

Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People?

How could God allow that to happen? How many times have you heard people ask that question? How could God allow six million Jews to be exterminated in the holocaust? How could God allow 140,000 people to be killed by a tsunami? If God is gracious and loving, why does he let his creatures suffer? He could stop it! Why doesn't he? There is probably not a person among us who hasn't asked this question at one time or another. Things get tough and God doesn't help us and we ask why? Different people have come up with different answers to that question throughout history. The atheist says, *"the reason God doesn't help is simple: God doesn't exist. Things just happen. It's the luck of the draw."* The problem the atheist has is that he chooses to believe something which makes no sense. Unless you want to believe that matter and energy created themselves, you're left with the fact that someone created them. This is what Paul was saying when he wrote: *"...since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from that which has been made..."* In other words, creation implies a creator. If you were walking through a field and saw a gold watch lying in the grass, you would know that somebody made the watch—it didn't make itself. Where there is a watch, there had to be a watchmaker. What has been made implies a maker. Therefore, the psalmist wrote: *"only the fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'" So much for the atheist. Another answer some people give is that there is a God but he has limited powers and can't prevent bad things from happening.*

This was the conclusion reached by a young couple back in the 1980's who wrote a book entitled *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*. The author and his wife had lost a child and as they struggled to understand how a merciful God could have let such a terrible thing happen, they ended up deciding that God just couldn't prevent it. If they had to choose between believing in an all-powerful God who let their son die and a loving God who couldn't prevent their son from dying, they would choose the latter. God could be either all-powerful or all-loving, but he couldn't be both. And according to human reason, it's not a bad argument. It just won't square with God's Word. From *Genesis* to *Revelation* the scriptures describe God as both loving and all-powerful. A loving God who does allow bad things to happen to people he loves—people like Job. People like John the Baptist. People like his own Son. If we are going to place our faith in the God of the bible, we have to accept the fact that he is both loving and all-powerful and that nothing happens apart from his will. Jesus testified to this when he said, *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. Even the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”* So let's cut to the chase: God loves us but he allows bad things to happen to us. Actually, he not only allows bad things to happen to us—sometimes he causes bad things to happen. After all, the greatest catastrophe in the history of the world—the great flood, which wiped out all of humanity except for eight people—was caused by God. The words of *Genesis* are clear: *“so the Lord said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth...for I am grieved that I have made them.’”* The prophet Amos says it very simply: *“when disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? There's just no getting around the fact that our loving and merciful Father is responsible for things that bring suffering into our lives. If this is a stumbling block for you, don't feel like you're alone—it's been a stumbling block for people down through the ages. Why would a God who loves us bring suffering on us?*

It doesn't seem to make sense. But our mistake lies in the question itself: *"why would God allow that to happen?"*

I had a seminary professor who said something I've never forgotten. He said, *"The bible will teach you everything you need to know about God. If you have questions that the bible doesn't answer—ask yourself why you are asking them. Chances are there's a sin behind the question. And the sin is probably pride."*

I came to believe that he was absolutely right. If I had a question of God that went beyond what he had chosen to reveal to me in the scriptures, didn't that mean that I felt I deserved an answer? I mean why would I ask a question unless I thought I deserved an answer? God had said, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts and your ways are not my ways, for my ways are as far above your ways and my thoughts are as far above your thoughts as the heavens are above the earth."* For us to expect that God would—or could—explain all his thoughts to us in a way we could understand would be like our being able to explain all our thoughts to an ant in a way that the ant could understand them. Yet we insist that God explain himself to us and when he doesn't so we hold him accountable. In effect, we set ourselves up to be judges of God. The great English poet John Milton wrote his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, in order to *"justify the ways of God to man."* With all due respect to Milton, it is not God who needs to be justified in our eyes, but we who need to be justified in His. The problem began in the Garden of Eden. When God created man he placed him in paradise, gave him a perfect companion and blessed him with eternal life. All he asked of man was that he not seek the knowledge of evil. But we all know what happened: the man and his wife wanted to be like God so they sought the knowledge of evil—and found it. And when they did they opened a breach in creation through which sin came pouring into the world, bringing suffering and disease and death along with it—just as God had told the man it would. And so it's man who brought suffering and disease and death into the world—not God. Yet we blame it on God and say, *"why would God allow that?"*

When we ask that question what we are really asking is “*why did God give us the ability to choose between good and evil?*” And the answer is that when God created us he wasn’t making puppets, he was making creatures who bore his image—and that included the power of choice. To blame God for human suffering is to blame him for choices we have made and continue to make every day of our lives. God said to Adam, “*On the day you eat of [the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil] you will die.*” Through Moses he said, “*...I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you.*” “*But if your heart turns way and you are not obedient and if you are drawn away to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed.*” It couldn’t be any plainer. Still, we blame God for the choices we make. But the good news is that God’s promises don’t end with Adam and Moses. If it did we would all be headed for something that would make our present problems seem insignificant. But God, our loving and all-powerful Father, has looked down on us with pity and compassion and he has provided a way out of the suffering and death we’ve brought upon ourselves. Just as he promised Adam that he would die if he sinned, he has promised all of us that we will live eternally if we believe in Jesus Christ. Aren’t you glad he has given us that choice? We can choose to deal with God through Moses or we can deal with God through Jesus Christ. If we choose the way of Moses, we will feel the full force of God’s thermonuclear wrath, for the Law of Moses is a scorched earth policy. But if we follow Jesus Christ, we will walk through green pastures and beside still waters for all eternity. And the icing on the cake is that God will even turn the suffering that comes into our lives into blessing if we will trust him.

Paul wrote, *“We know that God will cause all things to work together for good in the lives of those who love him and have been called according to his purpose.”* **All things.** And that includes suffering. The psalmist wrote: *“those who go out weeping carrying seed to sow will return rejoicing.”* If we cling to God in faith during hard times, he will work blessing out of the very things that oppress us—and that includes the current virus. We cannot understand God’s ways; how can the finite comprehend the infinite? If we try to use our limited powers to understand God, we will end up drawing conclusions that dishonor him and undermine our faith. But if we accept his will and trust his love, he will shower us with blessings. So when you find yourself asking, “why would God allow this to happen?”—answer it with another question: “why would God love a poor, sinful creature like me?” That is a question in which there is no sin. Amen.