

# If God is all powerful and loving, why is there suffering in the world? [by Matt Slick](#)

It is often asked why is there suffering in the world if [God](#) is all powerful and loving. Why doesn't He stop it? Can He or is He weaker than we think? Suffering can fall into three simple categories: emotional, mental, and physical suffering. But, there are a variety of causes for suffering: morally corrupt (evil) people, disease, earthquakes, floods, famine, etc.

There are different explanations for why God allows suffering, but none of them can satisfy everyone. Therefore, I will simply list various reasons offered to account for suffering and evil in the world.

## 1. Free will

- A. God has given us freedom of choice. Having this freedom means that we can rebel against God and make choices that are contrary to His desires. Since we can say that evil is anything contrary to God's perfect and holy will, then anyone who chooses anything contrary to God's perfection is committing evil. But this is the risk of being able to have freedom of choice. Evil and suffering are the result of making bad free choices.
- B. But how could this account for natural disasters and sickness that brings suffering? Biblically, Adam represented not only all of his descendents, but he was also the head of the created order since he was given dominion over the earth. Therefore, when he fell, sin entered into the world ([Rom. 5:12](#)) and with it the effects of being fallen spread to the earth as well as to humanity.

## 2. God cannot stop evil and suffering because He is powerless

Of course, this does not stand up to biblical truth. God allows evil to occur partly for reasons we do know and partly for those we do not. We know that God uses evil to discipline people ([Prov. 3:11](#)) and to teach them ([Prov. 15:32](#)). But we cannot know all the reasons that God has for allowing evil and suffering in the world. It is not logically necessary that since God has not stopped evil and suffering in the world, that He cannot. God could be using suffering for His divine plan, in order to teach, for discipline, because people are free, etc. The existence of suffering does not at all mean that God cannot stop all of it. It means that He simply has chosen not to do so.

## 3. How much evil should be stopped?

The question of stopping evil means that if God is to stop evil, then He must stop all evil. This means that the murderer must be stopped along with the thief. But it also means that thinking evil, which is in rebellion against God, must also be stopped as well; that is, if all evil is to be stopped. Therefore, for God to stop evil and suffering may very well mean that He must remove the ability for people to freely choose what they want to do. So, if God is going to stop evil, is He required to stop all of it or just some of it? If only some of it, then the question would still stand. If He stops all of it, would we be free?

## 4. Prevention of further evil

It is possible that human suffering (cancer, disease, etc.) can be a means that God uses to remove the person from further suffering, worse suffering, or future suffering. Of course, this does not seem to be a very good option because if God was intending to stop further suffering, why would He use suffering to stop it? Also, what about floods and earthquakes that cause

suffering? How would they fit into God decreasing or stopping suffering except perhaps by people's deaths which ends suffering? This is difficult to answer. Though it may be that God might use some suffering to prevent even greater suffering, this explanation cannot answer all issues concerning it.

## **5. For the greater plan**

Undoubtedly, God has a plan. Since God knows all things He is not surprised by the presence of evil and sin in the world that brings about suffering. But if God knows all things from all eternity, then He is perfectly capable of using suffering in the world in His greater plan. The best and simplest example of this is the suffering of Christ at the hands of evil men. It is by Christ's suffering and death on the cross that we are able to be redeemed. It was God's plan from all eternity that Christ die for our sins yet Christ was crucified by evil people ([Acts 4:27-28](#)). This means that God had incorporated into His divine plan the reality of evil and suffering in order to accomplish His will. Of course, this does not mean that God is the author of evil, but it does mean that God is above it all and can use it to accomplish a greater good. If this is true on a large-scale, why cannot it also be true on a smaller one in each of our individual lives?

## **6. For discipline and instruction**

The Bible tells us that God disciplines those whom He loves ([Heb. 12:6](#)) and that no true child of God is without discipline and instruction. It is obvious that the results of our rebellion against God brings suffering and it is also true that we can learn through our suffering that such rebellion is bad. We then could glorify God during and after our suffering by proclaiming the truth of His word that urges us to follow God and His ways.

Sometimes we learn our greatest lessons after having suffered the consequences of our actions -- and this is good. If we see that there are consequences through the acts of suffering in this world, it is logical to conclude that there will be suffering in the next as a consequence of our rebellion now. This could easily lead us to conclude that we need to be delivered from our rebellion against God. Of course, Jesus is the answer to this.

## **7. It is the result of sin**

Biblically speaking, pain and suffering are the results of sin in the world. Adam, who represented all humanity as well as creation, rebelled against God and brought suffering into the world ([Rom. 5:12](#)). Sin is more than simple rebellion and breaking of God's law. It is permeating throughout all of God's creation bringing imbalance, famine, earthquakes, disease, etc. This does not mean that God created evil. Instead, it is God who is allowing evil and suffering to continue for His divine plan.

## **8. To serve as a warning**

Evil and suffering in the world can serve as a warning against breaking God's law and then people can see the necessity of following God's truth. God's ways are right and good and following them leads to security and safety. The consequences of disobeying God's word are manifested in suffering. Therefore, suffering in the world easily serves as a demonstration of the need to follow God's words thereby vindicating what God has said

## **9. To make a point**

It is possible that God is simply allowing evil and suffering in the world to prove that rebellion against Him brings pain and suffering. God may be allowing sin to take its natural course in the world so that on the day of judgment God can say "Do you see what rebellion against my words brings?" This may seem overly simplistic but it may prove to be one of the reasons that God allows pain and suffering. After all, did He not make us in His image and give us the freedom to choose? And in our freedom have we not rebelled? Yes, we have. Should God then make us robots or restrict our freedom so much that we have no choices at all? Of course not. But since we are limited in our knowledge and have used our freedom to rebel, God allows us to have what we desire and in the end, our sins will prove that God's way is the right way.

## **10.To serve as a means to bring the Son**

The death of the Son is the means by which God has redeemed those who would receive Jesus. This death cannot occur if Jesus were not a man. In order to be a man he had to be born as one. But since Jesus was sinless, death has no power over Him. Therefore, in order to die and in order to redeem us, His death must be at the hands of evil people. But, without sin, suffering, and evil in the world, Jesus could not have been sent to the cross. So, it could be said that suffering in the world is necessary in order to bring about the cross which in turn demonstrates the great and awesome love of God. Jesus said that the greatest act of love is to lay one's life down for another ([John 15:13](#)). If God is love ([1 John 4:8](#)) and love gives ([John 3:16](#)), can it be that God must demonstrate the greatest act of love? If so, it can only be done through suffering in the world.

## **11.We don't know.**

Biblically speaking, pain and suffering are the results of sin in the world. Adam, who represented all humanity as well as creation, rebelled against God and brought suffering into the world. This sin is more than simple rebellion and breaking of God's law. It is an offense against a holy God. Sin is permeating throughout all of God's creation bringing imbalance, famine, earthquakes, disease, etc. This is not how God created things but it is God who is allowing them to continue for his divine plan. Ultimately, we can't know all the reasons why God allows suffering, we just know that He does.

What does the Bible tell us that God has done about evil? It tells us that he sent his son Jesus to die for our sins and to deliver us from pain and suffering. Ultimately, God is allowing evil in the world for a purpose, otherwise, he would not let it exist. Therefore, we must trust Him that He knows what He is doing