

Why is There So Much Suffering and Evil in the World?

Message 3 of 3 in the series: "Origins"

1. God created all that is, and originally, everything He created was very good.

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth... God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Genesis 1:1,31a (NIV)

2. Sin ruined everything.

"The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the Lord God had made. One day he asked the woman, 'Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?' 'Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden,' the woman replied. 'It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, "You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'" 'You won't die!' the serpent replied to the woman. 'God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.' The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it, too. At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves. When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the Lord God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the Lord God among the trees. Then the Lord God called to the man, 'Where are you?' He replied, 'I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked.' 'Who told you that you were naked?' the Lord God asked. 'Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?' The man replied, 'It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it.' Then the LORD God asked the woman, 'What have you done?' 'The serpent deceived me,' she replied. 'That's why I ate it.' ...Then he said to the woman, 'I will sharpen the pain of your pregnancy, and in pain you will give birth. And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you.' And to the man he said, 'Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.' ...Then the Lord God said, 'Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!' So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate the ground from which he had been made. After sending them out, the Lord God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life." Genesis 3:1-13, 16-19, 22-24 (NLT)

- Sin brought shame.
 - Sin damaged our relationship with God.
 - Sin damaged our relationships with others.
 - Sin brought pain and suffering.
 - Sin brought death and decay.
 - Sin got us kicked out of Eden.
- a. The devil is our adversary and is constantly tempting us to go his way instead of God's through doubt, deception, and outright lies. "...don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one." Matthew 6:13 (NLT)
- b. Sin is choosing to go our own way instead of God's way, and it always has painful consequences that spread farther than we think. "All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own." Isaiah 53:6a (NLT)

"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned... the wages of sin is death..." Romans 5:12, 6:23a (NLT)

"Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay."

Romans 8:20-21(NLT)

3. Three important questions:

Q: Why did God allow Adam & Eve to be tempted in the first place?

A: Love is a choice, and God wants children, NOT machines, who willingly love Him. “But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.” John 1:12 (NLT)

Q: Why didn't God make us stronger/smarter so we wouldn't rebel?

A: Being stronger/smarter doesn't free us from moral choices; it only allows us to obey or sin to a greater degree. “When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.” Luke 12:48b (NLT)

Q: Why doesn't God end suffering and evil right now?

A: God will end suffering and evil one day soon, but He is giving more time for sinners to repent. “The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise (to return), as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent.” 2 Peter 3:9 (NLT)

4. The rest of the Bible tells us how God dealt with sin and how He is making things right again.

a. God sacrificed His own Son, Jesus Christ, in order to free us from the penalty of sin. “Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God.” 1 Peter 3:18a (NLT)

b. God has given us His Holy Spirit to free us from the controlling power of sin. “I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway... Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord... now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death.” Romans 7:19-8:2 (NLT)

c. Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven where we will be free from the presence of sin forever. “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 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.’ ... Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse.” Revelation 21:3-4, 22:1-3a (NIV)

Connect Group Questions.

Read Genesis 3 and then discuss the following questions:

1. How does it make you feel to know that our world was originally very good, but sin ruined everything?
2. Have you ever suffered because of evil choices made by someone else? If so, how did you respond?
3. Describe a time in your life when a sinful choice you made had far bigger consequences than you imagined.
4. Why did God give us a free will? Why didn't God just make it so we couldn't sin?
5. Read Romans 5:8-10 & 1 John 4:9-10. How did God respond to mankind's sinful choices?
6. Read Revelation 21:3-4 & 22:1-3. If God is going to set everything right at the end of the world, why don't we talk about this more often?
7. Spend some time as a group praying for spiritual awakening in our church, city, nation, and world.
8. Discuss the following quotation:

“Evil is inherent in the risky gift of free will. God could have made us machines but to do so would have robbed us of our precious freedom of choice, and we would have ceased to be human. Exercise of free choice in the direction of evil in what we call the ‘fall’ of man [Adam's sin in the garden of Eden] is the

basic reason for evil and suffering in the world. It is man's responsibility, not God's. He could stop it, but in so doing would destroy us all. It is worth noting that the whole point of real Christianity lies not in interference with the human power to choose, but in producing a willing consent to choose good rather than evil." J. B. Phillips