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# *Why Would a Good God Allow So Much Suffering?*

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**T**his is a question we all ask at some point in our lives. I believe it's the chief obstacle to faith.

We all suffer. Our bodies are frail, they will fail us, and we will die. And until we do, we all hover over a pit of tragedy, every single day. A mass shooting kills dozens. A drunk driver kills a whole family. A sudden tornado destroys a whole town. An earthquake rocks a nation. What sort of world is this?

The case against God can be very strong indeed. In philosophical terms, it can be stated like this: Premise one: A God who is all-powerful would be able to prevent evil in the world. Premise two: A God who is all-good would want to prevent evil in the world. Three: Evil exists in the world. This results in a logical conclusion: Therefore, God cannot exist. That syllogism, doesn't it seem a pretty airtight such a thing? How do you respond to

*The struggle with evil and suffering in this fallen world is only temporary.*

Well, religious people have often tried to escape this conclusion by watering down one of the premises. They may try to deny the horror of evil as mere illusion of a mind that has not yet transcended the limited earthly categories of good and bad, of suffering and pleasure. Much Eastern religious philosophy tends in this direction. But for most, this is not a viable option. Our experience of evil hurts too much not to be real.

So others may deny the magnitude of God's power. They would say God allows bad luck and sickness and cruelty to come into the world because He just can't do anything about it. God wanted a loving relationship with real persons, so He decided to take the risk of creating human beings with free will,



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and how could He know what they would choose? God didn't know that that drunk driver would choose to pull in front of your car. It was out of His control. But this limited God is certainly not the God of the Bible, and one wonders whether that kind of God is truly worthy of one's ultimate worship and faith.

Now there's a third option. Many people deny the depth of God's goodness. Maybe God is all-powerful, but He just doesn't care as much as we'd like. He rules with an iron hand, but He does so as one who is distant and aloof from His creation. Both Islam and Buddhism in various ways reflect something of this view.

You see, any of these options break the chain of logic in that syllogism that I referred to, but all of them come at a great cost, either to our experience of the world or to our relationship with God. So how should we respond? Well, surprisingly, as Os Guinness observed,<sup>1</sup> the biblical response to this challenge to faith is not to minimize the premises underlying the apparent contraction that this argument poses, but to reinforce them while also seeing how the Bible provides reassurances.

The Bible declares that evil is far worse than we realize. Evil is an invader, a parasite, a rot. It's a malignant cancer that has spread, a rupture in the cosmic order. Evil is so real that it has a personal focus — a focus in the one Jesus called the Devil — the one who stands opposed to the purposes of God and all that is good, true, and beautiful. The good material world God created has been corrupted. The root of evil in this world is not material, it is moral. It is found in rebellion against God's good rule. And from the beginning of humanity we have all participated in that rebellion and evil is embodied in our own hearts.

At the same time, the Bible affirms that God is far more loving than we could ever hope. Though God could rightly do away with us all, in His love and mercy, He seeks us out to save us from the evil in this world and from the evil in ourselves.

And in the gospel we see that God shares in our suffering even as He acts to bring victory over evil. The cross and resurrection of Jesus become God's own response to evil in this world.

God works in mysterious ways to work out His good purpose, but there is one thing He wants us to understand clearly. The struggle with evil and suffering in this fallen world is only temporary. For God has already won the decisive battle in this war, and His ultimate and complete victory is absolutely certain. And if the cross of Jesus Christ shows us that our God shares in our suffering, then the resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates that God's triumph over evil is assured.

Though we can never give a full explanation of evil in this world, we do have God's response to it. At the end of this age, when Jesus comes again in glory, our God will show Himself to be fully and completely just when "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" (Rev. 21:4). The Bible reveals a God Who is worthy of our trust even in the midst of our pain.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Os Guinness, *Unspeakable: Facing Up to Evil in an Age of Genocide and Terror* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), pp. 138ff.

