

“Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?”

To be human is to suffer. No one questions that. Everyone who has ever lived has experienced pain in life. But is God concerned? Does He do anything in response to this world's troubles?

It is remarkable how much of the Gospels of the New Testament are a detailed record of all the ways Jesus suffered. When we look at His pain and death, we still don't exactly know why God allows suffering. However, we do know what the answer isn't. It can't be that He doesn't love us. It can't be that He is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that He was willing to take it on Himself.

Before we look at this week's Bible passages, reflect or discuss, ***“What does the reality of human suffering lead you to believe about God and about people?”***

Romans 8:18-30

¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ 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. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ 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. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he

sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

1. What does the reality of human suffering lead you to believe about God and about people? What effects can pain and suffering can have on someone?
2. Read v.18. Paul sets up a contrast to begin this section. What is this contrast, and why does Paul make this statement?
3. Read vv.19-22. List the qualities of nature we read in these verses. How does this guide Christians in a unique approach to nature?
4. What does Paul mean by “the creation” and its destiny?

5. Read vv.23-27. How does Paul describe the church in our current state? What is in store for the church?
6. How exactly does the Holy Spirit help us in our weakness?
7. Read vv.28-30. Here, Paul encourages waiting, suffering Christians with our sovereign God's faithful promises and provision:
 - a. What does it mean that God "foreknew" us? (29)
 - b. Predestined? (29)
 - c. Called? (30)
 - d. Justified? (30)
 - e. Glorified? (30)
8. How are you enduring pain and suffering in your life right now? How do these verses challenge or encourage you?

Going A Step Further...

- At WEPC, we begin each worship service with a Scripture reading. We do this because we believe that God Himself has brought us together and He always has the first word in our meeting. **Read aloud Sunday's *Call to Worship*** from [Hebrews 4:15-16](#). Jesus Christ is not only perfect, without sin. He is also fully sympathetic to sinners in need. Read these verses aloud and enter into a time of prayer for your suffering friends and our suffering world.
- **This past Sunday we participated in the Lord's Supper.** Why does the church practice this sacrament? As you reflect on that part of the worship service: did the Holy Spirit convict, change, or encourage you in any way you wish to share with the group?
- As a part of worship [we sing songs and hymns that further amplify each Sunday's message](#). This week, we sang William Cowper's bold cry for divine relief for human suffering, "[Heal Us, Emmanuel](#)". In this song, the church identifies with the situations of the sick woman of [Luke 8:42-48](#) and desperate father of [Mark 9:14-29](#). Listen to [this hymn](#) again: What issues of the heart arise in the mist pain and suffering? Take time to confess, not only our need for healing and relief, but also our need of repentance and faith.

Questions about this week's study guide? Contact Kevin Greene, kevin@wepc.org
To hear sermons and access past study guides visit www.wepc.org/archivedsermons

Sermon Notes

This week, Joe Brown preached on Romans 8:18-30

- What I want to look at this morning is what the Bible has to say about suffering, and in so doing: (1) What is the origin of pain and suffering? (2) What do we do with our pain and suffering? (3) What is the future of pain and suffering?
- Three presuppositions: (1) God has a plan; (2) That plan includes our pain and suffering; (3) Pain and Suffering affects all of humanity.
- “The cease-fire in Syria failed and the city of Aleppo has been pummeled. In the face of sobering statistics on deaths, in the face of the article from the New York Times today which describes the facts of this week, how can we respond? 100,000 of the 250,000 residents are children. They can't go to school, they can't escape, they can't hide from the volume and intensity of the bombs. Evil presses in on multiple sides, with no clear solutions. This is the time for lament. Lament sees the face of those suffering, and does not turn away. Lament cries out to God for mercy, for justice, without knowing exactly what that would look like. Lament acknowledges that this world is not fair, not safe, not as it should be. And lament addresses God, which is a matter of faith, of saying that in spite of Syria, we are not left alone.” (from the blog of Jennifer Myhre, Paradox Uganda, Wednesday, September 28, 2016)

First, what is the origin of pain and suffering?

- “All evil that exists in the world is the consequence of sin. After the creation of the world we are told that ‘God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good’. The inspired record of the history of the world, prior to the appearance of the tempter on the arena of man’s life and prior to the fall of our first parents, discloses no suggestion of discord, disruption or evil...” (John Murray)
- “Christianity asserts that God is good; that He made all things good and for the sake of their goodness; that one of the good things He made, namely, the free will of rational creatures, by its very nature included the possibility of evil; and that creatures, availing themselves of this possibility, have become evil.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*)

Secondly, what do we do with our pain and suffering?

Why does God allow it? I submit to you five *possible* reasons for pain & suffering:

- (1) Pain wakes us up! “We can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” (C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*)
- (2) Pain and suffering draws believers into a deeper solace with God. Adversity drives the Christian to the throne of grace. “Groaning” is one of those words that needs no definition. You know exactly what that means.
- (3) Pain and suffering is part of discipline or refinement. “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.” (Romans 5:3-4)
- (4) Believers suffer so that they may ‘share the sufferings of Christ.’ “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” (1 Peter 4:13)
 - “For whatever reason God chose to make people as they are—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from us that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it all worthwhile.” (Dorothy Sayers)
 - “If we again ask the question, ‘Why does God allow evil and suffering to continue?’ and we look at the cross of Jesus, we still do not know what the answer is. However, now we know what the answer isn’t. It can’t be that he doesn’t love us. It can’t be that he is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself.” (Tim Keller)
- (5) Our pain and suffering is for our perseverance

Which helps answer the final question for this morning: “What is the future of pain and suffering?”

- In Revelation 21, we have the image of the New Jerusalem at the end of time: “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’.”
- “Celebrating the gospel is beautiful and is good for my soul, but it doesn’t make me sleep more or cry less. Until God fixes everything, I’m still waiting: ‘I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope: My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.’...You don’t get a lot of watchmen these days, but I’ve got a feeling they don’t sit there at 3:00 a.m. thinking, *My goodness, this night’s gone on a long time. Perhaps morning has been canceled today! Maybe the earth has stopped at this particular point in orbit, and the sun is never going to rise again.* Watchmen wait for the morning not because they think it’s coming but because they know it is. The night is dark, but the light always breaks.” (Adam & Rachel Wilson, *The Life We Never Expected*)