

When God is Silent

Story: from WWII

It was eight days before Christmas in 1941. Two American Battalions from the 142 Infantry had overrun the German positions in the heart of the Italian peninsula. The Fall had been a long slogging battle driving German war machinery from one hilltop to another. The Germans fell back behind San Vitore. The pack mules were returning from the fields of exploding metal carrying 18 year American sons piled one on top of the other. German retreat flares glowed eerily off the moonlit sky. Soldiers said, when they unloaded the bodies from the mules, and stood them up for a moment, some could have been mistaken for a sick man leaning on his brothers.

Rifleman said when they reached San Peatro in the morning it was “one large mound of desolate.” St. Michaels was more of the same. It was reported that the entire town was reduced to a single upright wall of a church sanctuary on which the figurine of a crucifix with the head broken off still hung. The altar that people had wept at was buried under the masonry. Children were screaming. Slender old Italian men and women were groaning or coughing as they foraged through the dust and the rubble. Others were heating up gruel over smoking coals. This was the depravation of war and evil, not in theory but staring it in the eyes.

I condensed this pictorial summary from the book [The Day of Battle](#) by Rick Atkinson

Every time I read about war and history, I’m shocked by it’s brutality. But this jarring image of a bronze figurine of Jesus hanging headless in the rubble of evil, summarizes the piercing question that the world is asking –“Where is God? Is He powerless to stop this? How could God allow this to happen?” For many unbelievers they walk away from God... i.e. Ted Turner watched his 12 year old sister degenerate after Lupus (autoimmune)...and he asked “how could a good God allow this to happen.”

For many of us believers the pain is just as acute. We know that God can intervene. We’ve seen him intervene in the past or for someone else. So why doesn’t he intervene this time. Why didn’t he stop this from happening?

- you’re holding your mother’s hand through the hours of cancer’s unmanageable pain?
- Your reputation has been publicly maligned by someone you once trusted
- someone’s reckless driving ends up in your passenger side door

What do we do when God is silent? There are seasons in a believer’s life when the pain seems to shout louder than the songs that we sing and the truths that we read in the Bible.

Pastoral response

This morning I want to offer a pastor’s response to this question. For the skeptic, there are simple rational explanations for how suffering and God could co-exist. I’ve appreciated some of J. Warner Wallace’s articles from Cold Case Christianity. If you’re interested I’ve posted a link on our [Petra Facebook page](#). Such as [Why would a good God allow pain and suffering](#)

Psalms 42 – A Song of Lament

A pathway to walk through suffering...

Vs 10

My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, "Where is your God?"

The accusation of the ages. That's the accusation that our pain makes. And frankly there's a degree to which we'll never fully understand. The rabbis say, this is a mystery impenetrable. This is one curtain we can't pull the whole way back.

1. We have to start with the choice to trust God; that He will triumph over every injustice and evil. This is not an answer I give to a skeptic, but it is starting point for the believer who thinks differently about the world.

The Psalmist begins and ends with this choice to trust...

V.1-2

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

V. 11

Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God.

God is our hope. We have to trust that God hates evil and suffering more than we do. It's not that he's uncaring. He just chooses to deal with it in a different way and on a different timeline.

Slide: "We are eternal creatures who will live beyond our short existence on earth...God will do something to stop evil immoral behavior, He is powerful enough to stop evil completely, and He does care about justice. But as an Eternal Being, He has the ability to address the issue on an eternal timeline. It's not that God has failed to act; it's simply that He has not chosen to act yet." Apologist J Warner Wallace

God has already done something about evil from the cross, and He is about to do something from his throne. Injustice will not go on forever.

1 Corinthians 15:24-26

The end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Here's my encouragement to you. Whatever evil you're facing, whatever hardship you're laboring under...it will not last forever. The same power that raised Christ from the dead is

going to cast his enemies into the pit of hell. There is a resurrection after death. There is victory after brokenness. There is glory after sacrifice. One day we won't need the word remission for cancer because cancer won't exist. Abuse. Poverty will be distant memories, not one can retrieve anymore. I want to remind you this morning that you are the church; you are eternal. You will outlast your enemies.

If God isn't taking away our suffering, what is he doing in the midst of them? Well,

2. There is intimacy with God that's available in suffering.

Some of the deepest seasons of friendship I've had in God, were the seasons I was in the most pain. My wife and I's friendship has grown deeper because we've stood beside each other in the pain. When there's no words, you just feel each other breathe.

V.7-8

Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the LORD directs his love, at night his song is with me - a prayer to the God of my life.

Here is a clue that God thinks differently about pain than we do. Instead of sheltering us from pain, he chose to enter into our pain and suffer alongside of us.

"Where is God?" He's there, hanging on our cross. He said he would never leave us or forsake us. He's making good on his promise.

Philippians 3:10 calls it the "fellowship of sharing in his sufferings"

We will never know the depths of Jesus' personality and character until we embrace His sufferings with Him. Most people want to avoid the suffering, so they miss out on the friendship.

What is God doing in the middle of our pain?

3. Suffering leads to vulnerability and dependence on God.

Look how raw the psalmist is in

V.9

I say to God my Rock, "Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?"

It is in suffering that we cut through the veneer of religion. Our protection is gone. And the shell of self-sufficiency is cracked open. The heart is raw. It is a messy and dangerous place where we let go of our disguises.

The Holy Spirit told Paul "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul responded: Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

There's a sweet fragrance to brokenness. You can't buy it. You have to walk through it. And once you have it, you pour it out on the head of Jesus like Mary broke open her jar of perfume.

What is God doing in the middle of our pain?

The monastic fathers talk about how the pain of the wilderness strips away all the things we used to trust in. I'm left with nothing else, and no one else, but God.

4. God perfects us in our suffering.

There's maturity that God can only produce in you in the wilderness. Often it's a pruning, a stripping away of dreams or successes maybe we've found identity in, or loves we were distracted by. The prophet Hosea says that God calls us out into the simplicity of the wilderness to betroth us back to himself.

V.3-4

My tears have been my food day and night, (he has nothing) while men say to me all day long, "Where is your God?" These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng.

Slide: "Suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, ...I have been bent and broken, but - I hope - into a better shape." Charles Dickens, Great Expectations

What is God doing in the middle of our pain?

5. God uses temporary pain and suffering to increase eternal joy and glory.

Romans 8:18

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

I did the math. (Algebra equation)

ie. All of our missionaries that traveled to Thailand and who met the young girls freed from sex trafficking have said, they were shocked to see the countenances of joy and radiant faces of the young girls.

These transformed souls are God's ribbons of victory. He has made them beautiful. You would not recognize what they were. Only what they are becoming.

What is God doing in the middle of our pain?

6. Our greatest sacrifices to God are often offered out of our greatest pain.

That's when it costs us the most. Suffering saves us from consumer faith when it's all about how God fits into my life.

Jesus' said, "Not my will, but yours be done." And then he offered the Father his greatest sacrifice on the cross.

At the moment that Job lost everything he fell down in the dust and he cried out, "May the name of the Lord be praised." Job 1:21

Don't waste your wilderness. There's a worship that you can only give to God when you are in the wilderness.

What is God doing in the middle of our pain?

7. Our greatest ministry to others is often out of our sufferings, and not our successes.

It awakens compassion inside of us for others who are walking the road we've had to walk

- Harriet Tubman was permanently wounded by her abusers, suffering severe headaches, and blindness in one eye. But she went back rescued 300 more like her.
- 18 year old James Edward Hanger was the first amputee of the Civil War. He created the first modern jointed prosthetic that would help millions of people.
- Our Surrendering the Secret ministry – those who have lived under the burden and guilt of an abortion have created a safe place repentance and vulnerability and heal.

This morning we're going to end with a time of ministry.

Conclusion:

"Where is God?" -- He is here, walking through the fire with you.

Freedom to take your complaint to the Father, take your whole heart to him. Grief. Anger. Freedom to trust Him.

For some of you you're walking through something that feels heavy. Like a stone that you can't carry. This morning as an act of faith I want to invite you to bring that heavy stone and lay it here as an altar of worship.

Closing Song: Another in the Fire