

"Why is there so much evil and suffering in the world?"

1 Peter 1:3-9

This difficult question arises not in classrooms and textbooks but bedside in hospitals, graveside at funerals, and in the arms of those hurting. In those places, one grasps that suffering is predictable (inevitable and even a privilege) and purposeful (not pointless and random) to highlight our hope, change our character, intensify our intimacy with the Lord, and extend our empathy.

"I just don't believe the God of Christianity exists. God allows terrible suffering in the world. So He might be either all-powerful but not good enough to end evil and suffering, or else He might be all-good but not powerful enough to end evil and suffering. Either way the all-good, all-powerful God of the Bible couldn't exist."

Jesus was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"
—Isaiah 53:3

Paul was "in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in hunger."
—2 Cor. 6:4-5

Evil & suffering

I. ... Are predictable

"For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know."
—1 Thess. 3:4

"For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear to be in me."
—Phil. 1:29-30

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God."
—Romans 8:20-21

"It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was so that (RESULT) the works of God might be displayed in him."
—John 9

II. ... are purposeful

A. Highlights hope

"Peace, shalom ... is the fullness of life in all dimensions. Shalom is dwelling in justice and delight with God, with neighbor, with oneself, in nature. Death is shalom's mortal enemy. Death is demonic. We cannot live at peace with death. When the writer of *Revelation* spoke of the coming of the day of shalom, he did not say that on that day we would live at peace with death. He said that on that day 'There will be no more ...

"... death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.' I shall try to keep the wound from healing, in recognition of our living still in the old order of things. I shall try to keep it from healing, in solidarity with those who sit beside me on humanity's mourning bench."

"Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

—1 Peter 1:13

B. Changes character

"And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

—1 John 3:3

"The testing of your faith produces endurance ... so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

—James 1:3-4

C. Intensifies intimacy

"Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

—James 1:12

"That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings."

—Philippians 3:10

"Knowing Him must include sharing His sufferings by reproducing the pattern of His death. Instead of seeking first for escape from suffering, the soul hungry to know Christ will seek in it the means to know Him."

—E. Elliot

"Lord if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

—John 11:21

"Where is your God now?"

—Psalm 42:3

"In suffering God may be found precisely where He was on Good Friday: identifying with us in our suffering, acting to resolve that suffering in ways we may not see or imagine, and yet sovereign in the heavens, accomplishing His eternal, though mysterious, purposes."

—Robert Pyne

D. Extends empathy

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."

—2 Cor. 1:3-4

"But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

—1 Peter 5:9