

## Lesson 5

### God Meant It For Good, Part 2

*What do people mean when they say, 'I am not afraid of God because I know He is good?' Have they never even been to a dentist?*

- C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup>

Last week we focused on passages where Scripture directly speaks to the suffering in the world. We saw that God is using suffering to bring about a greater good, which ultimately is the end of suffering for believers. We also saw that suffering is used by God to remind us of our mortality, and as a result, to deal with our eternal state. Third, we saw that God is using suffering to bring us into a more intimate relationship with himself. As we look more specifically at why this immense suffering exists and what exactly will be done about it, the words of D. Martin Lloyd Jones are helpful,

“Most of our troubles are due to the fact that we are guilty of a double failure; we fail on the one hand to recognize the depth of sin, and on the other hand we fail to realize the greatness and the height and the glory of our salvation.”<sup>2</sup>

In light of this truth, we will focus the majority of our attention on the following 2 questions:

- 1) Why does suffering itself exist? And, why does *so much* suffering seem to rule the world?
- 2) How does heaven impact our view of suffering?

#### **Question #1: Why Does Suffering Even Exist?**

In answering the first question, it is important that we first reject a type of theology known as “exhaustive determinism.” Exhaustive determinism says that every aspect of the universe is orchestrated by God so that nothing can occur that God did not directly cause. Thus, God *exhaustively determines* every aspect of the universe. While this view would certainly explain the existence of suffering, it is fraught with problems, most notably the fact that is not Scriptural! If exhaustive determinism is true, then I Corinthians 10:13 cannot be true. I Corinthians 10:13 reads,

*“No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”*

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Armand M. Nicholi Jr., *The Question of God: C. S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex, and the Meaning of Life*, (New York: Free Press, 2002), 202.

<sup>2</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *God's Way of Reconciliation: Studies in Ephesians II* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), 82.

If God has caused everything to happen, then every time I sin, this verse must be false! For, if the verse is true, and there was a way to escape the temptation, then exhaustive determinism could not be true. For this reason, and many others regarding the character of God, exhaustive determinism must be rejected.

Because God did not cause Adam to sin, the entrance of sin and suffering into the world becomes the responsibility of humanity. Despite the modern world's mockery of this notion, it has been a fundamental teaching of Christianity throughout the ages. Consider Tertullian's remarks in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century,

“That man's liberty alone can be charged with the fault that it committed itself. . . . Yet, if God had intervened, He would have rescinded the liberty of man's will, which He had permitted for a specific purpose.”<sup>3</sup>

In essence, God gave Adam the free will to make a choice, and he chose wrongly. Therefore, the fault is Adam's, not God's. This idea was eloquently expressed in the opening lines of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*,

“Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe.”<sup>4</sup>

That is, Adam's choice brought not only death, but all suffering as well. Far from presenting a free-standing idea that is rooted only in church history, Tertullian and Milton are merely unpacking and commenting on the rich theology taught in Romans 5:12,

*“Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned”*<sup>5</sup>

Thus, the fall of man plays an enormous role in understanding why there is so much suffering in the world. Adam's sin tells us that the course of history has been dramatically altered and “the original design of the world is broken.”<sup>6</sup> While work was ordained before the Fall and intended to be fruitful, it became increasingly more difficult through Adam's sin. The effects of the Fall were not limited to Adam and Eve, but to all humanity. As the curse extends to the work of all men, regardless of their moral choices, so suffering also extends to all regardless of their moral choices. So, Adam's free choice to reject God has brought suffering into the world. Yet, many still question why God would allow the immensity of suffering which is seen around the globe today.

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Clay Jones, “Suffering.” Essay distributed through Biola University, January 2013.

<sup>4</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, [https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading\\_room/pl/book\\_1/text.shtml](https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_1/text.shtml), Last accessed, November 27, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> ESV.

<sup>6</sup> Keller, 114.

## Seems A Bit Much, No?

The depth of mankind's fall is often misunderstood. Steve Turner aptly summarizes modernity's view of man, "We believe that man is essentially good. It's only his behavior that lets him down. This is the fault of society."<sup>7</sup> While certainly an accurate summation of modern thought, these words fall in direct contradiction with the teachings of Scripture and the simplest of observations in human behavior. C. S. Lewis notes, "The Christian answer—that we have used our free will to become very bad—is so well known that it hardly needs to be stated. But to bring this doctrine into real life in the minds of modern men, and even modern Christians, is very hard."<sup>8</sup>

This doctrine, known as Total Depravity, is found throughout all of Scripture. The prophet Jeremiah writes, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?"<sup>9</sup> Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, wrote, "the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts."<sup>10</sup> Genesis 6:5 echoes the same truth, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."<sup>11</sup> The apostle Paul declares, "None is righteous, no not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."<sup>12</sup> While it is abundantly clear from the whole of Scripture that humanity is wholly corrupted, the notion that man is basically good at the core remains a prevalent thought, both inside and outside the church.

Consider the following statistics from the 20<sup>th</sup> century: 12 million civilians were killed in Germany from 1938-1945, 20 million innocent lives were lost in the USSR from 1917-1989, in 1937 alone, 300,000 were raped, tortured, or killed in Japan. 6-10 million were executed in China while another 20 million perished in death camps. 800,000 were killed in Rwanda in 1994. From 1915-1923, 1.2 million were killed in Turkey and from 1900-1920, 1.4 million died in Mexico. 2 million perished in Cambodia from 1975-1978. Over 300,000 were raped or killed in Pakistan in 1971 alone.<sup>13</sup> These atrocities speak to the breadth and depth of human depravity. Far from isolated executions carried out by psychopathic maniacs, much of the terror was accomplished by seemingly regular men.<sup>14</sup> After being sentenced to a Soviet labor camp for criticizing Josef Stalin in a private letter, and getting a first-hand glimpse of the normalness of the executioners, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn depressively reflected,

"Where did this wolf-tribe [officials who torture and kill] appear from among our people? Does it really stem from our own roots? Our own blood? It is our own. And just so we don't go around flaunting too proudly the white mantle of the just, let everyone ask

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God?*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 43.

<sup>8</sup> C. S. Lewis, quoted in Clay Jones, "Why God Allows Evil" Class Notes, June, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Jeremiah 17:9, ESV.

<sup>10</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:3, ESV.

<sup>11</sup> ESV.

<sup>12</sup> Romans 3:10-12, ESV.

<sup>13</sup> All statistics taken from Dr. Clay Jones class notes, "Why God Allows Evil", Biola University, June, 2013.

<sup>14</sup> For an in depth analysis of this claim, see Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (Harper Perennial, 1998).

himself: “If my life had turned out differently, might I myself not have become just such an executioner?” It is a dreadful question if one answers it honestly.”<sup>15</sup>

Following a doctoral study in human suffering, Clay Jones offered a similar sentiment to that of Solzhenitsyn,

“So, I think we must ask: if my life had turned out differently, might I have been a guard in Auschwitz? If we conclude that we were somehow born innately better than the millions who murdered or condoned murder, we should consider that the belief that we were born innately better than others is without logical or scientific foundation. How were we born innately superior to all the millions of others who have murdered? We should also remind ourselves that a belief in one’s innate superiority is the father of genocide. On the other hand, if we admit that we could have murdered, except for the grace of God, then we understand the depravity of humankind.”<sup>16</sup>

So, it seems clear that the suffering we encounter is a result of human depravity. While it is not comfortable, we must face the truth that our very own race has caused immeasurable pain and suffering. C. S. Lewis explains the need for human freedom,

“God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Suffering from Natural Causes**

Human depravity offers an explanation for a great deal of the world’s suffering, but what about terrible birth defects, horrible diseases, and natural disasters than bring suffering to the masses? This sort of suffering has often been termed “natural evil” by philosophers and theologians. However, given the first 3 chapters of Genesis, can birth defects, diseases, and natural disasters really be considered natural? Only in a fallen, broken, and cursed world do these problems reside. In short, “natural evil” isn’t natural! Al Mohler comments on the significance of the Fall,

“It is the fall into sin that explains all the suffering, all the strife, all the pain and conflict in our lives ... Why is it that so many Christians can have their faith rocked in the wake of a natural disaster? Why are they left asking the question “Where was God?” as if God somehow messed up by allowing this to happen? Why are so many Christians driven to

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<sup>15</sup> Clay B. Jones, “We Don’t Take Human Evil Seriously so We Don’t Understand Why We Suffer”, <http://www.clayjones.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Human-Evil-and-Suffering.pdf>, last accessed November 28, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Harper: San Francisco, 1952), 52-53.

shocked despair when elected officials don't bring the results they expected, or when the culture continues its march into depravity despite their best efforts? The reason is because those Christians do not understand the fall."<sup>18</sup>

Often lost in this discussion is "the implicit but strong cultural assumption ... that God owes all but the most villainous people a comfortable life."<sup>19</sup> This view grossly underestimates the depth of depravity of all humanity. Due to our sin, we deserve death. That some are granted a relatively peaceful 70 years on earth does not mean that any are owed such blessings. Given the magnitude of human disobedience, the greater question is, "Why, in light of our behavior as a human race, does God allow so much *happiness*?"<sup>20</sup>

Jesus' answers in Luke 13 and John 9 are helpful in this regard. Both passages speak to God's use of natural disasters to remind humans of the brokenness of this world, and the true solution. It is our limited perspective that assigns "severe" birth defects and "immense" suffering through diseases to the Fall. In reality, every single aspect of Creation that is imperfect in any sense is a result of the Fall. We gravitate to the extremes as we perceive them but stigmatism, type 1 diabetes, dyslexia, speech impediments and other imperfections that seem less severe are all results of the Fall. That our bodies degenerate at all is a constant reminder of our frailty, as Jesus points out in Luke 13, and only happens because of sin's entrance into the world. C. S. Lewis explains, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."<sup>21</sup>

In review, human suffering originated through Adam's disobedience in the Garden of Eden. Suffering continues because we now live in a fallen, broken, and cursed world, yet is used by God to draw people to himself. While some suffering is certainly the direct result of sin, to assume a "one size fits all" diagnosis for suffering is completely incompatible with Scripture. We looked at ways God is using suffering last week, but an additional question remains: how does heaven impact our view of suffering?

## **Question #2: How Does Salvation Impact Our View of Suffering?**

If the first key piece of Christian doctrine regarding the problem of suffering is a proper understanding of total depravity, then the second key doctrine is the renewal of the world – a restoration of the perfection originally intended. When Christ returns and judges the world, all wrongs will be put to rights. And, because we have suffered, we will find a deeper level of intimacy in the new order than if we had not suffered. Think about how the brokenness of our world enables us to worship God in ways unfathomable for Adam and Eve in the garden,

"In the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve certainly knew many songs they could sing of God's glory of Creator, but they did not know to sing "Worthy is the Lamb!" We are

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<sup>18</sup> R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He Is Not Silent: Preaching In A Postmodern World*, (Moody Publishers: Chicago, 2008), 98-99.

<sup>19</sup> Keller, 115.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 115.

<sup>21</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940/1996), 91.

more privileged than Adam and Eve were in the garden. We get to sing “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain!”<sup>22</sup>

Much like Christ could not have shown His love in a greater way than to suffer unspeakably, so we will not be able to experience the glory of heaven unless we first suffer. For this reason, the angels look into the wonder of redemption and are desirous of it.<sup>23</sup> Despite intense persecution that goes beyond what is conceivable to American Christianity, Paul speaks of suffering as miniscule compared to eternity, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”<sup>24</sup> C. S. Lewis quaintly spoke of this truth, “Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into a glory.”<sup>25</sup> Lewis goes on to stress the importance of seeing earthly suffering in light of eternal glory, “Scripture and tradition habitually put the joys of heaven into the scale against the sufferings of earth, and no solution of the problem of pain that does not do so can be called a Christian one.”<sup>26</sup> Lewis certainly had passages of Scripture such as 2 Corinthians 4:16-18,

“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, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”<sup>27</sup>

These verses were not only formative for doctrine in the early church, they were also formative for behavior under persecution. While the Roman government was threatening Christians with death and various forms of torture, they continued to preach with fervor. Why? Because they knew that their focus was on eternal things and on the glory that was awaiting faithful servants in heaven. Lucian of Samosata, a Greek satirist in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century comments on the attitude of these early Christians, “These misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them.”<sup>28</sup> Simply stated, a right view of our eternal destiny drastically alters the decisions we make in our mortal bodies.

But why should one believe this to be renewal and restoration will actually come? Last week we looked at the faithfulness of God throughout history to keep his Word. Is upon this basis, and that of the resurrection, that we can have true hope. At the beginning of Habakkuk 3, Habakkuk’s lament of God’s silence is reversed by his reflection upon the faithfulness of God. Habakkuk realizes that God has always kept His promises, and because of this, it becomes possible to find hope and joy in His promises yet unfulfilled. Matthew Henry comments on the turnaround experienced by Habakkuk,

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<sup>22</sup> Mohler, 102.

<sup>23</sup> Keller, 118.

<sup>24</sup> Romans 8:18, ESV.

<sup>25</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (Macmillan, 1946), 64.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 118.

<sup>27</sup> ESV.

<sup>28</sup> Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11-13, in *The Works of Lucian of Samosata*, transl. by H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1949), vol. 4.

“He had looked back upon the experiences of [God’s people] in former ages, and had observed what great things God had done for them, and so he recovered himself out of his fright, and not only retrieved his temper, but fell into a transport of holy joy”<sup>29</sup>

In the Incarnation, God shows His willingness to become flesh like us and to experience weakness. His human life was characterized by rejection, poverty, betrayal, torture, and death. On the cross, He experienced a degree of suffering that simply cannot be understood by finite beings. The physical suffering ravaged His body in a way that very few can know, yet this did not compare to the broken relationship that had never before been broken. Loss of relationship is often considered the greatest form of suffering, yet God the Father had eternally been in blissful fellowship with the Son and with the Spirit. Their relationship had never been broken – until the cross. Such depth of love and fellowship is simply incomprehensible for finite beings, yet Jesus willingly suffered this loss at Calvary. The writer of Hebrews says that during times of suffering we should focus on the work of God throughout history, both at the cross and in the lives of men.

“Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated – of whom the world was not worthy – wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect. Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”<sup>30</sup>

So on the one hand, the message of Habakkuk to submit to and trust in the faithful God is correct. On the other hand, it is incomplete. It is incomplete because the New Testament tells the rest of the story and assures us that our present suffering is not because God does not have our best interests in mind. Some might object that this sounds like a very man-centered idea. However, we know that God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him. Yet, we cannot be fully satisfied in Him if we are uncertain of His love for us. By showing His love for us, he assures us that He has our best interest in mind – namely, our satisfaction in Him. This in turn, brings Him the most glory. So, far from a man-centered, “God only wants what is good for you” type of health and wealth doctrine, we actually see that God’s love for us is used to bring maximum glory to Himself! We are not told exactly why suffering must take place, but we are assured that we do not suffer because God is lacking in love for us. Admittedly, this is only half the answer, but it is the portion we need most urgently. Suffering is bearable if we know that we

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew Henry, “Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible – Old Testament”, *Habakkuk 3 (Chapter III Study)*, <http://st-takla.org/bible/commentary/en/ot/matthew-henry/habakkuk/ch3.html>, last accessed November 28, 2014.

<sup>30</sup> Hebrews 11:35b-12:3, ESV.

are not alone and that the One over the suffering has our best interests at heart. A short story may be helpful in bringing this point home.

Imagine yourself as a 7 year old Jewish child living in the mid-1930s in Berlin, Germany. Your father is a surgeon and your family is very well-to-do. Suddenly, without explanation, your dad arrives home after work and declares that you will be moving and must pack all of your belongings in a single, small suitcase. The following morning, your family departs for London. Along the way, you stop and abandon your car, your father insisting that you travel by foot through the deep forests, despite the bitter cold. Soon, your family runs out of food and conditions worsen significantly. Because she refuses to eat until her children are fed, your mother tragically dies during the journey. As a result of the freezing temperatures, you suffer frostbite and lose 2 toes. The story goes on, and you eventually arrive in London and survive World War II. At the time, being instantly removed from your home, friends, comfort, and normal life seems incredibly cruel and insensitive of your father. Why did he insist that you leave without even saying goodbye to your friends?!?

What you are not aware of is the fact that your father received word that Nazi officials would be rounding up and deporting all the Jews from your neighborhood to a death camp at noon the next day. He knew the road would be long and arduous to London, but upon arrival, the glories of a free life compared to the agony of Auschwitz would seem incomparable. Does this minimize the reality of your suffering or your mother's suffering in any way? No – not in the least. But, it becomes possible to endure the suffering when you know that the person who is allowing it to happen deeply loves you. As the perspective of a 7 year old is limited in comparison with that of his father, so our perspective on life is virtually nothing compared to our Heavenly Father. In fact, the gap from a 7 year old to his father does not begin to express the gap between our understanding and that of God the Father's! Could it be that in a similar way to the Jewish father doing what was best for his children, God allows us to suffer in the short term, knowing that in the long run we will be eternally grateful?

### **Using Evil To Produce Good**

It has been established that mankind is responsible for bringing suffering into the world and much of the suffering in the world is inflicted upon humans by other humans. Suffering that does not come directly at the hand of other humans is nonetheless the product of human disobedience, which ushered in a broken and cursed world. While the Bible does not tell us specifically why so much suffering is permitted, we are assured it is not because God has forgotten about us or does not love us. We are also given a few examples that point out false explanations for our suffering. Finally, we are given a few insights into how exactly God is using the brokenness to bring a greater good. We'll briefly look at a few such examples.

First, when suffering comes, the natural human response is to ask what you have done to deserve such suffering. While sin in general has brought suffering, specific suffering is not a specific punishment for personal sin. In John 9, Jesus' disciples wanted to know whose sin caused a man to be born blind, yet Jesus responded that neither the sin of the parents nor the sin of the child caused his blindness. The story of Job communicates a similar message – Job's suffering was not at all a result of personal sinful choices. Tim Keller expands this basic idea,

“The individual sufferer is not necessarily receiving a due payment for specific wrongdoings. But on the other hand, while we must never say that every particular instance of suffering is caused by a particular sin, it is fair to say that suffering and death in general in a natural consequence and just judgment of God on our sin. Therefore we cannot protest that the human race, considering our record, deserves a better life than the one we have now.”<sup>31</sup>

So, while sin is the cause of our suffering, our suffering may not be traceable to a particular sin that we have committed. But, we have only defeated a possible explanation for our suffering, not offered any positive reasons for why God would allow suffering. Consider the following short list of reasons taken directly from Scripture.

#### God Allows Suffering To:

1. Display the works of God (John 9:1-3)
2. Remove a cause for boasting and to prevent conceitedness (2 Corinthians 12:7)
3. Promote sanctification (I Peter 4:1-2)
4. Prepare us for the judgment of works for rewards (1 Peter 1:7)
5. Give opportunity to demonstrate the body of Christ concept to believers and non-believers (1 Corinthians 12:12-26)
6. Achieve the ultimate good: to be conformed to the image of His Son (Romans 8:28-29)
7. Help Christians find strength and joy in God rather than circumstances (Habakkuk 3)
8. Allow us to see God and our own sinfulness (Job 42:1-6)
9. Bring us back to Him and away from sin (I Corinthians 5:5)

While the believer may be able to understand some of God’s purposes in suffering in a limited sense, the unbeliever is likely to find such purposes unacceptable. However, it is man’s arrogance that brought the suffering and it is man’s arrogance that prevents him from submitting to God during suffering. Haddon Robinson comments on the modern man’s propensity to see himself as a victim,

“Unfortunately, victimization convinces men and women who should be looking for a Savior to search for a scapegoat. After all, if I am not to blame for what I do, the Cross is much ado about nothing. How hopelessly out of date the old spiritual sounds to us: ‘Not my mother or my father, but it’s me O Lord, standing in the need of prayer.’ Victims do not need God, just a sympathetic therapist or a good lawyer.”<sup>32</sup>

### **Wrapping Up**

At the conclusion of the book of Job, following a litany of questions about why God would allow such intense suffering, God does not give Job a direct answer. Rather, God points out Job’s finite nature and God’s infinite nature. At the end of the day, we must trust that God is doing what is

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<sup>31</sup> Keller, 115.

<sup>32</sup> Haddon Robinson, quoted by Jim Cook at Bethesda Baptist Church, Brownsburg, IN, “A Biblical Basis for Understanding Pain and Suffering”, February 17, 1999.

best. As Tim Keller has said, “Suffering is unbearable if you aren’t certain that God is for you and with you.”<sup>33</sup> We must trust that he was doing what was best by creating us with freedom to reject Him and bring suffering upon ourselves. We must trust Him that he is using our self-wrought suffering to achieve a good greater than what was possible without suffering. As a pledge that we could and should trust Him, He came to the Cross and suffered horribly out of love for us. This unthinkable act demonstrates that He is at work to reverse the brokenness, the suffering, and the curse that temporarily resides on Earth.

If God is powerful enough to end all suffering and knowledgeable enough to know of all suffering, then it would also follow that He is great enough to have good reasons for not stopping all suffering. Stated differently, “if you have a God infinite and powerful enough for you to be angry at for allowing evil, then you must at the same time have a God infinite enough to have sufficient reasons for allowing that evil ... The belief – that because we cannot think of [a good enough reason for allowing suffering], God cannot think of it either – is more than a fallacy. It is a mark of great pride and faith in one’s own mind.”<sup>34</sup> At the end of the day, the problem of evil and suffering in the world comes down to who your God is. If it is yourself, then no reason will be satisfying. But, if Jesus is Lord, then the cause of suffering falls into place and we have His pledge that He is working to end suffering for good, and in the interim, is using suffering itself to bring good.

### **Verse for Scripture Memory**

Genesis 50:20

*“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.”*

### **Recommended Reading**

*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*

By Timothy Keller

If you are only going to read 1 book on why God allows evil, read this one. Keller formats the book into three basic sections: (1) How evil proves God’s existence (2) How Christianity best explains evil and (3) Practical steps for walking through suffering. Most books on the topic are either stuffy philosophy or feel-good clichés lacking depth. Keller avoids both extremes while tackling a host of difficult questions.

*Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*

By Christopher R. Browning

Browning studies a police battalion used by the Nazi’s to exterminate thousands of Jews. His research, which stands against conventional wisdom, shows that the executioners were not brainwashed members of Hitler’s Youth. Rather, they were middle-aged men who left successful

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<sup>33</sup> Keller, 58.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 99.

small business to fight the war and hoped to one day return to their businesses. Some of the most vile crimes imaginable were committed by ordinary men. It's fascinating and depressing – the depth of depravity in the human heart simply cannot be overstated, no matter how hard modernity tries to tell us otherwise.

*A Path Through Suffering*  
By Elizabeth Elliott

Elliott's story is well documented – while attempting to reach the Auca Indians with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, her husband was murdered and eaten by the cannibal tribe. Following this tragedy, his wife, Elizabeth, has carried on an amazing ministry. Her book deals with theological questions of God's mercy, compassion, and where to find answers. However, it is not a theological textbook. It is written by a sufferer and for sufferers. The subtitle accurately foretells the story of the book, "Discovering the Relationship between God's Mercy and Our Pain."