

**Sun., July 26:**

Message Series: FAQs: Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts

Message Series Theme Verse: Psalm 119:130

Message: "FAQs #4: Why Does God Allow Suffering?"

Memory Verse: Romans 5:3, "We also rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope."

Scripture: John 16:33

Blurb: Our question this Sunday is one that you've asked: "Why does God let this happen?" We dig into the Bible to seek guidance on one of life's greatest mysteries. Pastor David discovers that the answer we find is not what we expect. Don't miss this message! It helps answer our own inner wondering and also gives us a helpful response when we're asked this question.

Closing Hymn: "Standing on the Promises"

*Prep: Greeters outside, handing out bulletins*

*Doors propped open.*

*AC turned off.*

*Every other pew roped off.*

*Offering plates available as people leave*

**OPENING MUSIC:** -Sanctify

**WELCOME** -Pastor David

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

"We rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope." -Romans 5:3

**WORSHIP MUSIC SET** -Sanctify (acoustic)

Worship Prayer -Pastor Andrew

**GENERATIONAL BRIDGE:** "Bible FAQs" -Pastor Andrew

**OFFERING:** Please leave your offerings in the box as you leave.

**SERVE MOMENT:** Local inter-generational mission trip in August.

**MESSAGE:** FAQs #4: "Why Does God Allow Suffering?"

**PP#1:** FAQs: Your Questions Answered with Biblical Facts

Why Does God Allow Suffering? (Based on Joel's sermon 2/5/2006)

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation but take courage. I have overcome the world." -John 16:33

John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist movement. When he lay on his deathbed, he rallied one last time, sat up and declared the one thing that really mattered in life. He said, “The best of all is, God is with us!”

This morning our Frequently Asked Question is a doozy: Why does God allow suffering. It’s a question that I get asked over and over again. It’s a question that all of us ask. It’s one of the all-time questions people continue to ask. It’s even got it’s own word: theodicy. Theodicy is the problem of why God allows evil. This is cited as one of the top reasons why non-believers reject God. At atheist web sites, I notice it usually comes in as reason #3.

One guy put it to me very bluntly this way: Your God sat by and watched my daughter be raped. You claim that He has the ability to stop it, but chose not to. And then you claim that He is good and her Heavenly Father? No, that proves God doesn’t exist.”

Why does God allow such horror? The hatred of racism and the terrible acts people do? How about COVID-19, and all the suffering? How about child leukemia, or fires, or tornadoes?

This question is real, because suffering is real. Each baby should come with a warning label: Caution: there will be pain. There will be suffering. There will be heartbreak. There will be disappointments. There will be broken relationships. Caution, there is crime. There's abuse. This physical body will die. Jesus put it this way, in John 16:33, “In this world you will have trouble.” You’re going to face tribulation.

So, we go back to the facts we find in the Bible to help us answer our plaguing questions. Okay, Jesus, you said that in this life we will have trouble. But why? Why doesn’t our all-powerful God just fix it! *We’ve* managed to make seedless grapes and fat free butter. Why can’t *God* make a pain-free world?

**PP#2:** *Image of Job lying in misery.*

I looked around that verse, and I must tell you, I didn’t find an answer. Jesus never addresses the “why” question. In fact, the Bible never really does. It just says “that” it’s true.

Remember the story of Job? Satan claims that God’s people only stay faithful to God because God gives them good blessings. So, God lets Satan test a godly man named Job. God let’s Satan take away all his God-given blessings. In his misery, Job asks, “Why, God, why?”

God doesn’t answer, and in fact, God never answers Job. Job never learns about the debate between God and Satan. Job suffers unknowingly.

So often, that’s our struggle. We suffer not knowing any “why.”

What the Bible does offer, however, are some guiding lights.

**PP#3:** *An image of a lighthouse, subtitled with the following verse:*

“For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” -1 Corinthians 13:12

My wife loves lighthouses, and whenever we travel, we have to stop and go visit lighthouses. Lighthouses were built especially for sailors navigating storms at sea at night. They don’t explain why there are storms, but they help sailors survive and navigate during the storms that arise. Each lighthouse has a particular pattern to its signal, so even when the sailors can’t see where they are, the lighthouses offer a reference point, a point of light.

In the same way, the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 13:12 that now while in this life, we can only see things dimly, only in part. Some day, when we see Jesus, all these mysteries of this life will make sense. Until then, we navigate by trust, and by the points of light God give us in Scripture.

**PP#4:** Why does God allow suffering?

*[Reese: Can you use light houses or rays of light to list the 3 main points?]*

1. God did not create suffering

"God saw all that He made and it was very good." -Genesis 1:31

The first "Point of Light" is that God is not the creator of evil and suffering. This answers the question you hear so often: "Why didn't God create a world where there was no evil and suffering in the first place?"

And the answer is, He did! Genesis 1:31 says, "God saw all that He made and it was very good." Suffering comes because God's intended plan is broken when people choose against God's plan. God gives people the free will to choose good or bad, to choose to do good or bad. And so often—right from the beginning—people have always chosen to do all kinds of evil.

Why does God allow people to do evil? Because love is impossible without it. When my daughter was a toddler, she had this toy that when she pressed a button, it said, "I love you." I hated that toy! It didn't love her! It was just a recording. It was programmed to say that. And it cheapened my love. I loved her, and I meant it! I would do anything for her...even die for her. That toy cheapened love.

**PP#5:** Suffering and evil come from choice against God.

Two kinds of wilful evil in the world:

1. Moral evil: suffering caused by selfishness, pride, rebellion

2. Natural evil: suffering caused by natural causes in a fallen world

God is love, and created us to be a part of that love. God chooses us, and God created people with the free will to choose Him back. That's real love. The problem is we abuse our free will and continue to reject God and the way of living that He knows is good for us. This introduces two kinds of wilful evil into the world.

The first is moral evil. Moral evil is the immorality and the pain and the suffering that results when beings with free choice choose to be selfish and arrogant and uncaring and abusive. This was first Satan and the demons. Then it was humans. Romans 3:23 makes it clear. "All of us have sinned. All of us have fallen short of the glory of God." Therefore we've all done things out of our free will that have resulted in hurt to ourselves and to other people. The vast majority of suffering in this world is the result of human selfishness. Why does God allow famine and people to starve? Well, God created a world that produces sufficient nutrition for all people. Even with today's population, our current food production is enough to provide each person with 3,000 calories a day. It's human selfishness, greed, irresponsibility and misplaced nationalism that cause starvation.

**PP#6: Genesis 3:17-19**

17 To Adam God said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

The second kind of evil is called natural evil. These are things like disease and weather, natural phenomena that cause pain and suffering. But the Bible says that these are also a result of human sin. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, God's perfect creation was also broken. It's like when we make the decision to push our sibling, and he then falls against the vase and breaks it. Creation was cracked when Adam and Eve sinned. Thistles and thorns entered creation. Romans 8:22 says, "For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain like the pain of childbirth." In creation God ordered the chaos. In sin, chaos comes back into creation.

So, God didn't create evil and suffering. But, in order for love to be real, God created a world with the potential for evil and suffering. Human sin busted that open and made it reality.

**PP#7: Why does God allow suffering?**

1. God did not create suffering

2. God redeems suffering and creates good from it

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." -Romans 8:28

God, however, is not checkmated by the move of human sin. God's next move is to bring His redeeming power to create good again. God again creates good out of chaos. And truthfully, this is so much better than an answer to theodicy. God doesn't give an answer, God gives a redemption! This is the source of our hope, and life! This is the Gospel, the good news that makes us truly alive!

I'll give you a couple of ways God does this. First, God uses pain to draw people toward Jesus. The Christian philosopher Peter Craff put it this way, "What is the meaning and purpose of suffering in history? It leads us to repentance. Only after suffering, only after disaster did Israel, do nations, do individuals turn back to God." Suffering brings repentance. We often have to learn the hard way. As C. S. Lewis said, "God whispers to us in our pleasure. He speaks to us in our conscious. But He shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

**PP#8: *Image of a quarantine body prediction***

I saw this sketch of what people will look like if we keep living in quarantine: you know, staying home, not exercising, eating carbs, and being lazy. This is what people look like when we only do what is easy and lazy. We need the pain and suffering of activity, of healthy choices, of doing what is right, to become fit and healthy.

**PP#9:** "For godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation, we should never regret it." -2 Corinthians 7:10

This is true in our own experience, isn't it? If you're going through times in your life when everything is going great, the sun is shining, the money is rolling in, no major disruptions, then we find ourselves getting shallow, focusing on petty things, losing our ability to tolerate hardship, and depending on God less. But when there is pain, when suffering comes, when heartbreak takes place, what do we do? We run to God for help: "God, help me! I need You! I want You! Lead my life! Help me in this mess." This is true in parenting. When the lives of our kids are calm, we pray for them less. When they face difficulties, that's when my prayer life is most intense!

2 Corinthians 7:10, "For godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation." Then listen to the next part, "we should never regret it."

**PP#10:** *Image of Joni Erickson Tada in a wheel chair, painting with her mouth.*

Did you hear that? We should never regret the pain that God uses to turn us to repentance and salvation. The joy we experience when we turn to God is so worth the pain that caused us to seek God in the first place. Joni Erickson Tada, one of my childhood heroes, had an diving accident when she was 17 that left her paralyzed from the neck down. Yet, it was through that experience that she gave her life to God. For 40 years she's been living in a wheelchair, but full of joy and blessing. She explains, "I would rather be in this wheelchair knowing God than on my feet without Him."

**PP#11:** "For godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation, we should never regret it." -2 Corinthians 7:10

"We also rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope." -Romans 5:3

Another way God brings good from pain is that God uses pain to sharpen our character, to help His children become more like Jesus. Romans 5:3, "We also rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope."

**PP#12:** "For godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation, we should never regret it." -2 Corinthians 7:10

"We also rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope." -Romans 5:3

"Even though He was God's Son He learned to be obedient because of His sufferings." -Hebrews 5:8

The truth is improvement in our character and in our wisdom and in our virtue often comes through a process that involves hardship. It involves sacrifice. It involves trials. It involves difficulty. Hebrews 5:8 talks about Jesus: "Even though He was God's Son He learned to be obedient because of His sufferings." So here you have Jesus learning to be obedient. How? Through His sufferings. All the more true for us.

You can't have resiliency, for example, by just wanting it or learning about it. You have to practice it through experience. Our sufferings, when we learn to take them to God, grow us in holiness and develop our discipleship. The most saintly people I know have lived through lots of hardship.

**PP#13:** "For godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation, we should never regret it." -2 Corinthians 7:10

"We also rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope." -Romans 5:3

"Even though He was God's Son He learned to be obedient because of His sufferings." - Hebrews 5:8

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." -Romans 8:28

God allows evil and suffering, and God does not explain why. What God does do is show up in the midst of suffering and bring good out of it. And honestly, that's where our hope comes from: not from the absence of suffering, but because we have learned to depend on God through suffering. Romans 8:28, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." This is where our hope comes from, hope that makes us to live fully and abundantly while experiencing pain and hardships.

We know this is true, because God took the absolutely worst thing that ever happened in the history of the world and created the very best thing that ever happened in the history of the world. The culmination of human sin was the crucifixion of His son Jesus, who was also Himself God. At it was right there, at the pinnacle of pain and suffering, that God brought the best good: the opening of Heaven for people like you and me, who, by opening our lives to this resurrected Jesus, can spend eternity with Him. This is what God does: brings good from evil. He promises to do this for you!

**PP#14:** Why does God allow suffering?

1. God did not create suffering
2. God redeems suffering and creates good from it
3. God offers us a far greater reward

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." -2 Corinthians 4:17

Point of Light number Three. Our suffering will pale in comparison to what God has in store for His followers. The apostle Paul, who suffered beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonments, hunger, thirst and homelessness—far more pain than most people ever go through—testifies in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For our light and momentary troubles [this was a guy who five times in his life was flogged viciously—he was whipped 39 times at five different times, three different times people took rocks and beat him, leaving him for dead, and this guy says, "our light and momentary troubles"] are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." Or again, in Romans 8:18 he says, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us."

**PP#15:** *Image showing the life span of a person, with a tiny part being early life, and an endless length of eternal life.*

Let me try putting it this way: let's say on the first day of a year you had an absolutely terrible day. Everything went wrong; it was like a day being Job. But then, every thereafter was absolutely fantastic. Everything was restored a hundredfold. Now, a guy comes up to you and asks, "How was your year last year?" What are you going to say? "It was great!" But then someone says, "But didn't

you tell me how terrible that one day was?" You say, "You're right. It was a very difficult day. But the 364 tremendous days far outweigh that one day of pain and suffering." It just sort of fades away.

British pastor Galvin Reed tells about meeting a young man. When this young man was just one year old, he fell down a flight of wooden stairs and shattered his back. He was in pain from then after. But the young man boldly told the pastor that he thinks God is more than fair. The pastor asked him, "How old are you?" and the kid said, "I'm 17 years old." How many years have you spent in the hospital? Thirteen. So, the pastor asked, "So how can you think God is more than fair?" The young man amazingly answered, "Well, God has all eternity to make it up to me!"

I love 1 Corinthians 2:9, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him." It makes our present sufferings more than bearable.

So, why does God allow suffering? Because He is love. Yet it is hard to stomach rape and slavery, and torture. We just can't know fully the reason why. But the Bible does give us three points of light. 1. God is not the author of evil. 2. But God takes the bad situation and creates something good from it. And, 3. finally, our sufferings here will pale in comparison to the glories in store for us in Heaven.

**PP#16:** *Image for Jesus being there with us in our suffering, subtitled with*

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation but take courage. I have overcome the world." -John 16:33

Jesus says in John 16:33 that we will have trials in this life. But the whole verse is powerful: "These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation but take courage. I have overcome the world."

The ultimate answer of God to this question of suffering is not "words" that explain it. It is *The Word* of life. God's ultimate answer is not an explanation, but the incarnation: God coming personally in Jesus, fully God and fully human, coming in to our experience of trouble and suffering, to live among us, to carry us *through* our troubles, to die and earn resurrection, and to offer us the hope of life abundant and eternal, even while we live amid evil.

Jesus is the answer to the question of suffering. As one philosopher said, "Jesus is there sitting beside us in the lowest places of our lives." Why are you there? I don't know. But I do know you are not there alone! Are you broken? Jesus was broken like bread for you. Are you despised? Jesus was despised and rejected. Do you cry out that you can't take anymore? The Bible says Jesus was a man of sorrow. He was acquainted with grief. Did someone betray you? Jesus was sold out for a measly thirty pieces of silver. Did you love someone and then have them walk out on you. Jesus loved and then at the end His best friend denied Him and walked away. Does God enter into your own private hell? Yes, He is there! Corrie Ten Boom wrote, while sitting in a Nazi concentration camp, "No matter how deep our darkness, God is deeper still."

**PP#17:** *Painting of John Wesley on his deathbed declaring, "The Best of all is, God is with us."*

And in the end, this is what really matters. Atheists die in self-justified misery. Christians die unknowing, but in joy. At the end of the story of Job, God came to visit Job. He never answered Job's "why" questions, but Job said, "I have God, and that is enough!" (Job 42:5-6)

John Wesley pulled himself up on his deathbed and, in one last gasp, proclaimed, "The best of all is, God is with us!"

I want to end by telling you the story of Russell Kelso Carter. By the age of 30, he had suffered heart failure for seven years, but by then his heart was so bad he was on the verge of death. In it, he felt a nudging to pray. So, in his mother's bedroom, he lifted his concerns to God. Now, Russell wasn't healed, but a blessed quietness came over him. When he read the Bible, he found it deeply satisfying, like never before. He felt God was close. In thankful joy, he sat down and wrote a hymn of praise to God: "Standing on the Promises."

**PP#18:** *Image for standing on the promises of God...setting up the closing hymn.*

Let's make this our closing prayer today, too. We come with questions of "why," but we leave filled with something far better than an answer, we leave with God's closeness carrying us along. We join Russel Carter and proclaim, "when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living Word of God [Jesus with us] I shall prevail. Standing on the promises of God."

Let's stand and sing together!

**CLOSING SONG:** *Standing on the Promises* -Sanctify

**ANNOUNCEMENTS** -Pastor David

Next week's question: Where does the Bible come from?

This Wednesday: Kid's Summer Bash begins! Each Wednesday through August.

**MEMORY VERSE** -Pastor David

"We rejoice in our suffering because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character, and character hope." -Romans 5:3

**BENEDICTION** -Pastor David

**CLOSING MUSIC** -Sanctify