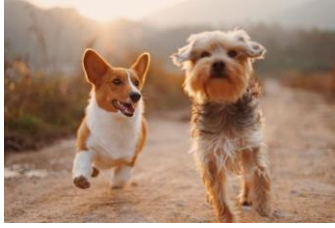


Why Do the Innocent Suffer?

There are some questions that are hard to answer, but they're still fun to ponder.

- What would it feel like to be a dog?
- Is my perception of the color blue the same as your perception of blue?
- If Florida was covered in carpet, how long would it take to vacuum?
- If a turtle doesn't have a shell, is it homeless or naked?



I'll admit it. Some of those questions are just dumb. There is one question, though, I do not consider dumb, but I struggle with the answer.

Why does God allow bad things to happen to innocent people?

This is a question I cannot escape. Watching the news of an incredible earthquake in Turkey brings the question to mind. Last weekend I walked the halls of our local hospital. We were visiting a friend who was only there for two days, but we walked past other rooms where you can tell the patients have been suffering for a while. Even the sad Sarah McLachlin commercials for the SPCA make me ask the same question.

Why do the innocent suffer?

I can give you theological answers about the fallen world we live in and the curse of sin that brings untold suffering. But let me be truly transparent: those answers, while true, feel cold and sterile. Look into the eyes of a small child struggling to breathe and live and tell her, "Well, you know it's because we live in a fallen world full of sin."



This question about suffering is nothing new. It was essentially the first question asked in the Bible. The book of Job was very likely the first biblical book penned, and the heart of this book centers on the question of why good people suffer.

Job, who likely lived during the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, was a righteous man—yet God allowed Satan to take away his children and his great wealth. Job's response?

Then Job stood up, tore his robe, and shaved his head. He fell to the ground and worshiped, saying: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life. The Lord gives, and the Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'

"Throughout all this Job did not sin or blame God for anything" (Job 1:20-22).

Satan said Job would lose his integrity and curse God if his health was attacked. So God allowed Job to be struck with nasty boils all over his body. Again, Job responded without accusing God.

"Should we accept only good from God and not adversity?" (Job 2:10).

Job's response doesn't mean he was content with the situation. He wanted to know why God judges our actions when He can just as easily change things. He asserted his blamelessness. He wanted to know how to appease God's justice.

Job wanted to question God, and at times I want to question God about this very matter. When Job questioned God, God responded. He responded by asking Job a boatload of questions to show how little Job knew.

"Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind. He said: Who is this who obscures my counsel with ignorant words? Get ready to answer me like a man; when I question you, you will inform me. Where were you when I established the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.... Have you comprehended

the extent of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this.... Do you know the laws of heaven? Can you impose its authority on earth?" (Job 38:1-4,18,33).

God's point? Job knew so little of the physical world he could see, so how could he possibly understand the vastly more complex moral world he could not see?

In the end, God never directly answered Job's question! Admittedly, I don't like that. I want a full explanation complete with charts and diagrams. But then again ...

Do I really want a God I can explain? If I could explain all God does—and doesn't do—He wouldn't be much of a God.

I must go back to that singular truth: we live in a sinful fallen world. We are sinful people—all of us. Bad people do bad things. Evil people inflict evil on others. But God stepped into the world in Jesus Christ to address the problem of a sinful world. Granted, not everyone responds to His solution, but through the death and resurrection, God guaranteed a life to come that will be free from pain, suffering, and evil.

"For our momentary light affliction is producing for us an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

That answer sounds like a cop-out to some. It's easy to talk about the by-and-by, about heaven someday, but why doesn't God keep the innocents from suffering now?

I don't know.

But I do know this: I've learned to trust God even when I don't understand. Please don't view that as a blind, naïve faith, but what I know of God—what I've experienced at His hand—gives me confidence to trust Him when I don't understand.

When I became a parent, I never wanted to give my sons the pat answer, "Because I said so." It didn't take me long to realize sometimes that's the best answer you can give a small child. Their developing brains cannot yet grasp the full complexities of, say,

why you just can't use that plastic card to buy whatever they want. Sometimes you just have to leave it at this. "I'm the parent and you can't have it—because I said so."

We need to trust God even as a small child must trust his parent when he doesn't understand. That's what Job did.

- "Wisdom and strength belong to God; counsel and understanding are his" (Job 12:13).
- "Even if he kills me, I will hope in him" (13:15).
- "But I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the end he will stand on the dust" (19:25).

It's a sinful, fallen world we live in—and this fallen world is overrun with pain and suffering. I cannot explain it away, but I can trust God. Even when it doesn't make sense, I can trust Him. Knowing that the God who is good and trustworthy is with me satisfies my questioning soul.