

Question: "What does the Bible say about suffering?"

Answer: Of all the challenges thrown at Christianity in modern times, perhaps the most difficult is explaining the problem of suffering. How can a loving God allow suffering to continue in the world which He created? For those who have endured massive suffering themselves, this is much more than a philosophical issue, but a deep-seated personal and emotional one. How does the Bible address this issue? Does the Bible give us any examples of suffering and some indicators on how to deal with it?

The Bible is startlingly realistic when it comes to the problem of endured suffering. For one thing, the Bible devotes an entire book to dealing with the problem. This book concerns a man named Job. It begins with a scene in heaven which provides the reader with the background of Job's suffering. Job suffers because God contested with Satan. As far as we know, this was never known by Job or any of his friends. It is therefore not surprising that they all struggle to explain Job's suffering from the perspective of their ignorance, until Job finally rests in nothing but the faithfulness of God and the hope of His redemption. Neither Job nor his friends understood at the time the reasons for his suffering. In fact, when Job is finally confronted by the Lord, Job is silent. Job's silent response does not in any way trivialize the intense pain and loss he had so patiently endured. Rather, it underscores the importance of trusting God's purposes in the midst of suffering, even when we don't know what those purposes are. Suffering, like all other human experiences, is directed by the sovereign wisdom of God. In the end, we learn that we may never know the specific reason for our suffering, but we must trust in our sovereign God. That is the real answer to suffering.

Another example of suffering in the Bible is Joseph's story in the book of Genesis. Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers. In Egypt, he was indicted on false charges and thrown into prison. As a result of Joseph's suffering and endurance, by God's grace and power, Joseph is later promoted to governor of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh himself. He finds himself in a position to make provision for the nations of the world during a time of famine, including his own family and the brothers who sold him into slavery! The message of this story is summarized in Joseph's address to his brothers in [Genesis 50:19-21](#): "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children."

[Romans 8:28](#) contains some comforting words for those enduring hardship and suffering: "We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." In His providence, God orchestrates every event in our lives—even suffering, temptation and sin—to accomplish both our temporal and eternal benefit.

The psalmist David endured much suffering in his time, and this is reflected in many of his poems collected in the book of Psalms. In Psalm 22, we hear David's anguish: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? Oh my God, I cry out by day but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel. In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted

and were not disappointed. But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: 'He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.'"

It remains a mystery to David why God does not intervene and end his suffering and pain. He sees God as enthroned as the Holy One, the praise of Israel. God lives in heaven where all is good, where there is no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What does God know of all that humans endure? David goes on to complain that "dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing."

Did God ever answer David? Yes, many centuries later, David received his answer. Roughly one millennium later, a descendent of David named Jesus was killed on a hill called Calvary. On the cross, Jesus endured the suffering and shame of his forefather. Christ's hands and feet were pierced. Christ's garments were divided among his enemies. Christ was stared at and derided. In fact, Christ uttered the words with which David opens this psalm: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" thus identifying Himself with the suffering of David.

Christ, the eternal Son of God in whom the fullness of God dwells, has lived on earth as a human being and has endured hunger, thirst, temptation, shame, persecution, nakedness, bereavement, betrayal, mockery, injustice and death. Therefore, He is in a position to fulfill the longing of Job: "If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot" ([Job 9:33](#)).

Christian theism is, in fact, the only worldview which can consistently make sense of the problem of evil and suffering. Christians serve a God who has lived on this earth and endured trauma, temptation, bereavement, torture, hunger, thirst, persecution and even execution. The cross of Christ can be regarded as the ultimate manifestation of God's justice. When asked how much God cares about the problem of evil and suffering, the Christian God can point to the cross and say, "That much." Christ experienced rejection from God, saying, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" He experienced the same suffering as many people do today who are feeling isolated from God's favor and love.

Recommended Resources: [Logos Bible Software](#) and [The Problem of Pain by C.S. Lewis](#).

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