

Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?

Of course, no one wants or enjoys pain and suffering. They are, however, an inevitable part of our temporal life on earth. This may sound strange, but suffering and hardship can be a catalyst for achieving new heights in our personal and spiritual lives.

That's because in times of difficulty we naturally turn to God and seek His help. For many, God is a kind of vague emergency service to be called upon when the going gets tough. If everything were always wonderful, do you think we would need God or seek Him in our lives? Probably not. As C.S. Lewis noted, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Our Creator knows that our true happiness lies in our relationship with Him. Only when we surrender our will to God can we find true joy. Yet, the human spirit will not surrender our self-will as long as we believe all is well. Most of us will not give ourselves to God as long as there is any other place to look for happiness. We often don't realize God is all we need until God is all we've got.

So, our illusion of self-sufficiency and self-control must, for our own sake, be shattered. Pain and suffering shatter the illusion. God often allows pain and suffering to help us find the proper perspective in life, which is rooted in our abandonment of self-will to God's Will. In other words, God allows short-term suffering for our long-term good.

God wants us to embrace the truth that our problems, difficulties, and disappointments are storms on the sea of life that are not meant to sink us, but to sanctify us. Each "storm" is an opportunity to grow closer to God. As we grow closer to God, the more we love Him and the more we desire to serve Him and others. Then, the more we serve God and others, the more like God we become.

Picture raw gold as it appears when mined from the earth. It is dull, dark, and clumpy. It doesn't glitter or shine. Its beauty is only potential. Only after it is melted and poured into a mold does it make beautiful jewelry. In the same way, God carefully allows the trials of this life to be opportunities to "melt me, mold me, make me" more into God's image. May we always remember and take comfort in the fact that: "Temporal trials are peoples' path to heavenly holiness."

We should keep in mind that every problem is a character-building opportunity and the more difficult it is, the greater is its character-building potential. Swimming against the current makes us stronger. And, the most difficult roads in life are the ones that often lead to the most beautiful views.

However, this growth in character is not automatic. Many people become bitter, rather than better, when faced with suffering. Adversity can either make us or break us, depending on our reaction.

Furthermore, the answer to the problem of suffering cannot be just an abstract idea, because this

is not just an abstract issue. It's a personal issue and requires a personal response. The answer to the problem of suffering is not a logical answer, but an Answerer—Jesus Christ Himself.

God understands our suffering because he has experienced it. Are we broken? Jesus was broken, like bread for us. Are we despised? He was despised and rejected. Do people betray us? Jesus was sold out Himself. Are our relationships damaged? He too loved and was rejected. Jesus' sufferings and death on the cross set an example for us to follow. How can we not help but love and trust in Jesus, who went the extra mile, who practiced more than He preached, who voluntarily entered into our world, who suffered our pains, and who offers Himself to us in the midst of our suffering?

Jesus said that we cannot be His follower unless we take up our cross. If we want to be with God, we need to be with Him in suffering. And, when we take up our cross with Jesus, our suffering is transformed into a means for our sanctification and salvation.

God truly does love each of us. Even the sufferings and hardships in our lives are signs of God's love and special opportunities for our spiritual growth. May we see the trials of this life as opportunities to grow closer to God, to grow in our faith and trust in Him, and to grow more one with God in holiness. May this understanding give us patience, hope, and peace as we face our daily trials.