

# Does God Cause Suffering?

By: Ben Sharp

Everyone experiences pain. Does God cause this suffering?

As a reporter, I've stood in the middle of a darkened highway, felt the heat of a car fire on my skin, and seen the tears in the eyes of veteran paramedics and firefighters as they pulled the body of a seven-year-old girl out of the wreckage. As a son, I've stood at the end of my mother's bed—my hand on her foot, my vision blurry—as her two-year battle with cancer came to an end. As a husband, I've felt a cold pit in my stomach as the surgeon rushed my wife to the delivery room for an emergency C-section because the umbilical cord was wrapped around my unborn daughter's neck. And as a father, I've spent the night pacing the hallways, praying that my son's 103-degree fever would finally break.

No matter what you do, no matter who you are, you're going to experience suffering in some way, shape, or form. It's a fact of life as immutable as gravity, as sure as the rising sun. Human or animal, we all experience [pain and suffering](#) to various degrees. As the great theologian C. S. Lewis wrote in *The Problem of Pain*, "Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you find that you have excluded life itself."<sup>1</sup>

## God and Pain

For centuries, man has tried to explain why such a condition is part of the natural order. Some blame fate, saying that's just the way the stars have lined up. Others say it's indicative of the laws of [science](#), the balance that the universe achieves through the dichotomy of positive and negative, light and dark, good and evil.

But at some point in such musings, the finger of blame always seems to point to [God](#). If there is an all-powerful creator, which many of us consider to be God, then why does he allow such tragedies to take place? More than that, does God *cause* the suffering that plagues us?

## God's Character

This question has caused countless people to evaluate their faith, question their beliefs, and, in some cases, abandon the idea that there is a God at all. Many reach a conclusion similar to this: If there is a loving, all-powerful God, he would [rid the world of evil now](#). Since he does not, there must not be a God—and if there is, he is either not loving or not all-powerful, either of which makes him unworthy of our worship.

But how do those who do believe in a loving, personal God reconcile their faith with the question of the cause of evil? From the Christian perspective, the answer can be found in the [Bible](#), a collection of sixty-six books that Christians trust to be the Word of God.

Looking at the biblical description of God's character and being, the short answer to the question of God causing suffering must be no. We

are told in the Bible that God is loving, compassionate, and merciful; God is perfect; God is so divine and inherently good that we mortal, sinful beings cannot even stand in his presence. In the Old Testament, leaders like Moses had to remove their shoes or veil their faces to be anywhere in the vicinity of God, because the very space that God occupied was holy. First John 4:8 says simply and concisely: "God is love."

Based on this understanding of God, we see that inflicting suffering on his creation would contradict God's fundamental nature. If that's the case, then who is the most logical originator for the suffering we endure?

## If Not God, Then Who?

In the Christian belief, the answer to the above question is [Satan](#). The book of Job speaks to this in some detail as Job is victimized by the devil through attacks on his family, possessions, and, finally, himself.

The interesting thing to note here, however—and what gives some people the most pause—is that though Satan administers the suffering, God must grant permission for it to occur. Job 2:6 states, "The Lord said to Satan, 'Very well, then, [Job] is in your hands; but you must spare his life.'"

This seems alarming, doesn't it? Why is God willing to hand over Job to Satan's torture? Why would God allow such suffering?

Christians believe that he does this because he does, in fact, love and care for his people.



## Purposeful Pain

That may sound paradoxical, but the reality is that through suffering, we come to better understand our need for and reliance upon God. As C. S. Lewis wrote, “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”<sup>2</sup>

Look at the ancient Israelites for example. Numerous times God allowed pagan rulers to attack, punish, and persecute his people in an effort to get them to turn away from their sinful choices and develop the understanding that life apart from God is painful and hopeless.<sup>3</sup>

As the great author Jane Austen wrote, “We do not suffer by accident.”<sup>4</sup> Suffering is a perspective-changer. When things are going well and life seems easy, it can be hard to see any reason to look beyond ourselves. When the opposite is true, our need for divine assistance becomes crystal clear. It’s through suffering that we begin to look beyond the shallow confines of this life and peek out into eternity—to the glorious salvation that awaits all who believe in Jesus Christ.

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”<sup>5</sup>

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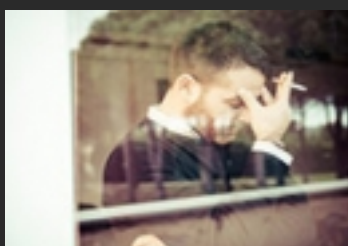
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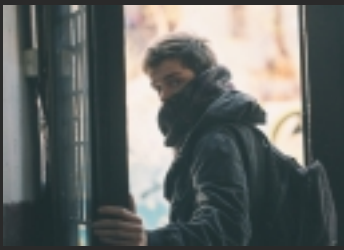
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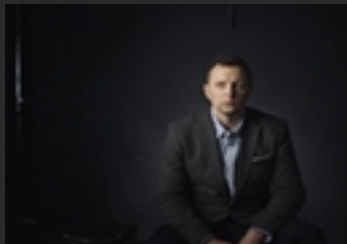
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