

Why Does God Allow Suffering?



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

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Learn why evil and suffering exist in this world and some causes of suffering

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My plea: It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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Why Evil And Suffering Exist In The World

Evil and suffering exist in the world today. People of all ages experience death – even tragic and unexpected deaths. People even kill other people. People suffer serious injuries and experience chronic pain. People even hurt others by stealing, fornicating, lying, and cheating. In fact, just a few minutes of reading the news headlines will remind you that evil and suffering exist in the world.

Once again, these facts beg the question of “Why?” “If God is really in control of all things, why would He allow suffering and evil to exist?” But, in order to fully understand the answer to *why* these things happen, we need to establish some basic facts about God, His creation, and man’s rebellion.

God is in control

Many people will reach a number of false conclusions when they try to answer the questions involved in human suffering. One false conclusion that is commonly reached is that God is no longer in control of the things that happen on this earth. While Satan is identified as being the “ruler of this world” (John 14:30) and the “god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4), holding the whole world under his power (1 John 5:19), he does not possess more control over the world than God has! Instead, these passages simply indicate that the world has chosen not to listen to God. The world has decided to live according to the desires of the devil. However, there are those who have escaped the power/rule of Satan in order to follow God (see Acts 26:18)!

The Scriptures are clear that Satan does not possess unlimited power or control over this world. For instance, prior to Job being afflicted with great suffering, Satan was required to come before God – and he was not permitted to do just anything that he desired to do to Job (see Job 1). This is just one example of God having control over Satan. You could also consider the fact that if God was not in control, then Satan would be responsible for the good things that happen on this earth. However, the

It is an undeniable fact: Bad things happen to us. It can be seen all around us. There is death, pain, sorrow, and loss in this world every day. Sometimes, the things that happen seem unexplainable. We are often left questioning, “Why...?”

“Why did my son/daughter have to die?” “Why did I have to be the one who had that accident?” “Why did my husband/wife leave me and my family?” “Why are my friends treating me in this way?” “Why did I have to lose my job?” “Why does my mother/father have to suffer in pain?” “Why did that disaster have to happen and kill so many people?”

Of course, these are only a sample of the questions that run through our minds. Ultimately, we are left to question why any of the bad things that happen have to happen to us – or to those we love. After all, if God really is in control of the universe, shouldn’t He keep all of these bad things from happening?

Through this lesson, I hope that you can find some Bible answers to your questions. It is my hope that, after you have considered these Bible truths, that you will be more confident in your faith and that your faith in God will not waver whenever you or a loved one experiences suffering. In fact, I hope that the conclusions we reach will actually serve to strengthen your commitment to serving God, as you come to recognize that He is the only one who can provide deliverance from your suffering.

Scriptures teach that every “good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning” (James 1:17).

Still, understanding that God is in control leaves us with questions about how an all-powerful God could allow human suffering. Therefore, some will reach the conclusion that there is no God, because a God who was in control of everything could not possibly allow all of this suffering to be experienced by His creation. So, they either will conclude that God is a cruel God and begin to blame Him for everything evil that happens to them or they will conclude that He does not exist. In fact, some have concluded that they would rather not believe in a God who would sit by and watch all of the suffering that is experienced by His creation.

Throughout this study, we will be considering some facts about suffering that (I hope) will help you overcome these conclusions. For now, just appreciate the fact that the problem of human suffering does not negate the evidence for the existence of God. For instance, Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.” All of the marvelous works of creation can still be plainly seen – and still demonstrate that there is an intelligent Designer who was responsible for them all (see also Romans 1:19-20).

God did not create evil

Everything that the Scriptures teach us about God demonstrates that God is a holy and fair God. God is said to be “light” and to have no “darkness” in Him at all (1 John 1:5). That is, God is entirely pure and righteous. There is no element of sin or evil in God at all.

Therefore, everything God has created was also good at the time of its creation. God is not capable of creating anything that is inherently evil. The Genesis account of creation shows all that God created on this earth was either “good” (Genesis 1:3, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) or “very good” (Genesis 1:31) when He created it. Once again, James 1:17 plainly states that every good thing on this earth comes from God.

In fact, a quick look into Genesis 2 reveals that God created a world that was entirely lacking evil and suffering. God placed man in the Garden of Eden that He had planted for mankind. In the garden was every tree that was “pleasant to the sight and good for food” (Genesis 2:9) and the Tree of Life (which would permit man to live forever, Genesis 3:22). God gave man everything that he needed – even creating a suitable companion for the man (a woman, Genesis 2:18-24). At that point, there was no death, evil, or suffering in this world. This is the way in which God created the world.

God created mankind with free will

With these facts being established, it should be clear that the holy and righteous God did *not* create anything that was evil. However, God *did* give free will to His creation and He *did* give laws to govern them. Therefore, both mankind and the spiritual beings God created (i.e. angels) have been created with the ability to choose their own paths – either of obedience or disobedience. God simply never desired to create mankind in such a way that would force him to serve God. Instead, God wanted His creation to choose to serve and worship Him.

Sadly, God’s creation has routinely chosen a path of disobedience – including many of the angels God created. For instance, 2 Peter 2:4 says that God “did not spare the angels who sinned.” Even Satan (who was created by God as a spiritual being) was given free will and chose to sin against God. John 8:44 says that Satan “was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” 1 John 3:8 makes it clear that “the devil has sinned from the beginning.”

Satan enters the Bible story in Genesis chapter 3 – when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. God had given Adam and Eve one law to abide by during their time in the garden. Genesis 2:16-17 says, “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” Satan (taking the form of a serpent), tempted the woman to disregard the instructions of God and fulfill her own desires to eat of the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3:1-5.

Then, Genesis 3:6 records a decision that forever changed the course of life on this earth: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.” As a result of their choices to fulfill their own desires rather than being content with what God had provided for them and obey His commandment, God punished them (see Genesis 3:14-24). Included in these punishments was suffering, being cast out of the Garden of Eden, and being separated from the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24).

After this sin, the Bible story begins to explain how sin spread and how suffering and death were now present in this world. It was only after this that we read about the suffering Cain caused Abel. In Genesis 4, two sons of Adam and Eve (Cain and Abel) both brought offerings to the Lord. However, God was only pleased with Abel’s offering. As a result of Cain’s anger, he “rose up against Abel his brother and killed him” (Genesis 4:8). Later, Cain then received a punishment from God that he believed to be greater than he could bear (Genesis 4:13). Then, in Genesis 4:23, a man named Lamech spoke about killing a young man for hurting him. In Genesis 5, you can read about the genealogies of many of the first people to live on this earth – including many of the first deaths. And, by the time you come into Genesis chapter 6, man had become so wicked that God was ready to destroy them all from the face of the earth. Over chapters 6-8, you can read about how God accomplished this by means of the flood and only spared Noah and his family.

Now, evil and suffering are in the world

Clearly, evil and suffering are now in full effect in this world. We are constantly reminded of the brevity of life and routinely experience suffering. While we do *not* inherit our sin from Adam, we do live in the “fallen” world that has resulted from Adam and Eve’s sin. We no longer live in the paradise of the Garden of Eden. We no longer live in a world that is free from evil. We no longer live in a world in which we have access to the Tree of Life. All of this means that we will experience suffering and death.

There are some fundamental things that we must absolutely understand about the suffering we do experience on this earth. Consider both of these points carefully and understand their full impact before we begin considering some specific reasons why God allows suffering.

(1) Evil and suffering is not because of God. That is, it is not here because it was God’s original design for this world. However, this does *not* mean that God never uses suffering to accomplish His purposes. Instead, this simply means that God did not design this world in such a way that He wanted its inhabitants to experience suffering and death. As we saw, this was a consequence of His creation choosing to pursue their own desires over obedience to His will.

(2) Evil and suffering are not entirely connected with our righteousness or unrighteousness. It is common for folks to attribute every bad thing that happens to people on this earth with some sinful/unrighteous activity. There are several Bible examples of this. (1) Whenever Job was suffering, his friends kept insisting that his suffering resulted from sin he had committed. However, the Bible reveals that Job’s suffering did not result from any unrighteousness in Job (read the book of Job). (2) In Luke 13:1-5, Jesus corrects this kind of thinking in some. There were some people who evidently believed that some Galileans who were killed by Pilate and some who were killed by a tower in Siloam were worse sinners than others. However, Jesus told them that unless they would repent, they would all perish. (3) When Jesus’ disciples saw a blind man, they questioned, “who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” (John 9:2). However, Jesus responded that their sin was not the reason for his blindness. (4) When Paul was on the island of Malta, he was bitten by a poisonous snake. After witnessing this, the native people of the island concluded that Paul must have been a murderer and that he was bitten by this snake because justice would not permit him to live. However, Paul demonstrates a great miracle by surviving this snake bite and shows that the thing did not happen because of sin that was in his life (Acts 28:1-10).

Therefore, the Bible teaches that both the righteous and the unrighteous will suffer during their time on this earth. Ultimately, the Bible promises that we will all experience death. Hebrews 9:27 says that it is “appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.” Please embrace these fundamental facts about evil and suffering on this earth. Now, we want to begin looking to the Bible for information that will help us understand why God allows suffering to happen on this earth. While I am not going to claim to have a full understanding of the ways of God, I do want us to consider these points about suffering God has revealed to us in His word.

Sometimes, It Is Evil At Work In The World

Satan is active in this world – and has been ever since we first read of him in Genesis 3. Just as he has tempted Eve, he has tempted billions of people since. The Scriptures tell us that he “walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). His work in this world does *not* just produce spiritual consequences (everlasting punishment in Hell); but, his work also produces a great deal of suffering in this world.

The world lies under the sway of the wicked one

As we saw earlier in this lesson, Satan has his way with the majority of people who live on this earth. 1 John 5:19 says that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.” He has certainly convinced most people to follow his ways of rebellion against God.

Not only is Satan at work to lead many people astray; but, Satan also works through other people to accomplish his purposes. For instance, you can read Matthew 16:21-23 to see that Satan even used one of Jesus’ own apostles (Peter) to tempt Jesus. Certainly, Satan works through many avenues in order to accomplish his evil purposes. And, these evil works often result in other people suffering on this earth.

Suffering happens because of wickedness

Sometimes, the influence of Satan results in greed which leads to theft. Sometimes, this results in anger and hatred which leads to murder. Sometimes, this results in lust and adultery which leads to broken homes. Sometimes, this leads to habits (like drugs, tobacco products, and alcohol) which lead others to experience cancer and serious diseases (i.e. through second-hand smoke) or to fatal accidents (i.e. automobile accidents). Sometimes, this results in selfishness and decisions that hurt other people. Sometimes, this results in hatred of Christians which leads to persecution.

The Scriptures clearly demonstrate that people suffer as the result of the evil choices that are made by others. For instance, Abel suffered because of the evil decisions made by Cain. 1 John 3:12 says that Cain was “of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” Abel’s suffering was not brought on himself. In fact, his offering was pleasing to God (Genesis 4:4). Instead, he suffered because of Cain’s evil.

1 Peter 2:18-25 also demonstrates this point in two ways. First, the passage instructs those who are Christian slaves of earthly masters to be submissive and obedient to their masters. However, this does not just apply to the masters who are good and gentle; but, also to those who are harsh. Peter says, “For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully” (vs. 19). These Christians, therefore, would be doing the right thing; but would still be suffering because of the evil actions of their masters.

Then, the second way this passage demonstrates this truth is in Jesus Christ. Peter demonstrates that Jesus Christ “committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (verses 22-23). Yes, Jesus Christ was entirely pure (having never sinned, Hebrews 4:15); yet, He still suffered when He lived on this earth – because of evil men who hated Him (see John 15:18).

Furthermore, the Scriptures teach that all those who are Christians will suffer at the hands of evil men. Not only did the world (those who live according to Satan's desires) hate Jesus; but, it also hates those who follow Jesus (John 15:18-21). 2 Timothy 3:12 even says, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." Yes, the Christian may be falsely accused, mistreated, or even physically persecuted by evil men!

Sometimes, It Is The Result Of Our Own Decisions

Sometimes, the suffering that we experience is no one's fault except our own! Sometimes, the sinful choices that we make have physical consequences (in addition to the spiritual consequences).

The Bible teaches us to make wise decisions

Following Biblical commands and principles would eliminate all/most suffering we experience as a result of our sinful and foolish decisions. God has clearly revealed His instructions to us and we have the choice whether to listen and obey or to shut our ears and disobey! However, He often warns us that acting in ways that are contrary to His instructions will carry consequences. Therefore, any suffering that results from a failure to listen to and obey God is self-inflicted!

The book of Proverbs, particularly, is a book that provides a great deal of information regarding wise living. When we follow these wise instructions, we can avoid many things that would have otherwise brought suffering on ourselves. Wisdom says, "But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, And will be secure, without fear of evil" (Proverbs 1:33). However, when we forsake the path of wisdom, we will be left to suffer the consequences. Concerning such people, Proverbs 1:31 says, "Therefore, they shall eat the fruit of their own way, And be filled to the full with their own fancies."

Decisions have consequences

In fact, the first chapter of Proverbs demonstrates how those who do reject God's wisdom will often experience physical consequences for their actions. The chapter pictures wisdom as crying aloud for all to hear her voice and heed her instructions. However, there are many who delight in their own foolishness and are set on living accordingly. Then, after they refuse to turn at wisdom's warnings and heed her instructions, these individuals are said to experience terror, calamity, and destruction because of their own decisions. At this time, they will often cry out to wisdom for deliverance from those consequences. But, she will not deliver them. They had rejected her counsel. They are left to "eat the fruit of their own way" (Proverbs 1:31).

Not only is the suffering that results from our own sin pictured in Proverbs 1, but, the Bible is full of examples in which individuals experienced consequences and sufferings because they failed to listen to God. For instance, the suffering Adam and Eve experienced after being driven out of the Garden of Eden was the direct result of their own sin. As a result of their sinful decisions, Eve would suffer in child birth, Adam would suffer when he worked the fields, and they would both experience physical death. Also, Cain experienced suffering as a direct result of his evil actions. After he killed his brother, he was made to be a fugitive and wanderer upon the earth and would suffer his entire life. Furthermore, Jephthah suffered whenever he made a foolish vow to God (see Judges 11). He had vowed that if God would cause the Israelites to be victorious in battle against the Ammonites, Jephthah would offer as a burnt offering the first thing that would come through the doors of his house when he returned. Unfortunately, this first thing happened to be his only daughter.

Sometimes, we are warned about particular punishments if we commit certain acts (either by God's law, by man's law, or by some other means). For instance, murderers will often be punished by the law (perhaps even killed). Drunk driving often results in jail time, loss of jobs, the guilt of injuring another, or even death. Using tobacco products often results in suffering lung ailments and cancer.

Committing adultery often results in suffering broken homes and a lack of trust. Suffering anxiety over bills and jobs often results from foolish decisions involving debt. Therefore, these are just a few examples of how the sufferings we may experience can be natural outcomes of the decisions that we make.

Sometimes, It Is God Allowing Our Faith To Be Tried

Our suffering is not always a result of sin that is in our lives. Sometimes, God is allowing our faith to be put to the test through various means in order for us to demonstrate whether we will be faithful to Him or not.

The story of Job

Job is introduced to us in the Scriptures as “a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil” (Job 1:1). Therefore, this was a very righteous man. However, as you read Job chapters 1 and 2, you learn about the great sufferings Job endured – and why he endured them.

First, understand that this man was a very prosperous man (in terms of physical prosperity). Job 1:2-3 says that he had seven sons, three daughters, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 yoke of oxen, 500 female donkeys, “and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.”

Then, Job 1:6-12 describes the time when “the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them” (vs. 6). Now, read Job 1:7-12: “And the Lord said to Satan, ‘From where do you come?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.’ Then the Lord said to Satan, ‘Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil?’ So Satan answered the Lord and said, ‘Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made

a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But now, stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face!’ And the Lord said to Satan, ‘Behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand on his person.’ So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord.”

After this exchange, Job suffered the loss of all his children and his possessions. Then, after Job continued to be faithful to the Lord (Job 1:22), Satan was granted permission to put Job’s faith in God to the test by inflicting Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head (see Job 2:1-7). It is at this point that we see a picture of job: “And he took for himself a potsherd with which to scrape himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes” (Job 2:8). His wife, then, turned against Job, telling him to “Curse God and die!” (Job 2:9). Yet, even through all of this (and not knowing the reason why he was suffering), the Bible says, “Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:10).

Our faith will be put to the test

Sometimes, like Job, the suffering that we will experience will be the result of our faith being tested. And, just as job was unaware of what Satan had desired to do to him and why God permitted it, we may not know what is going on “behind the scenes.” Instead, we will simply be called to faithfully bear the sufferings we experience.

In addition, those who are Christians and steadfastly endure the trials of life, will be made stronger in their faith. James 1:2-3 says, “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.” Every time we faithfully endure these trials of life, we will be made stronger having gone through them!

Sometimes, It Is The Chastening Of God

There are times when we will experience suffering because God is chastening/disciplining us. Therefore, there are times when God will punish us physically so that we will repent of our sins in order to be saved spiritually.

God's discipline

God does discipline us – just as a loving father disciplines his child. Consider Hebrews 12:5-11: “And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives.’ If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”

God has disciplined people on various occasions throughout the Scriptures. For instance, God disciplined the Israelites on several occasions by temporarily delivering them into enemy oppression so that they would repent and return to Him (see the book of Judges). In addition, after David had sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba (Uriah's wife) and having Uriah murdered, “the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David and it became ill” and later died (2 Samuel 12:15-23).

When God disciplines

Since no discipline is pleasant at the time it is being administered (Hebrews 12:11), there will be

times when we will experience suffering as a result of God's discipline. However, attempting to know for certain whether the suffering we may be experiencing at a particular point in time is the chastening of God or not can be difficult.

As we have already seen, sometimes bad things happen to good people and the sufferings they experience are not because of their sinful activity. Yet, we do know that God does discipline us during times when we sin and do not repent. Therefore, we can conclude that *sometimes* we experience suffering because God is rebuking us for our sin. Therefore, it is profitable to evaluate our lives any time we are suffering. We should begin by asking ourselves, “Is there sin in my life that I have not repented of – that God could be disciplining me for?” If there is, you should seek to correct that sin in order to be right with God. However, if there is no sin in your life God would be disciplining you for, you can conclude that your suffering is due to something else.

Whenever we experience the chastening of God, we must remember that God disciplines His children because of His love for us. He wants those who are living in their sin to correct their lives in order that they might live for Him. Again, Hebrews 12:11 says, “Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.” Therefore, if we respond to God's discipline properly, it will make us better and help us go to Heaven (thereby avoiding the eternal suffering prepared in Hell)!

Sometimes, It Is Being Used To Fulfill God's Purposes

There have been times (according to the Scriptures) when God has used sufferings to accomplish His purposes. Certainly, God is the one who is in full control of this universe – and all things are being done to accomplish His marvelous purposes. Therefore, some of the sufferings we experience may be part of God's plan.

God uses all things to His glory

The Scriptures teach us that God uses everything in life to His glory. For instance, Romans 3 demonstrates that even when mankind has practiced unrighteousness, God has been able to use such to His own glory (i.e. to demonstrate His righteousness).

Consider a few Bible examples, now, of how God has used the sufferings of others to accomplish His purposes and to be glorified. (1) Joseph suffered for a variety of reasons (primarily due to the sinful and foolish actions of people who were around him). However, through Joseph's father showing favoritism to Joseph, his brothers being envious of him, being sold into slavery, and being cast into prison, God worked providentially to save His people (the Israelites) from famine (read Genesis 37-50). (2) God instructed the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute in order that he might understand the sufferings God experiences whenever His people commit spiritual fornication against Him by serving other gods. (3) In John 9, Jesus identified the reason the blind man had been born blind. In verse 3, "Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.'" This was said just prior to Jesus performing the miracle of healing the blind man. (4) Jesus Himself suffered in order to accomplish the plan of God. Acts 2:23 says that Jesus was "delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" to be "taken by lawless hands...crucified, and put to death."

We do not always know the purposes of God

These are just a few samples of how God has worked to accomplish His purposes even through sufferings. Certainly, God rules over this world and He works in many providential ways to accomplish His purposes. Therefore, as we consider our sufferings and the examples I've just given, we should (at least) consider the possibility that God is trying to accomplish one of His purposes through us.

Certainly, we know that trials are brought upon us so that we can be tested and made stronger

(see James 1:2-3 again, also Romans 5:2-4). But, there are many times we simply do not know the answer as to why things are happening the way they happen in our lives. At these times, we simply need to trust in God and realize that the "secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us..." (Deuteronomy 29:29).

Sometimes, It Is Time And Chance

While it is certainly true that our sufferings can be the result of evil in the world, the result of our own foolish decisions, the result of God allowing our faith to be tested, the result of the chastening of God, and the result of God fulfilling His purposes – sometimes suffering is simply the result of "time and chance."

Life happens

God has designed this world and has created certain natural laws which govern it. He has set time and life into motion. He has given mankind the freedom to think and act according to his own desires.

While it is certainly true that God exercises ultimate control over this world, it is *not* true that God directly controls or influences every decision that is made or every action that is committed. As a result, God allows *life* to happen – according to those things He has set into motion. Ecclesiastes 9:11 says, "I returned and saw under the sun that — The race is not to the swift, Nor the battle to the strong, Nor bread to the wise, Nor riches to men of understanding, Nor favor to men of skill; But time and chance happen to them all."

It is possible for us to be on the receiving end of someone else's mistake. It possible for us to be caused to suffer something that is completely unrelated to the way in which we have lived our lives. For instance, it's possible to be killed in a car accident because someone else wasn't paying attention, because the roads were icy, or because a deer leaped out in front of the vehicle. It's possible

for a tower to fall and kill 18 people (such as Jesus references in Luke 13:4) without there being a direct purpose behind it. It's possible for the weather patterns God has set into motion to form powerful storms that destroy towns and leave people injured or killed without it being an act of God's vengeance. It's possible to be at the wrong place at the wrong time and sustain an injury without your injury being directly related to a specific purpose of God or a decision that you have made. It's possible to contract a disease that has no correlation with a direct purpose for that to have happened in your life.

Death will happen to all

Time and chance happen to us all! We all are living in a fallen world. We are going to experience sufferings as a result. Ultimately, we are all going to experience physical death.

As time passes, we naturally grow older. And, if we live long enough, we (along with our loved ones) will all experience the struggles and difficulties that accompany this aging process. Then, at the end of this process comes physical death. Again, Hebrews 9:27 says that it is appointed to all men to die. However, the suffering that is associated with all of this is not necessarily the direct result of our sin (although physical death exists because of Adam and Eve's sin – as we discussed previously). It is simply associated with the natural passage of time in this fallen world!

All Things Work Together For Good

Through every suffering we will endure during the course of our lifetimes, it is important for us to keep our faith (and to increase in it)! It is my hope that this study has helped you to understand some fundamental things involved in human suffering and that you will never begin to cast blame upon God or lose your faith. Yes, God is in control. However, mankind has chosen a path that has led to the suffering that is experienced throughout this world today! Still, for those who will faithfully serve

Him, there are wonderful blessings waiting – and everything works together for their spiritual good!

We don't always know the reason why

Through this study, we have looked at a number of things revealed in the Scriptures about human suffering. Now, we did not do this so that we could precisely pinpoint the reason we have suffered the ways we have suffered. Instead, we were focused on just observing why human suffering exists – and helping you understand that there are some different reasons for human suffering.

However, let's realize that we will likely never fully understand the sufferings we experience. For instance, the apostle Paul pleaded with the Lord three times to remove his "thorn in the flesh" (a source of suffering for him). However, God only responded, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). While we live on this earth, we may never get answers that are either sufficient for us or that we would fully understand. ***But that's OK!***

The Christian will overcome

As long as we are faithful to the Lord, everything will work out for the good *spiritually!* Romans 8:28 says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Now, this is *not* a promise that everything will work out physically. Physically, we may suffer throughout our entire lives. However, to those who love the Lord, He has promised the reward of everlasting life in Heaven – where there will be no more sorrow, death, pain, crying, or evil (see Revelation 21-22)!

Conclusion

When you suffer, do not blame God. Rather, recognize that God is the only one who has provided the avenue of escape from suffering. Everything that God does for you, He does so that you will be able to spend eternity with Him in Heaven. Revelation 2:7 speaks of those who overcome the trials of this world, saying that they will be given to "eat from the

tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God"! If you will dedicate your life to being faithful to God, you too can partake of these wonderful blessings of Heaven and be free from all suffering throughout eternity!

Consider John 14:1-6: "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.' Thomas said to Him, 'Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?' Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"

Jesus Christ is the way to eternal life in Heaven with the Father. However, in order to become Jesus' follower and receive the forgiveness of your sins, the Bible teaches that you must: Hear God's word (Romans 10:17), believe (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Luke 13:1-5), confess Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9-10), and be baptized (Acts 2:38). Then, you must live your life in a way that is faithful to God through the point of your death (Revelation 2:10). If you do, He promises that you will receive the crown of life in Heaven and you will be free from all sorrows and suffering for all of eternity! However, if you will not obey God in this way, you will experience everlasting punishment and suffering in Hell fire (see Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Study Questions

Why do you believe God has allowed you to suffer?

1. Why Evil And Suffering Exist In The World

Is God in control?

Did God create evil?

What quality did God create mankind with? Why is this important?

What facts must you understand about the suffering you experience?

2. Sometimes, It Is Evil At Work In The World

Who has a great amount of influence on the decisions being made in this world?

How does suffering often happen because of wickedness?

3. Sometimes, It Is The Result Of Our Own Decisions

What kind of decisions does God want you to make?

Do you ever experience suffering because of your own foolish decisions?

4. Sometimes, It Is God Allowing Our Faith To Be Tried

What happened to Job? Why did he suffer in this way?

Will your faith be put to the test?

What comfort does the Christian have through all of his/her sufferings?

5. Sometimes, It Is The Chastening Of God

Does God discipline? Give an example of this.

When does God discipline? How should you respond to this discipline?

6. Sometimes, It Is Being Used To Fulfill God's Purposes

Has God used suffering to accomplish His purposes in the past?

Will you always know the purposes of God?

7. Sometimes, It Is Time And Chance

Does God directly control everything that happens – either good or bad?

Will death be experienced by everyone? Why is this significant?

8. All Things Work Together For Good

Will you always know the reason why you are suffering?