

# It's OK to Ask God Why

Trusting God isn't easy when tragedy strikes. How do you respond when you face death, suffering or a life-crippling crisis?

War. Genocide. Suicide bombings. Divorce. Rape. Sex slaves in cages. Toddlers in refugee camps. Orphans on streets. Debilitating handicaps. Premature deaths. Natural disasters. Car accidents. Mental illness. AIDS. Cancer.

Our planet is a ball of pain.

We've been "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14, NKJV). Wonderfully, in that we have an exhilarating capacity for glory; fearfully, in that we have a terrifying capacity for pain.

Nothing is more horrific than suffering devoid of purpose. Hell is so hellish because its torment does nothing to make the sufferer a better person or produce anything positive. Tragically, millions today live in their own "hell on earth," coping miserably under the crush of senseless suffering.

Jesus, moved by man's plight, came to change that. Now when we submit our wretched woes to Christ, He infuses all of life with divine purpose—hellish suffering included—and extends to us the promise of His redeeming power.

## What Went Wrong?

The suffering all around us tells us there's something terribly wrong with our world. How did things get this way?

The problem, in a nutshell, is sin. Mankind became subject to death through Adam's initial sin (see Rom. 5:17). When Adam bowed to Satan's temptation, Satan became "'the ruler of this world'" (John 12:31). Things haven't been working right ever since.

There's a direct link between death and pain. Most forms of pain are expressions of incipient death; that is, taken to their ultimate potential, most forms of pain culminate in death.

No one appreciates the power of sin and death more than Satan. His No. 1 strategy is to tempt us to sin because he knows that sin produces death (see James 1:15). When we sin, we bring suffering and death upon our own heads.

When we ask the question, "Why does God allow suffering in the world?" we must first acknowledge that sin is our fault, not God's. We brought all this pain on ourselves. God didn't want Adam to sin or design him to do so. Sin was man's choice, not God's.

"How, then," someone might ask, "could a God of love allow us to bring such horror upon ourselves?"

The answer, actually, is found in His great love for us. God wanted to give His Son a bride who would love Him with extravagant abandonment. For her love to be authentic, however, it had to be voluntary. And for her decision to be voluntary, her power to choose between her options had to be real.

Not even God would violate her right to choose death or life. It's the fact that the bride chooses Jesus over her other options that makes her love so dazzling and stunning. The whole thing has to do with love.

God knew that the pearl of love He desired could be fashioned only in the war zone of cosmic struggle against the forces of darkness. A valuable pearl is the product of an oyster's distress; similarly, God is using the pain of the world to produce a pearl of great price—a glorious bride who is lovesick for Jesus Christ.

We're not the only ones in this war who are hurting. God

Himself is hurting. Revelation 13:8 calls Jesus “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” According to this verse, from the very beginning God knew that if He created man, He Himself would endure unimaginable suffering. After pondering the cost of creating man, God concluded that the final glory was worth the price tag of the suffering. The destination would be glorious, but the journey would be a killer.

## **The Wisdom of the Cross**

All the anguish of our world would seem utterly futile were it not for the cross—the one momentous event in history that revolutionized how we view suffering.

The cross changed everything.

The cross gives significance to the sufferings of the world. When we gaze at the cross, we don’t see a detached Creator who watches us writhe from afar; we see a God who has stepped into our struggle and hurts with us. No one has suffered as God has.

Now, no one can look at God and say: “You don’t understand. You have no idea what I’m going through.” On the contrary, He empathizes with our sufferings from firsthand experience. He who suffered in the body cares for all who suffer in their bodies, since He Himself is still in the body as well.

The cross demonstrates that it’s not sinful to be in pain.

It’s the cross that makes our gospel universally relevant. You can take it anywhere in the world. Take the gospel to the worst hellhole on the planet, and you have a message to lift the lowest life. Find the most destitute, sin-scarred, addiction-bound, demon-possessed, filthy human specimen you can possibly find, and you’ll find someone whom the gospel can take up in its arms.

Why? Because the One who suffered on the tree sank lower than any other person that He might raise up the chiefest of sinners and seat him at His table.

When man sinned, God lost the home-court advantage. In the cross, however, God was saying to the adversary, "I'll meet you on your own terms, play by your rules, honor both your free will and that of man, and use the very suffering you have masterminded to defeat you on your own turf." Truly, the cross is the wisdom of God!

### **Beholding Christ Crucified**

I myself am writing this article from a place of suffering. I've been enduring chronic pain ever since an injury 17 years ago. The cross has been my mainstay. The cross both empowers me to endure in the crucible and assures me of God's design to deliver me.

I expected to be healed years ago. I have only limited understanding about why I've suffered for so long. Often my emotions are like a roller coaster. When the going gets difficult, though, I have found strength in beholding the crucified Christ.

When I can't make sense of my journey, I go back to the cross. When I don't know how to process my pain levels, I go back to the cross. When it seems as if He's withholding from me, I go back to the cross.

The accuser likes to hit me with that ancient accusation: "God's withholding from you. He could deliver you right now, but He's holding out on you." But the cross nails that accusation.

When I look at the cross, I see a God with nails in His hands, a nail in His feet, a crown of thorns on His brow and stripes on His back. As He hangs there with arms spread wide, He says to me: "I give you My mind. I give you My soul. I give you My

heart. I give you My flesh. I give you My strength. I give you My last breath. I give you My last drop of blood."

The cross assures me that my God withholds nothing from me! He has given me His best. He has given me His all. It's here, as I behold His outstretched hands, that I spread my arms and say, "I am Yours, and You are mine."

### **Why You Can Ask 'Why?'**

The cross gives me permission to ask why, because even Jesus asked His Father, "'Why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matt. 27:46). If Jesus can ask why, I can, too.

The cross not only allows us to ask why; it compels us to ask. Because when we're asking why, we're peering into purpose. It's absolutely essential, in "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword," that we discover and cooperate with divine purpose so that we might be "more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:35,37).

The book of Job—the oldest book in the Bible—is the story of a man who sought desperately to find divine purpose in catastrophic suffering. As the cornerstone of Scripture, the book of Job demonstrates how God redeems suffering to vanquish the very perpetrator of suffering.

But if the book of Job left any room for controversy, the cross unequivocally confirms Job's message: God redeems suffering in order to produce champions who perform exploits against the kingdom of darkness.

Jesus was one such champion. Referring to the cross, God said, "By His *knowledge* My righteous Servant shall justify many" (Is. 53:11, emphasis added).

Jesus was able to endure the cross because He knew something. What did He know? *Divine purpose*.

God's purpose in the cross was that Jesus prevail. As the apostle John wrote, "But one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals'" (Rev. 5:5).

Jesus came to earth with a divine mandate to overcome sin, to overcome temptation, to overcome the flesh, to overcome Satan and to overcome the world. But His greatest challenge was to overcome the sufferings of the cross.

Jesus knew that if He prevailed over the cross, He would qualify to unlock the Father's destiny for His life as King of heaven and earth.

The cross carries the same promise for us today. As we endure and overcome the cross, we qualify to unlock the scroll of our eternal destiny in the age to come. "'To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne'" (Rev. 3:21).

Jesus did not prevail until He was resurrected from the grave. In the same way, we have not prevailed over our crosses until we have been raised up by God. It's not enough to suffer and be buried; we must be raised up if we are to qualify as overcomers. This is why I cannot live with the cross as the final chapter in my story; it must end with resurrection!

Those of us who suffer will never relent until we see the release of kingdom power and authority that looses the captives and establishes them in the freedom for which Christ died.

## **An Eternal Perspective**

The Gospels give us an up-close visual on the horror of the cross. In Genesis, however, we can step back and gain something of an eternal vantage. It's here, in God's first reference to the cross, that we survey it from a panoramic,

bird's-eye view.

I'm referring to Genesis 3:15, which records God's words to Satan: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He [Jesus] shall bruise your [Satan's] head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His [Jesus'] heel.'" "

God was contrasting what the cross would do to Jesus versus what it would do to Satan. True, the cross wounded Christ's heel; but it absolutely crushed Satan's head. By the time the warfare of the cross was over, Jesus came away with scars but Satan was completely destroyed (see Heb. 2:14). For as bloody a spectacle as the cross was, Satan was more bloodied by the cross than Christ.

When He hung on the cross, however, Jesus wrestled to maintain that perspective. His entire being was racked with untold agony. I promise you that it didn't feel, in that moment, like a mere bruising of His heel; it felt as if every atom of His being was being crushed.

The same is true for you in your sufferings. When you're in the vortex of your trial, you may feel as if you're being utterly crushed. The pain makes it difficult to gain heaven's view.

As you wait upon the Lord, however, you begin to mount up with eagle's wings (see Is. 40:31) and gain God's eternal perspective on your trial. By the time the battle is finished, God will have raised you up with a testimony that will empower multiple generations. Your cross thus becomes an invitation to a conflict that will do more damage to the kingdom of darkness than if your life were tranquil and comfortable.

Fight the good fight! Press into God's purposes! Give yourself to fasting and prayer and abiding in the Word. Never relent until you have qualified to loose the seals on your eternal destiny. If you'll endure, one day you'll look back on your

suffering and say, “I certainly did take it in the heel, but my adversary took it in the head!”

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