

James Foley, ISIS and Why the Righteous Suffer

Why did God allow James Foley, who in the past has spoken of the power of faith and prayer, to suffer beheading at the hands of ISIS terrorists? Why is Saeed Abedini, an American pastor, languishing under brutal conditions in an Iranian prison while his wife and two small children in Idaho pray for his return? Why are Christians in the Middle East, including children, being crucified, beheaded and expelled from their homes and communities with nothing but the clothes on their backs? Why?

The rise of the persecution of Christians around the world is raising again the question of why the righteous suffer. Although you may not have experienced such brutal physical treatment, you have experienced suffering. Perhaps it was the untimely death of a loved one, a painful broken relationship, the loss of employment, or a son or daughter who broke your heart. The fact is that suffering is a part of the human experience, and Christians are not exempt.

The question that so many have asked through the ages is, "Why do the righteous suffer?" I am not so presumptuous as to think I have all the answers, but here are some answers that I have found helpful in my journey of faith.

Because We Live in a Fallen World

This is not heaven. We live in a fallen world where evil exists. When our first parents, Adam and Eve, declared their independence from God and chose to go it on their own, they opened the door for the entry of evil into this world. Human nature itself was corrupted and death, which was not a part of the original creation, became a part of this fallen world.

The trend of this fallen world is against God and His Word.

This is why John the Apostle wrote to one of the earliest Christian communities and warned, "Do not be surprised, dear brothers and sisters, if the world hates you" (1 John 3:13, NLT). Where Christian influence wanes in this fallen world, greater will be the hatred toward followers of Jesus. This is why we must see another great spiritual awakening in our land.

The biblical account of a good creation, and then a fall, provides the only philosophical and theological answer for what we see in the world today. It gives the only answer for the existence of evil we see in the world. It provides the only answer for the human condition wherein people can show flashes of noble and good deeds and also horrific and evil actions.

Because There Is a Devil and Demons Who Hate Christians

The actions of our first parents, in turning from God, opened the door to an evil personality the Bible calls Satan and the devil. This evil being hates God and His children. Although defeated by the cross of Christ, Satan and his demons were not annihilated. They are still active in this world, and Christians are particular objects of their vileness and hatred.

Jesus warned His followers of the reality of serving Him in a fallen world where Satan is still a reality to be dealt with. In John 15:19, He said to His disciples, "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you." He went on to say, "The time is coming when whoever kills you will think he offers God service" (John 16:2).

It is Satan and demons who influence people like the ISIS terrorists who are so brutal toward Christians. Satan and demons also attack us in our thought life seeking to lead us astray and get us to make wrong choices that will hurt us and

do injury to others. Peter tells us how we should respond to this reality. He says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour, whom resist steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:8).

What Can We Do?

1. Know that suffering is not God's will. God does not enjoy seeing us suffer. If suffering was something inherent in the nature of God, then we might expect to suffer throughout eternity. Suffering is not inherent in God's nature for when redemption is complete those who have put their trust in Him will be completely free from every form of pain and suffering and live with Him in eternal bliss. Rev. 21:4 says, "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

Knowing that suffering is not God's will means that we do not resign ourselves to suffering that is brought about by evil or bad choices. We fight evil and seek to relieve suffering. And in the midst of it all, we continue to trust in God's goodness and faithfulness.

2. Trust in God's goodness in the midst of your suffering. God in His infinite wisdom is able to take, even the evil and suffering that comes our way and turn it around for good. God took the evil actions of Joseph's brothers toward him and turned it around for good, using those very actions to bring Joseph into the place and position He had prepared for him. Joseph never stopped trusting! He never stopped believing! Neither must you! Trust God to take your suffering and turn it around for your good and the blessing of others. In this fallen world, God will take even the acts of Satan and turn them around for good. He did this in the life of Joseph, and he will do it in your life and mine as we trust Him.

3. Remember to pray with empathy for those who are suffering.

We are commanded in Hebrews 13:3, "Remember those in prison, as if you were there yourself. Remember also those being mistreated, as if you felt their pain in your own bodies" (NLT). Some believe that Peter was miraculously delivered while James was killed because the early church made continual prayer for Peter, but no such prayer is mentioned for James (Acts 12). Perhaps we would see more deliverances, as in the case of Miriam Ibrahim, if we were more diligent to pray for these brothers and sisters according to the above passage.

4. Know that God's grace is sufficient for whatever suffering you may encounter.

I have lost two brothers in tragic accidents. I preached the funerals of one brother, my father and my mother. I can testify that in those situations I experienced an empowering sense of God's presence and peace in ways that I do not experience in my normal daily walk. I have found that His grace is sufficient.

In my book, *Pursuing Power*, I tell of Michael Sattler, a 32-year-old leader in the 16th-century Anabaptist movement in Europe who was arrested and condemned to die by being burned at the stake for the crime of heresy. I show how, after having his tongue cut out and as the flames were swirling around him, Sattler gave testimony that such suffering was bearable—that God's grace was sufficient. I have to believe that James Foley experienced the grace of God in the midst of his sufferings.

5. We must understand and exercise the authority over Satan and demons that is ours through the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

Jesus Himself said, "Behold I give you authority to trample on serpents and scorpions over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). If our suffering is a direct attack of Satan then we must resist him and, according to the promise in James 4:7, he will flee from us, i.e., he will run from us in terror. James 4:7 also tells us of two different postures we are to have in our walk in this world. Concerning God, we are

to yield. Concerning Satan, we are to resist. In other words, we are not to resign ourselves to everything that is handed us in life. Declare the lordship of Jesus and resist the devil in the Name of Jesus.

Many cases of mental/emotional sickness and oppression are caused by the direct attacks of demons. I remember, as a Bible school student, walking across the campus and my soul was so troubled, and I did not know what about. My mind felt as though it was in a vice that was being tightened by the minute. I was just learning about my authority in Jesus Christ, so I spoke to the oppression and its cause and commanded it to depart in the Name of Jesus. Immediately, the tightness and oppression left, and a sense of settledness and peace filled my mind and heart. It was such a real experience that it is still vivid in my mind today, 40 years later. Do not neglect to exercise the authority that has been given you by Jesus Christ Himself.

6. Stay filled with the Holy Spirit. In the book of Acts we read of the persecutions and sufferings of the early church. In the midst of their sufferings we find this phrase; *And they were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit* (Acts 13:52). The joy of the Lord is not tied to our circumstances. The joy of the Lord can be manifest in our hearts in the most adverse, outward situations. This is why Paul, in writing from prison to the Philippian believers, could admonish them again and again to *rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice*. There was such joy released at my father's funeral that one woman said to me, "I don't know if I should say this, but I really enjoyed this funeral." Stay filled with the Holy Spirit, and you will know His joy even in the midst of suffering.

7. We must pray for another great, spiritual awakening in our land. The American army and air force will not stop terrorism. This is a spiritual battle. We are fighting false belief systems that Satan uses to deceive and destroy lives. This is

no time to play church. A Christianity of comfort and convenience will not survive in today's world. There must be a turning to God in sincere repentance and prayer. Our only hope is another Great Awakening in our land. If My people who are called by name will humble themselves and pray ... then I will hear from heaven and heal their land (2 Chron. 7:14).

Eddie Hyatt is an author, ordained minister and founder/director of Revive America. Through Revive America his goal is to help lay the biblical and historical foundation for another Great Awakening in our land. If you would like to host a Revive America event with your group or congregation, contact Eddie at dreddiehyatt@. His books are available on Amazon and on his website.