

Why Does God Allow Suffering and Evil?

Lesson 03 of the series, "Why?"

I. We live in a fallen world where there is much suffering and evil.

"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." Genesis 3:11-19 (NLT)

a. Pain, suffering and death occur because our world is under God's curse.

"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)

"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, 6:23 (NLT)

b. Much suffering and evil occur because of the devil.

"Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour." 1 Peter 5:8 (NLT)

"...the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God." Ephesians 2:2 (NLT)

c. Much suffering and evil occur due to sinful choices made by us and by others.

"What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them." James 4:1-2 (NLT)

"A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life." Gal. 6:7-8 (NIV)

II. Why does God allow suffering and evil?

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

Answer: God gave Adam & Eve free will because love is a choice. God wants children NOT machines.

"But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God."

John 1:12 (NLT)

b. Question: Why didn't God make the devil out of better stuff, so he wouldn't rebel?

Answer: The devil was the highest and best of God's creation before pride consumed him.

"I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian... You were blameless in all you did from the day you were created until the day evil was found in you... and you sinned. So I banished you in disgrace... I expelled you, O mighty guardian... Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor." Ezekiel 28:14-17 (NLT)

"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 12:48 (NLT)

c. Question: Why doesn't God destroy suffering and evil now?

Answer: God will one day destroy suffering and evil, but He is compassionate, kind and giving more time for sinners to repent.

"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, 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)

III. How has God responded?

- a. God sacrificed His own Son, Jesus Christ, in order to free us from the penalty of sin.

"God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." 1 John 4:9-10 (NLT)

Note: "This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most." Hebrews 4:15-16 (NLT)

- b. Through Christ, God has given us His Holy Spirit to free us from the controlling power of sin.

"So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions... Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there. Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."

Galatians 5:16-17, 24-25 (NLT)

Note: "...the Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world." 1 John 4:4 (NLT)

Note: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:2-4 (NIV)

- c. Through Christ, God has given us the promise of heaven where we will be free from the curse of sin.

"Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever." And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." Revelation 21:3-5 (NLT)

Note: "...he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 (NLT)

John Schmidt • 08-20-17 • john@centeringlives.com

Connect Group Questions

1. Have you ever lived through a natural disaster? If so, what happened? How did this experience impact you? How did it impact your faith?
2. Have you ever suffered because of evil choices made by someone else? How did you respond?
3. Read Isaiah 53:6. Why did God give us a free will? Why didn't God just make us so we couldn't sin?
4. Read Romans 5:8-10 & 1 John 4:9-10. How did God respond to our sinful choices?
5. Read Revelation 21:1-7. Does it matter to you that God will set everything right at the end of the world? Why? Why not?
6. Read Galatians 5:16-25. How does the Holy Spirit free us from the controlling power of sin?
7. Discuss the following quotations:

"God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong, but I can't. If a thing is free to be good it's 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 ...creatures that worked like machines- would hardly be worth creating." C.S. Lewis

"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