



God, I Have Questions | How Could a Good God Allow Evil and Suffering?

Teaching Text

John 16:33 "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

Sermon Recap

This week addresses the profound question: **"How can a good God allow evil and suffering in the world?"**. This tension between God's sovereignty and the reality of pain often prevents people from accepting Jesus or even drives them away.

Historically, in places where "true evil happened," like Nyamata or Auschwitz, the question **"For God's sake, where is God?"** naturally arises, echoing through personal tragedies, global conflicts, and historical horrors like the Holocaust, Rwanda, Bosnia, or current events in Palestine, Ukraine, and Nigeria.

The **church has not always handled this question adequately**, sometimes promoting **false theologies** such as the prosperity gospel, which suggests suffering means one has done something wrong, or a shallow, needs-based prayer culture, creating an illusion of perfection. This has often left the suffering feeling isolated and unwelcome, and the church itself has perpetuated evil through abuse of power, scandals, and atrocities, failing to look like Jesus in its response to pain.

However, the Bible provides a **holistic and reasoned explanation for evil and suffering** that is nuanced and embedded in reality, rather than simplistic. It describes several types of evil and suffering:

1. **Moral Evils:** These stem from a spiritual reality, acknowledging a real, unseen "war" involving forces like the Devil. They also arise from **humanity's sin**, which started with Adam and Eve's rebellion and has "gone viral" into all relationships, families, communities, and nations. This sin manifests as **assault** (intending harm, from obvious abuse to subtle manipulation, or participating in harmful social systems) and **withdrawal** (distancing oneself from others, regarding their wellbeing as indifference). Inwardly, the heart is deceitful, leading to wars of desires and motives that spread into systems of evil like human trafficking and racism.
2. **Natural Evils:** This "viral sin" has also spread into the natural world, creating a rupture that brings **decay and an "unceasing ache"**. This includes animals dying, environmental issues, natural disasters, and the breakdown of our bodies through disabilities and death. The Bible teaches that "the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth" (Rom 8:22).

God's response to evil is also part of the suffering we see. The Bible teaches that suffering can occur because of God's **just and necessary response to evil**. This can include:

1. **Allowing for natural consequences**, where actions have predictable outcomes (e.g., "if you touch that you'll get burned").
2. **Direct punishment** for nations or systems.
3. **Discipline of His children**, which, though painful at the time, later produces righteousness and peace (Hebrews 12).

While we may not always know the specific source of suffering (the Devil, God's intervention, human evil, or natural calamity), the Bible often asks us to **live in the tension of trust**, believing God is working a bigger plan, as Joseph did when he recognized God's good intent behind his brothers' harm (Genesis 50:20).

Ultimately, **Jesus is the central answer** to the question "For God's sake, where is God?" in evil and suffering. God is found on the cross, a "twisted symbol of torture and death". Through the cross event, Jesus took on every moral evil, the collateral suffering from natural evils, and every unpunished act to heal us. Isaiah 53 describes how Jesus "took up our pain and bore our suffering," being "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities," with His "wounds we are healed". God, through Jesus, cried out that He cares and empathizes with our weaknesses, having been tempted in every way (Hebrews 4:15-16). The cross is God's "BIG ANSWER," demonstrating that He is not absent but "so close".

Furthermore, Jesus promises a **future world** where all evil and suffering will cease, and humanity will be fully reconciled to God and each other. This new heaven and new

earth, described in Revelation 21, will be a world without suffering, sadness, or sickness, brought about by Jesus Himself. He is the one worthy to open the scroll of God's plan for history, bringing forth a new world with His nail-pierced hands, proving that only the one who experienced human suffering and death can resolve the deepest questions of life. Holding onto this hope empowers Christians to "die to themselves like Jesus did, and be His hands and feet towards those who are suffering in the world".

Discussion Questions

Connect

1. Share a memory of a time where you were **well cared for** by a friend or family member.

Character Ask someone to read John 16:33 aloud. Then ask the following questions:

1. What words, phrases, or images **stand out** to you in this passage?
2. What do you learn about the **heart of Jesus** and His perspective on suffering through this verse?

Consider

1. "For God's sake, where is God?" is a common question in suffering. How does this resonate with your experiences or current events?
2. The church has sometimes promoted false beliefs about God and suffering (e.g., prosperity gospel, shallow prayer, an illusion of perfection). What misconceptions have you believed about God in relation to pain and suffering?
3. The Bible describes suffering as stemming from moral evils (spiritual forces, human sin) and natural evils (sin polluting creation). Does this framework help you understand suffering? Why or why not?
4. How does **Jesus' suffering on the cross**, as described in Isaiah 53 and Hebrews 4, answer the question "where is God?" in pain? What does it mean for God to be "so close" in our suffering?
5. God sometimes allows suffering as a **just response** (natural consequences, punishment, discipline). How does this understanding, combined with other types of evil, help you live in "tension of trust" when the reason for suffering is unclear?
6. Jesus promises a **future world without evil or suffering** (Revelation 21). How does this hope impact your view of current suffering and your role as a follower of Jesus?

Cover Spend time praying for anyone suffering in your group. Then, spend time praying for anyone your group members know who are experiencing suffering, asking the Holy Spirit to bring peace and reveal His presence in their pain.

