

When in the midst of suffering...

He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater,
He sendeth more strength when the labours increase;
To added afflictions He addeth His mercy,
To multiplied trials, His multiplied peace.

When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father's full giving is only begun.

Fear not that thy need shall exceed His provision,
Our God ever yearns His resources to share;
Lean hard on the arm everlasting, availing;
The Father both thee and thy load will upbear.

His love has no limits, His grace has no measure,
His power no boundary known unto men;
For out of His infinite riches in Jesus,
He giveth, and giveth, and giveth again.

He Giveth More Grace by Annie Johnson Flint

Further reading from a Christian perspective:

- C.S Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 1940
- Roger Carswell, *Where is God in a Messed Up World?*, 2006
- Tim Keller, *The Reason For God*, 2008
- Christopher Ash, *Where was God When That Happened?*, 2017
- Ravi Zacharias International Ministries, rzim.org
(*the source of much of the material used in this course*)



Why Me?

But
What
If?

What questions does your worldview raise about suffering?

Eastern (pantheistic) faiths – Buddhism, Hinduism, New Age

Problem: If pursuing oneness with the universe (nirvana) is the goal—how many lifetimes of suffering will we have to live before we can achieve it?

Secularist (atheistic) faiths – Atheism, agnosticism, materialism, naturalism

Problem: If we're a random union of atoms shouldn't we expect suffering? Isn't all meaning to suffering purely invented, and ultimately irrelevant?

Abrahamic (monotheistic) faiths – Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Problem: How do we solve the trilemma of faith; that God is all-powerful, that he is all-good and yet evil still exists? How can these be compatible?

Everyone has noticed how hard it is to turn our thoughts to God when everything is going well with us. We “have all we want” is a terrible saying when “all” does not include God.

C.S Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 1940

3 ways a Christian could view suffering:

1. God knows best

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Isaiah 55:8-9, The Bible

God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist.

St. Augustine, Enchiridion, c. 420

2. God wanted you

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart

Jeremiah 1:5, The Bible

There is calm and rest in remembering that God is too wise to make mistakes and too good to be unkind. That doesn’t mean there is no need to grieve or sorrow. God doesn’t make those who trust him hard-nosed, insensitive autonomists. Instead, God promises to be with his children, to give them the resources to cope with their hurts, to heal the broken-hearted.

Roger Carswell, Where is God in a Messed Up World?, 2006

3. God understands how it feels

My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.

Jesus, Matthew 26:38

Some... claim that God cannot suffer. I believe they are wrong. God’s capacity for suffering, I believe, is proportional to his greatness; it exceeds our capacity for suffering in the same measure as his capacity for knowledge exceeds ours. We don’t know why God permits evil; we do know, however, that he was prepared to accept suffering of which we can form no conception.

Alvin Plantinga, A Christian Life Partly Lived, 1993

So why do bad things happen to ‘good’ people?

The Bible teaches that nobody is good—we have all walked away from God and wanted to do our own thing. We have treated the Creator as if he were simply in our way. But if God is really there and, as the Bible claims, there are consequences to our rebellion, then is it not a good thing that this God should be more concerned with our eternity than with our temporary happiness? That he can use bad things, even our suffering, to open our eyes to spiritual realities that we have too willingly dismissed? As C.S Lewis says...

Let me implore the reader to try to believe, if only for the moment, that God, who made these deserving people, may really be right when He thinks that their modest prosperity and the happiness of their children are not enough to make them blessed: that all this must fall from them in the end, and that if they have not learned to know Him they will be wretched. And therefore he troubles them, warning them in advance of an insufficiency that one day they will have to discover. The life to themselves and their families stands between them and the recognition of their need; He makes that life less sweet to them.

C.S Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 1940