ‘Why did you ask that question?’ It may be that something has happened to them, and they are struggling to understand it. When Job’s friends came to see him after he had seemingly lost everything, they first sat quietly with him and were just there for him. **It was when they were silent that they were most helpful because the advice they gave him, which was the common logic of the day, wasn’t true or applicable to Job’s situation. Don’t underestimate the power of just comforting someone.**

## The Existence of Evil is Evidence for God’s Existence

When someone says, “I can’t believe in God because of all the evil in the world.” They are unwittingly. Admitting that some things ought not to be and are wrong and should not happen – they are admitting that there is an objective good standard. David Hume claimed there could be no God because of the holocaust. Such a horrible and evil event should not have happened. But on what basis could Hume, an atheist, say the event was ‘evil’?

Atheists have no basis to say there is objective moral evil. If someone does something they dislike, they can say they don't like it, but since that other person's mind is the product of the same natural processes theirs is, who is to say, who is right or wrong – it's just opinion. If one group deems the holocaust OK, who is another group to disagree. Someone may not like someone else's decision, but if there is no objective lawgiver, then any decision is just opinion. To claim there is true evil, objective evil, you need an objective good – you need an objective lawgiver, and that is God.

While the problem of evil is often cited as evidence against God's existence, however, the very concept of evil presupposes God. Evil's existence implies an objective moral standard, which cannot be grounded in a purely naturalistic worldview. The presence of objective evil is not a disproof of God, but evidence for His reality. To claim that something is "evil" requires an objective standard of goodness. If morality were subjective or illusory, evil would reduce to arbitrary opinion. Yet our universal revulsion at genuine evils suggests a transcendent moral law. Thus, evil's existence points to God as the source of the moral framework that makes evil intelligible. If evil exists, good must exist. If good exists, its source must be God. As philosopher William Lane Craig notes, **"The problem of evil actually presupposes the reality of God" (Reasonable Faith).**

### Why would God allow evil to exist?

Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?" - **Epicurus** (341–270 BCE)

The argument forgets that God is also all-knowing.

Logically, God would permit evil if there was some greater purpose in it. Alvin Plantinga, in *"God, Freedom, and Evil"*, **argues that a world where love exists is the most optimal world.** And for a world where true love can be experienced and expressed, free will is necessary, because compelled love is not real love. And if people have free will, then they can disobey God's laws.

Someone might argue, 'but can't God give us free will and make us always choose to do the right thing'. Either free will exists or it doesn't. Saying someone has free will but can't exercise it, is like saying there are round squares.

**So, it is logical that God would allow evil to exist, if a more important goal was achieved – love.** We see God using the death of Jesus to accomplish the greatest act of love. Through this unjust act, God saved many and gave them eternal life. Making them children of God.

## Did God create evil?

Some have misinterpreted this verse to mean that God made evil:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, **and create evil**: I the Lord do all these things. – **Isaiah 45:7 KJV**

However, this the word the KJV renders ‘evil’ **also means ‘calamity’**. Most modern translations use this translation instead.

I create the light and make the darkness. **I send good times and bad times**. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things. – **Isiah 45:7 NLT**

Evil is not a created thing. **Evil is a privation of good**. We know what it is, because of the standard – good. Just as darkness is not a tangible thing, but a privation of light. We know what evil is because it does not match up with the ultimate source of good – God. **God did not create evil, but the possibility of evil, by giving us free will. Individuals actualize evil when they choose to do that which is not good.**

## Does God Permit Evil, Pain, and Suffering?

Yes. People will often try to say, ‘it’s the devil’s fault’. But God himself accepts responsibility for allowing evil, pain and suffering in our world.

**"The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble."** – **Proverbs 16:4**

**"Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?"** – **Lamentations 3:37-38**

**"Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?"** – **Amos 3:6**

The issue is not that God is too weak to prevent evil, pain or suffering as will be explained in a moment.

A brief observation about the emptiness of atheism to help people experiencing suffering and pain.

**First atheism has no moral basis from which to call anything good or evil.**

There are no objective goods or evils in atheism because everything is just the result of naturalistic processes. Even the human mind, according to atheism, is the product of random and often flawed processes. There is no reason that you should trust it. If one person says it is OK to harm a child, from an atheistic framework, who is to say that individual is wrong? There is no reason to claim one person's view, or even one group's view, is better than another's. Atheism can not say that the holocaust was objectively evil.

**Further, atheism offers nothing to help someone understand suffering and pain.** Pain and suffering are just realities in their world view. There is nothing to offer people going through it. **In atheism, you live, you suffer, then you die. The end.**

Isn't God immoral for allowing evil and suffering to exist?

No. First **some suffering we experience is the result of our own sin and the result of Adam's disobedience.** Suffering entered the world because of humanity's rebellion against God (Genesis 3). **This "cosmic rupture" corrupted creation, introducing natural evils (e.g., disease, disasters) and moral evils (e.g., violence, injustice).**

Genesis 3:16–19 (pain, toil, and death as curses of the Fall).

16 To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." 17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

## Isn't God unjust for letting everyone suffer because of Adam's sin?

No. The truth is we have sinned ourselves. God did punish all of humankind because of Adam, He did treat us as one group, but he also provides eternal life for all humankind because of what one man, Jesus, did:

### **Romans 5:12-19**

12 When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. 13 Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. 14 Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did. Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. 15 But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. **For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ.** 16 And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. 17 For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ. 18 Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone, but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. 19 Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous.

## Another argument for why God allows suffering.

In *The Problem of Pain* by C.S. Lewis points out **that for free will to be meaningful, we need to live in a world with a 'fixed nature', where things work in a consistent manner.** If things work arbitrarily then our choices will have inconsistent results and be meaningless. The same wood that is used to build a home and protect a family, can be picked up and used to strike another human being. If the nature of wood isn't consistent, then our choices will have inconsistent outcomes. The same natural processes that allow for a couple to have a baby, also can produce cancerous cells. Undesirable outcomes can result from the universe following its fixed rules.

"Yet again, if the fixed nature of matter prevents it from being always, and in all its dispositions, equally agreeable even to a single soul, much less is it possible for the matter of the universe at any moment to be distributed so that it is equally convenient and pleasurable to each member of a society. If a man traveling in one direction is having a journey down hill, a man going in the opposite direction must be going up hill. If even a pebble lies where I want it to lie, it cannot, except by a coincidence, be where you want it to lie. And this is very far from being an evil: on the contrary, it furnishes occasion for all those acts of courtesy, respect, and unselfishness by which love and good humour and modesty express themselves. But it certainly leaves the way open to a great evil, that of competition and hostility. And if souls are free, they cannot be prevented from dealing with the problem by competition instead of courtesy. And once they have advanced to actual hostility, they can then exploit the fixed nature of matter to hurt one another. **The permanent nature of wood which enables us to use it as a beam also enables us to use it for hitting our neighbour on the head.** The permanent nature of matter in general means that when human beings fight, the victory ordinarily goes to those who have superior weapons, skill, and numbers, even if their cause is unjust."

[Doesn't God owe me a life free from suffering? I didn't ask for this.](#)

No. In fact Jesus told us we would face trials and suffering

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth **you will have many trials and sorrows**. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. – **John 16:33**

For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him **but also suffer for his sake**, - **Philippians 1:29 (ESV)**

We shouldn't be surprised when we suffer:

Beloved, **do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you**. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. – **1 Peter 4:12-13 (ESV)**

**Share in suffering** as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. – **2 Timothy 2:3**

## Are there other reasons why God would allow people to go through suffering.

The Bible doesn't give just one reason for why people suffer. We may not always know God's purpose for it, but we know God has a plan and purpose for us. Here are some reasons the Bible mentions:

1. We can suffer because of our own actions and sin.

There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: - **Romans 2:9 (NIV)**

2. Sometimes God uses a bad experience to bring about a greater purpose.

God allowed Joseph to become a slave and go to prison, for the greater purpose of saving nations from starvation and preserving Abraham's family.

You intended to harm me, **but God intended it all for good.** He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. – **Genesis 50:20 (NLT)**

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "**but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.**" – **John 9:1-3 (NIV)**

3. Suffering refines character, deepens faith, and fosters virtues like perseverance and empathy.

This is sometimes called the '**soul-making**' theodicy, popularized by John Hick and Richard Swinburne.

Not only that, but **we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.** – **Romans 5:3-5 (ESV)**

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that **the testing of your faith produces** steadfastness. And let steadfastness have

its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. – **James 1:2-4 (ESV)**

So, we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, - 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 (ESV)**

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. – 1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV)

And after you suffer for a short time, God, who gives all grace, will make everything right. **He will make you strong and support you and keep you from falling.** He called you to share in his glory in Christ, a glory that will continue forever. – **1 Peter 5:10 (NCV)**

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. – Hebrews 12:11 (ESV)

Suffering develops in us a Godly character that would not otherwise develop if we never had any difficulties.

4. Suffering teaches us to look for and rely on God. God uses pain to get our attention.

"We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, **but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.**" – C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the

sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. – **1 Corinthians 12:7-10 (ESV)**

5. Our Sufferings help us to help others who are suffering

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction**, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. – **2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (ESV)**

"Experience is not what happens to you. It is what you do with what happens to you. **Don't waste your pain; use it to help others.**" - Rick Warren, The Purpose Driven Life

6. Suffering shows that God is patient and not done with this world yet.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, **but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish**, but that all should reach repentance. – **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

7. We experience the presence and power of God in our lives more when we suffer

Casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you. – **1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, **nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.** – **Romans 8:35-39 (ESV)**

Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and **I will give you rest.** – **Matthew 11:28 (ESV)**

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us

then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, **that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. – Hebrews 4:15-16 (ESV)**

So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. – **1 Corinthians 12:7-10 (ESV)**

#### 8. The suffering of believers has an eternal reward

For this light momentary affliction is **preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, - 2 Corinthians 4:17 (ESV)**

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” – **Revelation 21:4 (NIV)**

#### Keep In Mind Jesus Understands Our Suffering and Went Through Suffering for Us

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." – **Hebrews 4:15**

"For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted." – **Hebrews 2:18**

"Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps... He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree..." – **1 Peter 2:21-24**

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

4 Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,

and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.

9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

11 After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied, by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong,

because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors. **Isaiah 53:2-12 (NIV)**

## What does the book of Job teach us about suffering?

The Book of Job offers profound theological insights into the nature of suffering, challenging simplistic explanations and emphasizing trust in God's sovereignty and wisdom. Here are its core teachings, drawn from scholarly analysis and biblical themes:

### 1. Suffering Is Not Always Linked to Personal Sin

Job's story dismantles the retributive theology that assumes suffering is divine punishment. Despite being "blameless and upright" (Job 1:1), Job loses his wealth, health, and family. His friends insist his suffering must stem from hidden sin, but

God rebukes them, affirming that suffering cannot be reduced to moral cause-and-effect.

## 2. God's Sovereignty Transcends Human Understanding

The narrative underscores God's absolute control over creation. While Satan instigates Job's trials, God permits them within set boundaries (Job 1:12; 2:6). Job's eventual confession—"I know that you can do all things" (Job 42:2)—highlights divine omnipotence and sovereignty, even when His purposes remain inscrutable.

## 3. Lament and Honest Prayer Are Valid Responses

Job models raw, unfiltered dialogue with God, expressing anguish (e.g., "I will complain in the bitterness of my soul" [Job 7:11]). His laments are not condemned but framed as acts of faith, demonstrating that **grief and trust can coexist**.

## 4. Human Wisdom Is Limited

Job's friends represent flawed human reasoning, attributing his suffering to sin. God silences their "words without knowledge" (Job 38:2), revealing that finite minds cannot fully grasp His cosmic purposes. True wisdom begins with humility before the Creator.

## 5. Suffering Reveals God's Character

Through his ordeal, Job encounters God's majesty in creation (Job 38–41) and learns of His holiness, independence, and wisdom (Job 42:2-6). **Suffering becomes a lens for deeper revelation**, shifting Job's perspective from hearsay ("by the hearing of the ear") to experiential knowledge ("now my eye sees You").

## 6. Trust Amid Mystery

**The book resolves not with an explanation for suffering but with a call to trust God's goodness.** Job's restoration (Job 42:10-17) reaffirms God's faithfulness, yet the central message remains: God's justice operates beyond human categories, inviting faith even in darkness.

In summary, the Book of Job reframes suffering as a mystery within God's sovereign care, urging believers to lament honestly, reject simplistic judgments, and anchor their hope in the God who "gives and takes away" (Job 1:21).

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