

WHAT ABOUT SUFFERING?



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‘What About Suffering?’

by

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all Scripture quotations are taken from

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WHAT ABOUT SUFFERING?

This is the big question so many people want the answer to. I am sure that suffering is the most common reason people find it difficult to believe that there is a loving God.

So Why Is There So Much Suffering?

It isn't God who is to blame for suffering, but the devil. God made people to be perfect and made a perfect world for them to live in. But He didn't want automatic slavish obedience – He wanted people to freely love Him. So when He created the first people, Adam and Eve, He made them with free will so they could choose whether to love Him or not. And to make this free will reality He gave them one rule to obey. The place

where they lived was full of wonderful things to eat, but God said they mustn't eat the fruit of just one particular tree, called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And they broke that one rule!

It sounds ridiculous that they did this, but the devil had come along and started whispering doubts in their ears and promising wonderful things if they listened to him instead of God. And they fell for it. They disobeyed the one rule and the whole world went awry. God had to send them out of the beautiful garden He had created for them to live in. This wasn't a punishment. In the garden was another tree, called the tree of life. If they had continued to eat the fruit of this tree they would live for ever. And God knew that the world wasn't going to be a great place to live in anymore and He

wanted something better for them. They had to go away from the tree of life so that they would eventually die and could then enter heaven instead, where they could live in perfection forever.

Christians call the time that Adam and Eve disobeyed God ‘the fall’. The fall was responsible for all the suffering in the world today. It wasn’t God’s fault. It was Adam and Eve’s fault responding to the devil. So in the end it was the devil’s fault. When disasters happen, don’t blame God. He’s more grieved about them than you are. Put the blame where it lies – on the devil and on people’s weakness in giving in to his ways.

The Bible says in Romans 8:22 – ‘*the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now.*’ The earth itself was spoilt by the fall. It no longer works in the perfect way it

was designed to work. This is why there are natural disasters like earthquakes, hurricanes and tsunamis. And the fall has also resulted in wars, tragedies and atrocities inflicted by people on people around the world. Everything has been messed up.

And Why Doesn't God Stop It?

The big thing to get hold of is that God made people with free will. That means that everyone can choose how they live. They can try to live well or they can just choose the bad. They can believe in God or they can choose not to. They can try to make good things happen or they can make bad things happen. They can love people or they can hate. No-one is perfect, so I'm not suggesting this is black and white, but

realise that God isn't pulling your strings to make you act or respond in a certain way and He didn't make you a pre-programmed robot. Think about it – God loves you and wants you to love Him back. If you fell in love with someone and had the ability to make them love you, would you want it to be that way? I don't think you'd actually call it love. Wouldn't you rather that they chose to love you? That would lead to a real love relationship. And it's the same with God. He leaves you free to choose to love Him or not. Those that do choose to love Him really love Him, and He can have a real love relationship with them. That's the only relationship He wants and it's the only one that will be fulfilling for them too.

But also with free will, things are going to go wrong when people choose wrong ways to

think, speak and act, what the Bible calls 'sin'. If God stepped in and instantly put everything right, then your free will would be pointless. God loves you so much that He leaves you free to choose how to act and respond. Now God is God of course and knows all things. He has always known who will follow Him and who will reject Him, but knowing ahead of time isn't the same as making it happen.

What Did God Do?

He did the most amazing thing. He didn't want to leave the world in such a mess with no way through, so He sent Jesus. When Jesus was put to death on the Cross, God was putting all the punishment for every sin on Him instead of on the people who deserved it. Jesus died once for all. He died

for every sin, past, present and future; for every person past, present and future; and for all time. Jesus died for you. He took your punishment and guilt and shame so you wouldn't have to carry it yourself. What sacrifice! What love! And because of this your sins are forgiven and you are free to be God's child and live in the close love relationship He wants with you. To do this you need to accept Jesus as your Lord and Saviour – what the Bible calls being born-again. This means acknowledging that Jesus is God and deciding that you want to follow Him. The forgiveness Jesus won for you will then become reality in your life as you receive it. (To read about being born-again, go to the end of this booklet.)

1 John 3:8 says – *'To this end the Son of God was revealed: that he might destroy the*

works of the devil.' Remember, all the troubles of this world eventually go back to the devil. And on the Cross, Jesus destroyed all the devil's works. This means that troubles no longer have the power to hold you. There is a way through and you can walk free because of Jesus. Even if the situation doesn't change, you can be free from it in your thinking. Jesus said in John 16:33 – *'In the world you have trouble; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.'* When you are born-again you become the winner because Jesus has won the victory and He makes you victorious too.

This is real love - a love that gives you the freedom of new life here on earth, and eternity in joy and peace in heaven; not being made a puppet on strings to avoid suffering. Romans 8:35&37 say – *'Who shall*

separate us from the love of Christ? Could oppression, or anguish, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.'

Take Up Your Cross

In Matthew 16:24 Jesus said – *'If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.'* People will talk about something difficult they have to put up with as the cross they have to bear, often using it to refer to sickness, but this isn't what Jesus meant. Jesus defeated sickness on the Cross along with all of the devil's works, so when the Bible talks about enduring suffering it doesn't mean sickness. Good health isn't automatic for Christians of course, but the

power of sickness is defeated and healing is available. In the same way, Jesus took poverty on Himself, to provide a way out of it. He took the world's sin on Himself so you could be forgiven and live in that close love Father/child relationship with God He has always wanted. So taking up your cross doesn't mean putting up with sickness, poverty or guilt. It means being prepared for persecution and being willing to suffer it, just as Jesus was.

Persecution

Persecution is suffering at the hands of other people because you are a Christian. The Bible makes it very clear that this will happen. 2 Timothy 3:12 says – *'all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.'* There are situations around

the world where Christians are persecuted in appalling ways.

Maybe you've teased, ignored or ridiculed a Christian. If so, don't despair – Jesus died that you might be forgiven. A man called Paul tried to wipe out the early Christian church, but then he was born-again and God used him to tell thousands of people about Jesus and he became one of the main writers in the Bible.

If you are a Christian, you may be aware of people thinking you're weird or taunting you or refusing to allow you to talk about your faith or talking about you behind your back. I'm sure this is one reason why God wants His believers to meet together, so there is a place where they can talk and be understood and believed, and where they can support and encourage each other.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:11-12 – *‘Blessed are you when people reproach you, persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven.’* Jesus said to rejoice when you’re persecuted. Really? Yes – born-again Christians are on their way to heaven and God’s reward. There can be nothing better.

Comfort

How wonderful to know that God is the God of all comfort. In the middle of suffering, God wants to comfort you if you’ll let Him. He wants to put His arms around you and tell you He loves you and that you are so precious to Him. He wants to lift you up and give you the strength to carry on and come out the other end. He wants to give you His

peace. And that peace isn't a natural peace which anyone can experience when nothing's going wrong. It's God's supernatural peace which you can know even in the middle of suffering. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says – *'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.'* Isn't that great! God wants to comfort you so that you will be comforted, and so that you are then able to comfort others.

Don't Be Alarmed

In Matthew 24:6 Jesus said – *'You will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you aren't troubled, for all this must happen.'*

This doesn't mean God doesn't want you to care about people who are caught up in wars, atrocities, tragedies and natural disasters. God cares for each individual involved far more than any person ever can. God wants His people to show compassion and demonstrate His love to those who are suffering. But He says not to be alarmed or troubled. In other words, don't be surprised and don't allow such things to frighten you or make you lose your own peace. You are of much more use to suffering people with God's peace in your heart, than with worry and fear.

Victory

Jesus said in John 16:33 – *‘In the world you have trouble; but cheer up! I have overcome the world.’* Jesus has won the victory over the problems of this world. You don’t have to win it. You just have to put yourself on the victory side, believing all Jesus has won and accepting it for yourself personally. Really getting hold of this will help you to cheer up. It’s not an insensitive statement – it is God’s truth. Recognizing this will really help.

I’ve used this illustration in another booklet, but I’m including it here too. In 2013 I watched Andy Murray win Wimbledon. I so wanted him to win and every time he made an unforced error or got down on himself or Djokovic played a winner, I was on the edge of my seat. I used up emotional energy. The

year before I had watched him win his Olympic gold medal, but I watched it on catch-up and already knew he'd won. It didn't matter how many mistakes he made or how well Federer played, I watched it calmly in the secure knowledge of Murray's victory.

The amazingly good news is that when you're born-again you're on the side that has already won. You already know the end result – victory is yours. You don't have to live on a roller-coaster of emotions. Choose to live your life in that knowledge and start to find that you can have peace even in difficult circumstances. It is as you focus on God and all He has done for you that you'll find peace, not as you focus on the troubles of this world. It doesn't mean you won't ever feel hurt or grief again, but if you are

born-again, these painful emotions no longer have the power to hold you - you can come through them because of Jesus. Maybe you are suffering in the middle of very difficult circumstances right now. Know that in Jesus there is a way through. Speak out the verses in this booklet and focus on Jesus. Choose to believe that God loves you and that He didn't send the trouble. Hold onto the God of all comfort and let Him hold you. He has already won the victory over it for you. And it's all because of Jesus. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says – *'thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'*

Being Born-Again

When you acknowledge Jesus as God and decide to follow Him, you make Him your Lord. When you accept His sacrifice on the Cross for yourself personally, you make Him your Saviour. You are then born-again and have a new perfect spirit. God becomes your Father and you His child, and you can start to enjoy your personal love relationship with Him.

Romans 10:9 says – *‘If you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.’* Tell God you are sorry for the wrong things you do, say and think. Choose to believe that Jesus is Lord, that He died for you and is now alive. Accept

Him as your Lord and Saviour. Say it with your voice and believe it in your heart.

If you've done that sincerely, you are now born-again and Jesus has come to live in you. Everything you've ever done wrong or ever will do wrong is forgiven, and after this life is over, you'll live in peace and joy with your loving Father God for ever.

As a child of God, you now have a whole new family of brothers and sisters. Tell a trusted Christian that you are now born-again so they can help you in your new life in Jesus. And you have the Bible to help you understand and experience more of God's love for you and all Jesus has done and won for you. It will help you to live your life in the best possible way – His way.

Life in Jesus

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and all He has done and won for us
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There is so much suffering in the world
and many people wish they could
understand why it happens.

Some blame God

but it isn't God who causes suffering –
He grieves at it as much as you do.

So why does it happen and how can you respond?

This booklet will answer these questions
and help you to understand.



Katherine Hilditch has been teaching in local churches for many years. In 2013 she wrote her first booklet and since then has written many more. She created her website to make all the

booklets freely available to everyone. They can be read online or printed out. Katherine's threefold purpose is to help people understand more about Jesus and all He has done and won for them, to encourage them to go deeper in their relationship with God and to provide material to help them share their faith with others. To read her story and find all the booklets go to –

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