

"Evil, Pain, and Suffering" Video Transcript

We live in a world that experiences suffering. If we were to cast our eyes across the globe on any given day, we would see an immense amount of pain and suffering that is experienced by people in the world. Just recently in the southeastern part of the United States, F5 tornadoes struck an entire section of the state and killed over 200 people; earthquakes on a regular basis around the globe, hurricanes, tsunamis, plane crashes, car wrecks, disease, sickness, and many times those end ultimately in death.

When we survey the situation, and we see the pain and suffering that goes on, sometimes the weight of all that pain and human suffering makes us question, "Where is God? Why have all these bad things happened to us? If God is so powerful and He loves us so much, why hasn't He done something to ease our pain and to ease our suffering? If He loves us, why doesn't He stop the suffering?"

You know, the skeptic has used that argument to attempt to militate against the idea that God even exists. They have said that if God really exists, Who loves us, and Who has the power to stop this pain and suffering, then He would do that. They've been unsuccessful. They can't use that argument to show that God doesn't exist.

But, that doesn't change the fact that we experience pain and suffering in our lives. And, we do wonder why God allows this to happen. Why does God allow a child to be diagnosed with terminal cancer? Why does God allow a young mother to be tragically taken from her family? Gideon, in the Bible, had a very similar question in his mind. He was assured that God was with him and he said that "if God is with us, then why have all of these bad things happened to us?" And that's a great question.

Why have all of these bad things happened to us? We're going to explore that question. We're going to answer some of that aspect of the problem of pain and suffering. And, what we're going to do is give some reasons why an all loving God, Who is all powerful, could allow the suffering and pain that we see in our lives. And, we'll see that not only does suffering and pain not militate against God, but we will be able to see God's presence in the pain and the suffering.

When we start to look at the question of "Why does God allow the suffering and pain that He does?" we need to go to the Bible for the answer. You say, "Why would we go to the Bible for the answer?" There's a very good reason for that. You go to the Bible for the answer because that's where we learn that there is even a problem. What I mean by "problem" when we discuss the problem of evil, pain and suffering, we're asking why a loving God, Who's all powerful, would allow suffering and pain.

Well, where did we get the idea that God is a loving God? We got that from the Bible. Numerous passages tell us that, but in 1 John 4:8, we read that God IS love. But, where did we get the idea that God is all powerful? We got that from the Bible just as well. In several passages we read that God is all powerful, that He's omnipotent, that He can do anything that He desires to do that would take power to do. So, we see that God is love from the Bible. We see that God is all powerful from the Bible. And, we also see throughout the Bible, and throughout our human experience, that God does allow suffering. Why is that?

One reason that God allows suffering is because His love values freedom. What do I mean by "His love values freedom?" I mean that when He created humans, He made them in His image. He made humans with the ability to be able to speak, to be able to think, to be able to decide what those humans want to do or don't want to do. And, with the freedom to decide, with the freedom of choice comes the responsibility of consequences.

You see, God has the power to create a group of beings that couldn't decide for themselves; robotic creatures that would always do exactly what He wanted them to do, creatures that wouldn't have the freedom to choose. But, if He gives His creatures, humans, the freedom to choose because He loves them, then that freedom has to come with consequences.

One of the main reasons that people suffer is because we have the freedom to choose and we suffer because of our own consequences. Can you imagine a world where all of the consequences were the same? Imagine a world where a person went and worked hard all day to earn money to live, and another person stole to live, and every consequence was the exact same to the person who worked hard and to the person who stole. Imagine a world where consequences were the exact same if you decided that you were going to take care of the poor and feed the hungry, and you were going to do the best that you could to help others, and the consequences were the same for that as if you decided you'd walk down the street and murder anybody that you didn't want to have to deal with, or you wanted their things and you wanted to take their material possessions. What if the consequences were all the same?

Could we ever learn from a world like that? No, we certainly couldn't. In fact, in the very beginning when God put Adam and Eve in the garden of paradise, He designed that garden for them to be able to live forever. He never wanted them to have to experience suffering and pain and death. But, He allowed them to freely choose to disobey Him. And when they freely chose to disobey Him, those consequences of their free choice hit their lives very heavily. Do you know that sometimes what occurs in our lives, the suffering and the pain, is because of our own poor decisions? But, there are other reasons for the suffering and pain that goes on in the world today.

We understand that much of the pain and suffering that comes into our lives is because God allows us to have the freedom to choose. And sometimes we choose wrongly. Think about a person who decides to drink alcohol. They take in more alcohol than their body can handle. They are passed the level of intoxicated. They get behind the wheel of a car. They drive down the road, they lose control, smash into a telephone pole and they're paralyzed for the rest of their life on this earth. Whose fault is that? Can you blame God for wrong decisions that a person makes that cause pain and suffering in his or her life? Certainly that's not God's fault. But, you and I both know that some pain and suffering that comes into our lives is not because we made wrong decisions. No, sometimes innocent people suffer.

Imagine that same scenario with the person who has taken in too much alcohol, they're drunk, they're behind the wheel, except this time they don't smash into a telephone pole. This time they swerve into the middle of the road and an oncoming car that has an innocent two-year-old. That drunk driver smashes into that oncoming car. That 18-month-old loses his life because of the wrong decisions of that drunk driver. Does that seem fair? Why didn't God stop that? Why would God create a world where we are impacted so devastatingly by the wrong decisions of others? The answer to that is fairly simple. The answer to that is that God is no respecter of persons.

God doesn't decide who gets the freedom to choose and who doesn't. In fact, when God created humans He endowed them with the ability to make decisions that had consequences. But those consequences, they didn't just impact the person making the decisions, but those consequences impact other people around them.

You know, it might be tempting to say, "God, I would use my freedom of choice correctly so give me the freedom to choose. But God, there are some people out there that wouldn't. Some people out there that would choose to do wrong, that would choose to make decisions that would cause pain in my life. God, I don't think you should let them have the freedom to choose. I don't think you should allow the situation to be such that their choices would have consequences like my choices have."

Now, you see, that's just not the way that God operates. When God created humans, he endowed them with the ability to choose. And sometimes those choices bring about consequences that cause pain and suffering in the lives of even the innocent. Is that unfair of God to give everyone the freedom to choose? No, it's not. Since He's no respecter of persons, we all have the ability to impact those around us.

There are other reasons why God allows the pain and suffering that go on in this world. We understand that some of the pain and suffering that comes into our life is because of our own wrong decisions. We also understand that since God doesn't respect one person over another, He allows everyone to make decisions that impact those around them. And, some of the pain and suffering that comes into our life is because of the wrong decisions of others who are living around us.

There's another reason why we experience pain and suffering. And that's because sometimes past generations have made decisions that impact the present generation. We can think of all kinds of examples of this, but one good example is the idea and use of asbestos. For many years, people thought that using asbestos was a great idea. They mined it and they put it in insulating fibers that they used to insulate military vehicles. They used to insulate factories and it was very effective. It was fire proof, virtually, and they thought it was a great idea. And then they started seeing that the people who were mining asbestos were dying prematurely of lung disease. They started seeing an increase in lung cancer and other medical problems that were due to an association with asbestos. Hundreds of thousands of people died because people in past generations didn't understand that asbestos was not a good idea and harms people when they breathe it in. There again, are we to blame God for the deaths of those hundreds of thousands of people? No. God allowed past generations to make decisions and those decisions affected and impacted not only people in their generation, but future generations.

We might try to protest and say, "Well, that just doesn't seem fair." But there are lots of things from the past generations that we accept, and that we enjoy, and that we are very glad that we have. Right now, I'm speaking to you and I'm wearing contact lenses. I think contact lenses are one of the most amazing inventions that have come down the pike in the last twenty, thirty, forty years. I have terrible vision, but with my contact lenses in, I can see 20/20. Now why is that? Well, that's because very smart people in past generations studied how light comes into the eye and they invented tiny pieces of plastic that you can put into your eye and you can see. We walk into houses, many of us, and turn on water faucets and we drink clean, pure water out of those faucets. Not that we came up with the technology that would do that. We have a cell phone that

we can dial a number and reach someone in Ireland. We have a computer that we can get on and we can type in something in the search engine and pull up information. Not that we came up with that technology; that has been passed down to us for many, many years.

What are we to do? Accept the benefits of the decisions of the past generations, but not accept the consequences? No. There again, we see exactly what is going on. God allows people to choose, they make decisions and those decisions impact others. We're impacted by the decisions of past generations, and our decisions will impact future generations.

Is God unfair for allowing humans to freely choose and for their choices to have an impact on future generations, for the good or for the bad? Certainly not! We can't blame God for the pain and suffering that comes into our lives because of the wrong decisions of past generations. There are other reasons, other ways that our lives come into pain and suffering because of certain things that are at play in this universe. We'll explore some of those as we continue.

God designed a universe that's regulated by natural laws. We understand that. Natural laws we study, we use them on a regular basis to benefit us. We understand the law of gravity and we study it so we can determine what we need to do to create an airplane that would take us from one city to another city. We understand what our bodies need in order to survive. They need water, they need food. And so, we find places where there are sources of clean water and we drink that water. But, the same chemical properties of water that allow us to live can cause us pain and suffering. The same chemical properties of water that allow us to live — that water can drown us. The same properties of gravity that we use to study to our benefit — if we find ourselves in the wrong position, falling from a building, those laws of gravity and other physical laws cause pain and suffering in our lives. That's how God designed the world. Can you imagine a world where there were not physical laws that you could study and understand and know how they operated? Imagine a world where the physical laws did not stay the same.

Sometimes, the skeptic says, "Why didn't God design a place where physical laws don't cause us pain and suffering?" If we were to ask that question, we would have to then ask, "What would a world be like where you didn't have regular, physical laws that always acted in the same way?"

Suppose in the middle of a baseball game the pitcher was throwing the baseball and it was going to hit the batter. And so, God adjusted that physical law of gravity so that that ball did not strike the batter. Suppose that a plane was going to be falling from the sky and was going to crash and so God adjusted the law of gravity. Can you imagine a world like that? That would be a world of chaos. That wouldn't be a world that we would understand to be regulated by an intelligent God and Designer. In fact, a world like that would speak more for atheism than it would for a world that was created by a loving Designer.

Natural laws are at play that cause pain and suffering in our lives. When we think of things like tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, those are caused because of the natural laws that are at play. We know sometimes we look at those natural laws and we ignore them. Sometimes a person will understand that if they will put their house or if they build a city in a certain place, there is a high probability that there is going to be an earthquake. And yet, they will still build their house or that city by that particular location. And when an earthquake occurs and causes death or pain and suffering in that particular instance, what are we to do? Are we to blame God for creating a world that has natural laws that we can study and that we can know how things

will react to other things? Is it God's fault that He created a world that natural laws will bring about, sometimes, pain and suffering in our lives, especially if we decide to ignore certain things that we could avoid? No, you can't blame God for that.

When we look at the universe, we understand that there are natural laws at play. And those natural laws can be used to our great benefit. But, sometimes, because of the way those natural laws are set up, they bring about pain and suffering in our lives. What are we to do? What we're to do in those cases is to understand that God loves us, to understand that God created these natural laws, and to, as much as possible, be aware of how they operate so that we can use them to our benefit.

Those are some of the reasons for pain and suffering:

- Our own wrong decisions
- The wrong decisions of others
- The wrong decisions of previous generations
- The natural laws that are at play

But, we've been looking at this idea of pain and suffering, asking ourselves why God allows it to happen. We've looked at some of those reasons. But, maybe there's something else we should consider. Maybe we should consider and understand that sometimes there are great benefits to suffering. Let's explore some of those benefits.

You say, "How can suffering, how can pain be beneficial?" Let's just analyze that question on a physical level for just a moment. Is it the case that sometimes a physical pain can cause us to look for a cure to something? Is it the case that sometimes physical suffering can show us that there is a greater problem that needs to be taken care of? Certainly, that happens all the time.

In fact, I'm thinking about one of my friends' father who was in a board meeting, and in that meeting he started having some problems with his chest. He started feeling an ache and a pain. And he didn't think much about it. He thought it might have been indigestion, so he excused himself from the meeting. One of his friends, thankfully, saw what was going on and followed him out of that meeting. And my friend's father started to sweat, and he started to have severe chest pain. His friend quickly loaded him into a car and drove him to the hospital. At the hospital they said that he had just a few minutes to live. He had had a heart attack, a heart attack in a certain artery that was called the "widow maker," If he had not gone to the hospital and had not received treatment for that heart attack, he would have died within minutes.

What sent him to the hospital? The physical pain that he was experiencing alerted him to the fact that there was something that was even more important going on. Is it the case that on a fairly regular basis, physical pain can tell us something needs to be checked out, that there is something greater at play that needs to be considered? Certainly it happens all the time.

I'm thinking of a young man who had severe pain in his side, he didn't know what it was, he didn't know why he was hurting, but that pain continued. So he went to the hospital. And, at the hospital they informed him that his appendix was about to rupture. If he hadn't had that pain, he wouldn't have gone to the hospital. If his appendix had ruptured, there's a good chance that he

would have died. Why did he go to the hospital? Well, he went because of the pain that he was experiencing.

Is it true that pain in this life can have physical benefits and help us see something that's going on that is even greater than that pain, that needs attention, and that alerts us to a severe danger? Yes. Not only can pain and suffering on a physical level have benefits and cause us to look for greater dangers, but pain and suffering can have benefits on a spiritual, emotional, and psychological level. In fact, when we see a person going through severe trials and struggles, often that is where the real character of a person is built. The "metal" of a person's character is forged in the fire of trials. After all, where only the sun shines, it's always a desert.

Many times in the storms of life, that's where we really see what we're made of. That's where we really form our character. James, in the Bible, told us that this would be the case. In James 1:1-3, he said, "My brethren, count it all joy when you go through various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance." The writer of Hebrews said that Jesus Christ, "though He were a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered." (Hebrews 5:8) The psalmist writer in Psalm 1:19 said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I seek Your will."

What are these verses trying to tell us? They're trying to tell us that in the middle of our suffering, that's where much of our character is built. And, that's where we see human character at its finest. I'm thinking of a young man right now. Many years ago he was at a camp and he was blind. And, at this camp they were going around the circle and they were asking what each one of the campers were thankful for. When it came time for this young man to answer, the other campers wondered what he would say. He was blind. He didn't have the abilities that the others had. When it came time for him to say what he was thankful for, he said, "I am thankful that I am blind, because I can see things that those who have sight cannot see."

I contacted him just recently to ask about that particular time in his life. And he said yes, he had said that. And as he had matured he understood that if he had a choice, he wouldn't have picked blindness. If someone had said to him you could go through life without being blind or being blind, he said, "No. I wouldn't have picked blindness. But, in my blindness I have seen the love of God. And, I have seen things that I never would have seen had it not been for my disability."

I'm thinking of another man right now. This particular individual was diagnosed with a debilitating disease. After his diagnosis, just a few days, I think it was four days after he was diagnosed with that disease, his 16-year-old daughter was driving her car and was killed in a car accident. Not many months after that, he was confined to his bed where he stayed, and has stayed for many, many years. But, throughout the struggles and trials that he has been through, they have forged his character to such a degree and caused things in his life that he would never trade for all the money in the world, for all the comfort in the world. In his debilitation, he has written several books. They have been printed by the thousands and have been distributed all over the world. Those books are used to provide comfort and encouragement and spiritual understanding and edification to people, thousands and thousands of people all over the world. And, that might never have happened if he hadn't been through these sufferings and trials and struggles.

What else happens in sufferings and struggles? We see people's character shine in ways that we never, ever could see their character shine without the struggles. We see those victims of

earthquakes and hurricanes and tornadoes, those victims being cared for by the loving and compassionate people all over the world who are coming to help in those times of struggles. Many times when we experience pain and suffering, we realize we are not alone. There are others that care about us, that love us, and that love and care and compassion shines brighter than it ever would have shined had we not been going through those struggles and those trials.

Do pain and suffering have benefits in our lives where we grow emotionally and spiritually? Absolutely. It's important that we need to consider that we allow that suffering and pain that comes into our lives to cause us to be better, not to cause us to be bitter. You see, the same sunshine that melts an ice cube bakes clay into a hardened substance that cannot be used for anything else other than what it has baked into. We need to make sure that the suffering and pain that comes into our lives — we use it to draw closer to God, to draw closer to others, to make us better, to melt our hearts, and to allow us to see the love of God.

But, there's another reason that God allows pain and suffering, and that is to remind us of eternity. You see, this world was never designed to be our home. God created this world in order to be the perfect vale of soul making. God's purpose in this life for us is not for us to be comfortable 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It's not for us to feel all the physical comforts and avoid all of the pain. God's purpose for us in this life is for us to understand that He's our Creator, and that the only thing that can truly set us free is the truth. And, when we understand that there is a Creator, and we build a relationship with Him, then anything that helps us to draw closer to Him is something that can be used to remind us of eternity.

This world is not our home. We are just passing through. We need to remember that. C.S. Lewis expressed that thought when he said pain and suffering are “God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Why is it that the world needs to be roused? Because many humans are forgetting their purpose here in this world. They're forgetting their reason for being on this globe. And it's not so we can be comfortable. It's not so we can have everything that we want. It's so that we can form a relationship with God, because after this life there is the potential for eternal life; a life that lasts forever, that has no ending.

It's important for us to remember when we ask the very legitimate question, “Where is God when we suffer?” The answer is very simple. God is in the exact same place that He was in when His son Jesus Christ suffered. Jesus Christ was perfectly innocent, had never done anything that would cause suffering to come to His life, had never made a wrong decision, and never committed a sin. And yet, He suffered excruciating pain for our sins.

When we think of the suffering that comes into our lives, and we wonder where God is, we need to remember Jesus Christ hanging on that cross. We need to remember that God had the power to stop that suffering, but He didn't. Why? He didn't stop that suffering because He wanted something better for all of us. He wanted all of us to be able to experience eternal life, a life that would last far longer than the few years that we'll be here on this earth.

Where is God when we suffer? He is loving us, and He's in the exact same place He was when He allowed His son to suffer for us. Let's use our suffering to get better and not to be bitter.