

1

## When God Took On Pain Isaiah 53:1-12

Who is Jesus?

- **He was \_\_\_\_\_ by people — vss 1-3**
  
- **He is the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ who takes away the sin of the world — vss 4-9**
  
- **He is God's \_\_\_\_\_ from the beginning — vss 10-12**

He is the suffering One who takes away sin, giving you another chance.

# 4 Wrong Answers to the Question "Why Me?"

By Timothy Keller, August 6, 2012

When I was diagnosed with cancer, the question "Why me?" was a natural one. Later, when I survived but others with the same kind of cancer died, I also had to ask, "Why me?"

Suffering and death seem random, senseless. The recent Aurora shootings—in which some people were spared and others lost—is the latest, vivid example of this, but there are plenty of others every day: from casualties in the Syria uprising to victims of accidents on American roads. Tsunamis, tornadoes, household accidents—the list is long. As a minister, I've spent countless hours with suffering people crying: "Why did God let this happen?" In general I hear four answers to this question—but each is wrong, or at least inadequate.

The first answer is, "This makes no sense—I guess this proves there is no God." But the problem of senseless suffering does not go away if you abandon belief in God. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, said that if there was no higher divine Law, there would be no way to tell if any particular human law was unjust or not. If there is no God, then why have a sense of outrage and horror when suffering and tragedy occur? The strong eat the weak—that's life—so why not? When Friedrich Nietzsche heard that a natural disaster had destroyed Java in 1883, he wrote a friend: "Two hundred thousand wiped out at a stroke—how magnificent!" Nietzsche was relentless in his logic. Because if there is no God, all value judgments are arbitrary. All definitions of justice are just the results of your culture or temperament. As different as they were in other ways, King and Nietzsche agreed on this point. If there is no God or higher divine Law, then violence is perfectly natural. So abandoning belief in God doesn't help with the problem of suffering at all, and as we will see, it removes many resources for facing it.

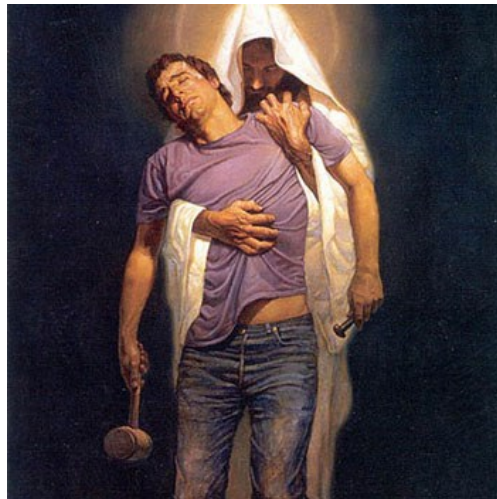
The second answer is, "If there is a God, senseless suffering proves that God is not completely in control of everything. He couldn't stop this." As many thinkers have pointed out—both devout believers as well as atheists—such a being, whatever it is, doesn't really fit our definition of God. And this leaves you with the same problems mentioned above. If you don't believe in a God powerful

enough to create and sustain the whole world, then the world came about through natural forces, and that means, again, that violence is natural. Or if you think that God is an impersonal life force and this whole material world is just an illusion, again you remove any reason to be outraged at evil and suffering or to resist it.

The third answer to seemingly sudden, random death is, "God saves some people and lets others die because he favors and rewards good people." But the Bible forcefully rejects the idea that people who suffer more are worse people than those who are spared suffering. This was the self-righteous premise of Job's friends in that great Old Testament book. They sat around Job, who was experiencing one sorrow in life after another, and said, "the reason this is happening to you and not us is because we are living right and you are not." At the end of the book, God expresses his fury at Job's "miserable comforters." The world is too fallen and deeply broken to issue in neat patterns of good people having good lives and bad people having bad lives.

The fourth answer is, "God knows what he's doing, so be quiet and trust him." This is partly right, but inadequate. It is inadequate because it is cold and because the Bible gives us more with which to face the terrors of life.

God did not create a world with death and evil in it. It is the result of humankind turning away from him. We were put into this world to live wholly for him, and when instead we began to live for ourselves everything in our created reality began to fall apart—physically, socially, and spiritually. Everything became subject to decay. But God did not abandon us. Of all the world's major religions, only Christianity teaches that God came to earth (in Jesus Christ) and became subject to suffering and death himself—dying on the Cross to take the punishment our sins deserved—so that some day he can return to earth to end all suffering without ending us.



Do you see what this means? Yes, we don't know the reason God allows evil and suffering to continue, or why it is so random, but now at least we know what the reason isn't—what it can't be. It can't be that he doesn't love us! It can't be that he doesn't care. He is so committed to our ultimate happiness that he was willing to plunge into the greatest depths of suffering himself.

He understands us, he's been there, and he assures us that he has a plan to eventually wipe away every tear, to make "everything sad come untrue," as J.R.R. Tolkien put it at the end of his Christian allegory *The Lord of the Rings*.

Someone might say, "But that's only half an answer to the question 'Why?'" Yes, but it is the half that we need.

If God actually explained all the reasons why he allows things to happen as they do, it would be too much for our finite brains. Think of small children and their relationship to their parents. Three-year-olds can't understand most of what their parents allow and disallow for them. But though they aren't capable of comprehending their parents' reasons, they are capable of knowing their parents' love, and therefore capable of trusting them and living securely. That is what they really need. Now the difference between God and human beings would be infinitely greater than the difference between a thirty-year-old parent and a three-year-old child. So we should not expect to be able to grasp all God's purposes, but through the Cross and gospel of Jesus Christ, we can know his love. And that is what we need most.

In Ann Voskamp's book *One Thousand Gifts*, she shares her journey to understand the senseless death of her sister, crushed by a truck at the age of two. In the end, she concludes that the primary issue is whether we trust God's character. Is he really loving? Is he really just? Her conclusion:

"[God] gave us Jesus... If God didn't withhold from us His very own Son, will God withhold anything we need? If trust must be earned, hasn't God unequivocally earned our trust with the bark on the raw wounds, the thorns pressed into the brow, your name on the cracked lips? How will he not also graciously give us all things He deems best and right? He's already given the incomprehensible."

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