

“Suffering Space”
Message by DD Adams
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Why do bad things happen to good people?

It’s a question we’ve asked God since the beginning of time. Why is this happening to me? I’m a good person. I do lots of things for other people, but why has this fallen on me and those I love and care about? Why are there natural disasters, wars, genocides, famines, or diseases that are passed along from generation to generation? Why ethnic cleansing, 9/11, and now Syrian slaughters. God created the world and said it was good, but why is there so much suffering?

Who is God anyway? I would venture to say that people can have a misconception of God’s character. If you don’t read the Bible and rely on what you’ve heard about God than maybe you’ve heard wrong. Maybe you’ve made some wrong assumptions.

God is a God of love, and all good things come from God. God has no part in evil or the doing of it. God doesn’t base his love for us on what we do or don’t do. God loves us no matter what. We are part of God’s creation. God’s love is unconditional. But you might ask, “If God loves creation, which we’re a part of, and God is omnipotent all-powerful, why does God allow bad things to happen to people?”

The Bible doesn’t promise people they won’t suffer or go through trials in their lives. What we do see in the Bible is people who stubbornly refuse to let go of their faith regardless of their circumstances. And the fact is—everything doesn’t happen for a reason; it’s not God who wills bad things in this world. I guess what’s

implied when people say things happen for a reason is that there's a divine master plan that God has set into motion; however, *suffering isn't part of it*.

God doesn't will evil and suffering. God has given the human race responsibility to manage and be stewards of creation, and we're part of that creation. But when we abuse that freedom and responsibility, bad things happen.

People are part of God's creation. Many people have the resources to care for other's who are in need, but when other's choose to keep for themselves what is meant to be shared, people suffer and don't have things like food, shelter, and clothing.

Humanity has been given free will by God. We make choices, and when we choose wrong, everyone suffers. Sin is basically selfishness, and that causes war, starvation, and horrible things to happen. The human race has a predisposed propensity to sin—but when they have God's spirit within—they have power to choose as God would have them choose. The bad news is that we can stray from the path that God has given us to follow.

Bad things happened to a lot of people in the Bible, Job, David, Joseph and many others, but why? Jesus said in John 16:33, "In this world you will have trouble." Jesus didn't say you might have trouble—he said it's *going* to happen.

There's so much we don't understand about life. 1 Corinthians 13:12, from *The Message*, by Eugene Peterson says this. "We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us!"

So what can we do to find comfort and peace in a troubled world when it knocks at our door, because it will knock? What do we do when our vision is eclipsed, and we don't know where we're going. Job 5:7 states that, "A man's life is full of trouble as the sparks fly upward."

Well we deal with the trouble best we can. We pray. We seek medical help. We read the Bible. We pray. We hire an attorney to protect ourselves. We pray. We buy life insurance, we pray, we ask good counsel and advice from others we trust, we read the Bible, we pray, and we apply preventive medicine by making the choices in our lives that God would have us make, and we pray.

As mentioned earlier, just because we're a child of God doesn't mean we're exempt from suffering and evil. Jesus was tortured and crucified. The apostle Paul was in prison for more than 1/3 of his life. Peter was hung upside down and crucified. Andrew was crucified. John was exiled to the Island of Patmos. James was beheaded. Stephen was stoned, legend has it that Matthew died a martyr's death, James, son of Alpheus was thrown down from the temple by the scribes and Pharisees and then stoned, Bartholomew or Nathaniel was flayed to death by whip, and on and on. Bottom line is: we need the help of God to go through troubles in our lives.

Everything God created is good, but why didn't God create a world where tragedy and suffering don't exist? Surely God knew if he gave humanity the power and freedom to make their own choices this world would turn out messy?

This is my thinking. God loves us so much, the freedom to choose is the most loving thing God gave us. Love releases. Love doesn't control. And anyway, what good is there in obeying God if there's no inclination to do otherwise?

We already know the human race has a predisposed propensity to choose selfishness, but if we choose what's good rather what's selfish, now there's virtue in that. We're not robots. God has given us freedom to choose and because of that some choose evil.

People look at the famine in the world and wonder where God is, but the world produces enough food for each person to be fed. There's enough water for

everyone to *never* go without, and yet thousands die because of lack of water every day. Isn't it men and women who have chosen to turn their backs on God and each other? God is always good. God never changes, yesterday, today, and forever.

If you think about natural disasters—remember this. When God judged Adam and Eve for their disobedience—he judged creation too. Creation is groaning just as we are because of the sin that's in the world. Creation hasn't been set free either Romans 8 tells us. Earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes exist because mother earth was judged just as the human race; this is the condition of creation. Disease, suffering, death, and evil are the result of a fallen world.

The apostle Paul tells us this in Romans 8. “The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” What's the word firstfruits mean that Paul mentions? It's the Holy Spirit that dwells in us. The spirit that God shed abroad in our hearts when we placed our trust in Christ as Lord and Savior.

God did not create evil and suffering. God created only good. It's true that God did create the potential for evil to enter the world, because God gave humankind freewill. The only way to create the potential for genuine goodness and love was to give humanity freedom to choose. It was human beings, in our free will, who brought that potential evil into reality.

You might ask why God did it then. Why did God create us? Let me ask you. Why did you have children? Knowing the world's condition, why did you, as

a parent, bring children into the world knowing what the world was like?
It's not a perfect analogy, but most analogies have some play in them.

When we think about suffering and what it causes, there's nothing good about it, but God is able to bring good out of it. Romans 8:28 states that, "God works all things together for good for those who love him."

God gave the human race free will, and we rebelled. Yet God still continues to work good from the bad things that occur in the world. You might ask, what good has come out of evil? Where is God when hurricanes strike? Where was God when 9/11 happened? God's presence was seen as people rally to help others. Food is sent, money is given, prayers are prayed, and people come to realize we have to work together in this world.

We can decide to turn bitter when bad things happen or we can decide to turn to God for peace, courage, and provision. Bad things will happen in our lives, but we don't need to understand God completely in order to love God completely or other people.

And when God is silent and seems to be absent from our lives in the face of suffering, let's choose to follow the example of faithful disciples in the Bible and continue to walk as people of faith and trust. If God is silent and chooses to not change our circumstances, God's promise to us is that he'll never leave us or forsake us, but rather he'll walk with us through the trial and then change our lives and others.

God hasn't left us alone to suffer the consequences of our own rebellion against him. God still pours grace down on the whole world and searches for persons who reach out to him as he reaches out to them. God still pursues humanity and desires to influence and bless her

Two thousand years ago a light came into the darkness of this world. A Savior Jesus Christ was born. Christ died for the whole world, in hope, that the

world would come to him to be saved. And it's at the cross, where we laid down our sin, and it's at the tomb we found empty, so we might believe and be raised with Christ. And because of that Easter morning, death has no victory over us and God calls us more than conquerors and more than victorious.

We would never voluntarily leave a space in our lives for suffering. Yet, suffering forces and finds its place in our lives anyway. We all suffer, and the rain falls on the just and the unjust, but be of good cheer, Christ has overcome the world. Amen.