

Answers to suffering

SUFFERING: If there is a God why there is so much suffering?



Answer 1: Explanation & Solution

Answer sensitively – ask question – personal or general issue?

- Painful broken leg story – explanation of nerve sending signals to brain but need leg reset (a solution)

EXPLANATION:

- God made world good & we have mucked it up bringing suffering into our world (*Gen 1-3*)
- This is in God's fixed plan (*Eph 1v11*) and God has a good reason for all that happens, for the judge of the earth always does what is right (*Gen 18v25*). But we often don't know why God allows specific suffering (*Deut 29v29*)

SOLUTION - Jesus Christ offers the *solution* we need rather than the full *explanation* we might like to have:

- This solution is that Jesus sympathises with those who suffer (*John 11v32-36 & Heb 2v18*) and he himself has suffered and conquered death to overcome all evil (*Is 53v3, 1 Jn 3v8, Roms 5v6-8 & John 11v25-26, 11v38-43*) – “Do you believe this?” (*John 11v26*)

Answer 2: The logical problem of evil answered

1. If God is all-powerful, he would be able to prevent evil and if God is all-good, he would want to prevent evil.

2. But there is evil.

~~3. So God does not exist (or he is not all-powerful and not all-good).~~

3. *God has a sufficient moral reason for the evil.*

- *And what about the unbelievers' problem of (the basis of) good? (The moral argument.)*

Answer 3: Job's Story

- **Job “good” but suffered terribly and did not know why *Job 1-3***
- **God revealed himself as great & good *38-41***
 - e.g. ^{38v1} Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: ^{38v4} “Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand.” (God is *great*)
 - ^{38v28} “Does the rain have a father? Who fathers the drops of dew?” (God is *good*)
- **So won't understand all God's ways (as God is great) *42v1-3***
 - ^{v1} Job replied to the LORD: ... ^{v3} “You asked, ‘Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?’ Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.”

- **But can trust what we do know (God's is good) when don't know why suffering (because God's is great):**
"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him" (13v15)
"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (19v25-27)

Answer 4: Demolishing

Judgement:

- *Luke 13v1-5* Repent or you will likewise perish
"God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains: it is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." C. S. Lewis
- If God did remove all evil by his judgement where would that live you & I?

Show their rock is not like ours – the problem of good:

- Agree evil of suffering occurs e.g. child abuse
- What is the basis for saying this is evil? – back to moral argument

Answer 5: Asaph's Psalm 73 for believers

- v1-16 Nearly slipped as envied wicked who prosper whilst the children of God are plagued with suffering
- v17 then enters God sanctuary & understands their final destiny:
 - v18ff Evil doers will be destroyed whilst believers are taken into glory, so live by v27,28:

*"Those who are far from you will perish;
 you destroy all who are unfaithful to you.
 But as for me, it is good to be near God.
 I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge;
 I will tell of all your deeds."*

Answers 6-8: By John Frame for believers

John Frame (*Apologetics to the Glory of God* = AGG):

- 1) **God is his own standard defense (compare Answer 3 above)**: Because of who God is, human beings have no right to bring accusations against him (Job 38-42, Rom. 9:14-15, 19-21). Can call this the "shut up" defense, as in the gag line "'Shut up,' he explained." This is the *normative* perspective. AGG 171-78.
- 2) **The greater good defense**: God promises us that he will bring good out of evil (Rom. 8:28). This is the *situational* perspective. AGG 179-87.
- 3) **The new heart defense**: Regeneration and our eventual glorification changes our values and presuppositions so that we lose the inclination to charge God with wrongdoing. This is the *existential* perspective. AGG 187-90.

Also can read **Don Carson** *How long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (IVP, 2nd edition). NB not an easy read.