

Psalms 73:12-17 “How Can You Reconcile God, Evil, and Hardship?”

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Intro. The presence of evil and suffering can be an obstacle to God. If God is all knowing, all powerful, and good why does He allow evil, hardship, and suffering? How can you reconcile God, evil and hardship?

Subject: How you can reconcile God, evil, and hardship.

Object: Reconcile God and suffering, and follow God

A. The problem of suffering and evil [Psalms 73:12-17]

“Behold, these *are* the ungodly, who are always at ease; they increase *in* riches. ¹³ Surely, I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, and washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ For all day long I have been plagued, and chastened every morning. ¹⁵ If I had said, “I will speak thus,” behold, I would have been untrue to the generation of Your children. ¹⁶ When I thought *how* to understand this,

it was too painful for me—¹⁷ Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* I understood their end” [Psalms 73:12-17].

The Psalmist, Asaph, is struggling as he contemplates the world around him. He observes the ungodly prospering in this world [12]; and meanwhile godly people suffer [14]. He struggles at the idea that maybe living for God is a waste [13]. Contemplating those thoughts was simply too painful for Asaph [16]. Yet, let’s consider if we can reconcile God, evil, and hardship:

1. Does the existence of evil disprove God? The existence of evil is actually evidence of God. Our understanding of evil cannot exist without a sense of good and God. Similarly, there is no sense of cold without warmth, darkness without light, or injustice without justice. There is nothing illogical about the two statements that God exists and evil exists; but emotionally people may dislike the idea of God allowing suffering.

2. Is suffering and evil God’s fault? God is not at fault for the existence of evil and suffering. Man’s rebellion in the Garden of Eden allows Satan to introduce evil and suffering [Genesis 3]; and continued rebellion increases suffering and evil [Romans 1:24-26]. Clearly there is something very wrong in the world, and the Bible explains the problem as sin or man’s abuse of freedom. Sin is refusing to yield to God. Continued rebellion against God produces adverse consequences for the individual and the community. We either are witnesses to sin, victims of sin, perpetrators of sin or all three. God did not create evil but has allowed it (although He restrains it).

3. Does suffering and evil show that God isn't good? People can struggle with the issue of why do “bad” things happen to the godly, and why do “good” things happen to the ungodly.

Although no one is truly good but God [Matthew 19:17], there is clearly tremendous suffering experienced by those who don't appear to have deserved it. How do you reconcile this suffering with the goodness of God? First, remember that it cannot be that God doesn't love us since He gave His Only Son for us [John 3:16]. When we don't understand, we need to rely on what we do know: God is good, holy, perfect, and has proven His love by giving Jesus for us.

B. The perspective of God [Ps. 73:17]

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *then* I understood their end” [Psalms 73:17]. Asaph gained perspective when he entered the sanctuary or house of God. As he contemplated worship of God, the Word of God and the works of God the psalmist begins to understand the perspective of God. God's perspective is eternal. Apparent temporal blessings and burdens need to be considered in light of their eternal significance.

1. God works all things together for good for those who love Him:

“We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to the will of God” [Romans 8:28]. Job, Joseph, David, and Daniel all experienced

incredible hardship though they were loyal to God and loved Him. Yet, the Bible records how in each of their lives, God worked all things together for their good.

Note: God redeems and restores the suffering of His children.

2. God allows suffering to grow our faith in Him and conform us to Christ's image:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be

perfect and complete, lacking nothing” [James 1:2-4]. James warns and encourages believers that Jesus followers will experience various trials that they did not expect [2]. These trials will produce joy in a believer who knows that the testing of their faith produces patience or longsuffering with difficult people and circumstances. The completed work of these various trials is *that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing* or spiritual maturity. You cannot become truly spiritually mature without experiencing hardship and suffering.

“That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” [Phillipians 3:10]. Paul understood that he needed to enter into the sufferings of Christ in order to be conformed to Christ's image, and to put to death the life of self-will. Jesus lived in obedience to, and dependence upon His Father. Those who remain under God's

authority during suffering declare dependence upon Him, and discover God's power to overcome.

Suffering is a catalyst for dependence and discovering God's faithfulness.

Group Discussion: What have you discovered about suffering and God?

3. God allows suffering to draw you to Himself to receive His comfort [John 16:33, 2 Corinthians 1:4].

An Arab proverb states, "Too much sunshine makes a desert." The chief aim of life is relationship with God not temporal happiness. Suffering is a catalyst to seek relief and hope in something that can transcend your circumstances. God's purposes are not restricted to this life but go beyond the grave into eternal life, and present suffering can't compare to future glory [2 Corinthians 4:16-18]. It is difficult in light of our human finite limitation to see the ultimate eternal benefits for allowing suffering.

The paradox of suffering: **The problem of suffering is one of the greatest objections to God, but God is the solution to the problem of suffering.** God offers the hope of redemption and eternity with Him where there will be no more suffering or evil. God promises that the day is coming when there will be no more suffering and evil will be judged. And while there is suffering in the world there is hope in Christ. There is comfort from God that He will bring forth good from perceived negatives, and that our temporal suffering can't compare to the glory that God has prepared for us.

Study Guide Qs

Q1. It seems reasonable that people are likely to struggle in their faith as they experience suffering and hardship or see those they love in pain. Also, observing the ungodly prosper while God's people struggle can be perplexing. If you have ever felt that way, or known believers who have had this experience, describe it.

Q2. Describe a time when you experienced hardship or suffering and God used it grow your faith in Him?

Q3. How can suffering help to conform you to be more like Jesus? How has suffering produced dependence upon God, and helped you to discover God's power to overcome?

Q4. How have you discovered God's comfort and hope during times of suffering?

Digging Deeper

1. Consider the Book of Job. What did you discover about suffering, God, and yourself?

2. Ravi Zacharias shared a profound message on the “The Problem of Suffering and the Goodness of God” available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7-gP1gC8gM>.

Neighboring idea: If someone you know is suffering or struggling, seek to share compassion, listen to, and comfort them in Christ.