



## THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING



Our universe contains vast amounts of misery. Every 5 seconds, somewhere in the world, a child dies of starvation. Every minute, 25 people die because of a lack of clean drinking water. Every hour, 700 people die of malaria. In recent years we have witnessed earthquakes in the Himalayas that killed 50,000 people and left 3 million homeless, and a tsunami in Thailand that killed 300,000 people in one devastating inundation. Where is God in all this?



John Stott, noted theologian, states, ***“The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God’s justice and love.”***



Stephen Fry, the TV actor and a very outspoken atheist, was once interviewed and asked, *“What if you’re wrong? What if there is a God? What if, when you die, you come face to face with God. What will you say?”*



He replied, ***“I will say to him – bone cancer in children? How dare you! How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault! It’s utterly, utterly, evil! Why should I respect a mean-minded, capricious, stupid God who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain! That’s what I’d say! Because if there is a God who created this universe, he is quite clearly a manic!”***



The 18th century Scottish sceptic David Hume, expressed it more succinctly, ***“Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”***

Without doubt, suffering is the most complex topic that we have to deal with as Christians .... And most Christians struggle to know how to answer this question themselves .... And so, I strongly encourage you to do some more reading on the topic and equip yourself to more adequately answer the questions that people commonly ask...



The underlying premise of the sceptic’s argument is this: ***“If there is an all-powerful, loving God, surely he could have created a world without suffering!”***

But I want to demonstrate in this seminar that that is NOT a logical premise. That, in fact, there appear to be many philosophical reasons why suffering appears to be a NECESSITY in order to have a meaningful universe.



In my book I examine 10 aspects to understanding the existence of suffering.....

1. **The LOGICAL necessity of Suffering**
2. **The ONTOLOGICAL antecedent of Suffering**
3. **The REMEDIAL necessity of Suffering**
4. **The PROVIDENTIAL necessity of Suffering**
5. **The ESCHATOLOGICAL necessity of Suffering**

## 6. The TRANSCENDENT necessity of Suffering

## 7. The Context of God's UNSEEN INTERVENTIONS

## 8. The Context of DEMONIC ACTIVITY

## 9. The Context of ETERNITY

## 10. The Context of the CROSS

I simply can't cover all of these in a single 1 hour session. I will only have time to deal with a couple of these areas tonight ...



I will spend most of my time dealing with 1 and 2, The LOGICAL necessity of suffering and the ONTOLOGICAL antecedent of suffering ...



## THE LOGICAL NECESSITY OF SUFFERING

Put very simply:



**You cannot have free will without the possibility of evil and, hence, suffering.**

In other words, it's a logical impossibility for free will to exist without the possibility of choosing to use that free will in negative ways. If there is no possibility of disobedience to God, if the only option is obedience, then free will simply does not exist.

Now, those who claim that if an omnipotent God exists, surely He could have created a world without suffering, are absolutely correct in one sense:



God could **certainly** have created a world without suffering and evil, but it would necessitate a world without free will; a world with a robotically pre-programmed humanity, unable to make free choices, unable to do anything but obey.



And if there is no free will, it renders the notion of love meaningless. This is because **love** only has meaning if it is freely given as a choice of the will, rather than a product of pre-programmed spiritual coding.

There is something else that needs to be said at this point as well.



The proposition that an omnipotent (all-powerful) God can do anything, is actually false.

While it is true that  **"with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26)**,  intrinsic, logical impossibilities are not things, but theoretical non-entities.

In other words, God can do anything except those things that are logically contradictory. For example, God cannot make a round square. Nor can He create a rock that is too heavy for Him to lift. That's just utter nonsense.

In the same way, God can't create humans with free will while at the same time making it impossible for us to disobey Him and do evil – that also is nonsense!

The great C. S. Lewis, in his book, "The Problem of Pain", writes,

 *“God’s Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense. This is no limit to His power. ... It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.”<sup>1</sup>*

Lewis explains further;

 *“Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free wills involve, and you will find that you have excluded life itself.”<sup>2</sup>*

 It is possible, perhaps, to conceive of a world in which God’s hand continually intervenes to nullify the harmful consequences of mankind’s free will; a world where He turns an assassin’s bullet to jelly after it is fired; where a baseball bat turns to straw before it connects with someone’s skull; where a violent husband’s fist is halted one centimetre before connecting with his wife’s face; where a hurtful comment is transformed into an expression of love before it enters the ears of the hearer; where a grossly inadequate wage is boosted magically into an adequate payment in the employee’s bank account; where the imbalance of the earth’s resources due to greed and selfishness is magically readjusted every night.

 But such a world would be a complete nonsense, for it would mean that the laws of nature, and even matter itself, would constantly behave unpredictably. It would also effectively nullify free will. It would make a complete nonsense of free will.

In a recent conversation with a sceptic, I was explaining the inevitability of suffering as a result of its inherent link to free will. He responded by saying,  *“If those who go to heaven will still have free will, but sin will no longer be possible in heaven, why didn’t God create this kind of world in the first place?”* It is a very good question, but I think there is a rational answer.

The Bible does **not** speak of people having truly unfettered free will in heaven, and there is a logical reason for that.

 To be fully in the presence of the transcendent, omnipotent Creator God, will be to have our senses completely overwhelmed with His glory, power and majesty. It will be such a soul-shaking, awe-inspiring experience that the concept of rebelling against Him or disobeying Him will be completely unthinkable. Sin will not be possible in heaven, not because our free wills will be removed, but because they will be completely overpowered by the gloriously awe-full presence of God.

 It’s for this very reason, that God chooses **NOT** to currently disclose His full glory to mankind, for it would compromise our free wills. It would **overwhelm** us. No one would be able to resist Him; everyone would be driven to submit to Him by the overwhelming, irresistible force of His power and glory.

 God values our free will too much to force Himself on us in this way. He wants us to want Him, not as a result of being overwhelmed by Him, but out of the sincere desire of our hearts. He wants our love to be genuine, freely chosen, and not manipulated or coerced by the power of His presence.

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, “The Problem Of Pain”, Clays Ltd, St. Ives, 1940, p.18

<sup>2</sup> IBID, p. 25

So that's the first part of the answer regarding the existence of suffering. You can't have free will, without the very real possibility of those free wills being used for evil.

 But have you noticed that this answer really only deals with suffering caused by the wrongful use of human free will? Suffering caused by people behaving in selfish or evil ways.

But the reality is that there is a lot of suffering that can't be directly attributed to the use of free will .... Diseases and so-called natural disasters.

So now we need to talk about ...

## **THE ONTOLOGICAL ANTECEDENT OF SUFFERING**

Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of "being" and its inter-dependant relationships. These are just fancy words for the causative origin of suffering. In other words, where did all this so called "natural" suffering come from?

 Sickness, disease, famines, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, bush fires and natural disasters. It's at this point that we must turn to the biblical account of the Fall.

 In Genesis 3, we read the account of the Fall of mankind – our rebellion against God at the beginning of human history.

Now, I believe that that whole account of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and their fall from God's grace, as literal history. I believe that what we read in Genesis 2 and 3 actually happened. But whether or not you regard this story as a literal historical event, doesn't affect its relevance for the explanation that it gives of the antecedent (or origin) of suffering in the natural world.

At its simplest level, the Biblical account of the Fall indicates that, at some point in the distant past, mankind rebelled against God.

 The serious nature of this rebellion cannot be understated. It involved a deliberate refusal to be governed by the commands of God, and a desire to be masters of our own destiny. It was a heinous act of self-will, refusing to accept our subservient relationship to God. We effectively severed the intrinsic ties that bound our spirits, in subservient intimacy, to God's Spirit.

 The cutting of that tie, the breaking of that spiritual cord, has had devastating impacts upon the physical world.

Here is God's proclamation of the curse that would now befall mankind:

 **Genesis 3:16-23**

***"To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labour you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because***

***you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return... So the Lord God banished them from the Garden of Eden..."***

Consider the avalanche of profound consequences that that passage declares:

-  Pain in childbirth (v.16)
-  Thorns and weeds will now plague mankind (v.18)
-  Work would now be hard and painful (v.19)
-  Mere survival would be difficult (v.17)
-  We will now all die (v.19)
-  We are now cut off from the immediate presence of God (v.23)

Bible scholars point out that these pronouncements by God were by no means exhaustive;  they were the briefest of summaries of the vast and profound change that came over the entire physical universe the moment these first humans sinned.  Our sin was so horrendously treasonous that it affected the entire physical universe, down to the sub-atomic level. The universe itself became sick, broken and dysfunctional – infected with our sin.

 Paul describes this profound brokenness, which remains to this very day, in Romans 8 when he says that creation is now ***"in bondage to decay" (v.21)*** and that ***"the whole of creation is groaning" (v.22)***. The physical universe is profoundly sick, and we made it so!

 How could this be? How could the surreptitious eating of a simple piece of fruit ruin the entire universe?

The answer, if you will allow me to use some theological terms, is that  **the physical universe was providentially connected to God via the subservient rulership of mankind.**

In Genesis 1:26 we read,  ***"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the livestock and over all the earth and over everything that moves on the earth'." (Genesis 1:26).***

God gave mankind “*dominion ... over all the earth*”. The providential rule of God over the earth, flowed through us! Mankind became the conduit through which God’s providential rule and care of the earth was expressed.

 As long as we remained in a right relationship with God, His providential care would flow through us unimpeded into every molecule of the universe. The universe would remain in perfect harmony and balance.

 But when we severed the cord of our subservience, we not only cut ourselves off from God, but we took the whole of creation with us. That first, seemingly simple act of disobedience, represented a seismic shift in the spiritual balance of the universe. The creature said to the Creator, “***No! I will not obey you! I will not recognise your right to tell me how to live!***” The cataclysmic shock of this treasonous act has reverberated through every molecule of the universe ever since, destroying its perfect balance.

 A.W. Tozer explains the serious nature of sin and its dreadful universal consequences; “***Sin is a capital crime as well. It is treason against the great God Almighty who made the heavens and the earth. Sin is a crime against the moral order of the universe. Each time a man or woman strikes against God’s moral nature and kingdom, he or she acts against the moral government of the entire universe.***”

 The spiritual and physical realms are inextricably linked in a way that we can only dimly perceive. And when mankind rebelled against the Creator, that link was broken; our spiritual sin infected the physical universe with a profound sickness.

 Every natural disaster that has since ensued, every disease and illness, every accident, every hard, painful day of toil, every death, every heartache – all this and more - is **our** fault. Our sin has destroyed the perfect balance of creation, right down to its sub-atomic level.

 Theologian, David Bentley Hart states that “***this ancient alienation from God has wounded creation in its uttermost depths and reduced cosmic time to a shadowy vestige of the world God truly intends***” (“The Doors Of The Sea”, p.22).

 Arguably, the most horrible aspect of our wounded universe is the fact of death. We will now all die. And the Bible says that this is one of the profound changes that took place at the moment of our rebellion.

 Romans 5:12 states that “***sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin***”. And God had warned us that this would happen if we rebelled against Him:

 ***Gen 2:17 “You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good and evil, for when you eat of it you will certainly die.”***

But, of course, they didn’t die immediately did they? Or did they? Spiritually they did. But they also began to die physically. The process of death began instantly. Every cell in their body began to wear out and wind down towards death.

 As you sit here tonight, the cells in your body are constantly dying, through two processes known as apoptosis and autophagy. Basically, your cells gradually wear down and stop functioning, and then self-destruct.

 And as old cells die, nearby cells are given the instruction to replicate, to replace the ones that have died.

 Different cells wear out at different rates:

<b>LIFESPAN OF SOME CELLS OF THE HUMAN BODY</b>	
<b>CELL TYPE</b>	<b>LIFESPAN</b>
Granulocytes: eosinophils, basophils, neutrophils	10 hours - 3 days
Stomach lining cells	2 days
Sperm cells	2-3 days
Colon cells	3-4 days
Epithelia of small intestine	1 week or less
Platelets	10 days
Skin epidermal cells	2-4 weeks
Lymphocytes	2 months – more than a year (highly variable)
Red blood cells	4 months
Macrophages	Months-years
Endothelial cells	Months-years
Pancreas cells	1 year or more
Bone cells	25-30 years

 In fact, it's estimated that nearly every cell in your body has died and been replaced over a 7-year period.

In other words, 7 years ago, that body that you've plonked into that chair did not even exist!

But if that is the case, why don't we live forever? If dead cells are constantly replaced with new ones, why don't we live forever? The answer is that the cell replication process breaks down over time.

Have you noticed that as your body constantly replaces dead cells with new ones,  the new ones aren't quite as good?

That's because the whole cell replication process is flawed – it gradually breaks down

 Genetic errors creep in and accumulate over time, some DNA information is lost completely, it fails to be copied across, while other bits of our DNA are corrupted with transcription errors - copying errors - so that the new cells become less and less efficient.

Skin cells gradually lose the genetic information for producing elastin, so your skin begins to wrinkle. Hair cells gradually lose the genetic information for creating pigment, so they go grey.

Your synovial cells in your joints gradually lose their ability to produce synovial fluid, so your joints ache and you become arthritic.

 And of course, sometimes the DNA errors in the cell replication process are so significant, that healthy cells are transformed into rampant cancer cells.

The point is that this ***did not happen at all*** prior to the fall. Our cells did not wear out and die. But they started to die at the precise moment when we rebelled against God.

 And your cells are dying right now. During the course of this presentation millions of your cells will die. Our bodies are fighting a  losing battle from the day we are born. We begin to die the day we are born.

 And all this is because our rebellion effected the entire universe, from the macro, global level, right down to the micro, cellular and sub-atomic level.

You see, God's "curse" in Genesis 3 was not God losing his temper and punishing us; it was a pronouncement to Adam and Eve of the profound consequences in the physical world that would ***inevitably*** flow from their betrayal. It was God's declaration of the profound brokenness of His beautiful creation, caused by the evil of our rebellion against Him.

 In this sense, there is no such thing as a "***natural***" disaster. There is nothing ***natural*** about them; they are decidedly ***unnatural***. The physical world was never created to behave as it does now. Every instance of sickness and physical calamity is a symptom of a world that is fundamentally broken, - and we broke it!

So that is the ONTOLOGICAL ANTECEDENT of suffering. That is the biblical explanation of its original cause.

 **And I think it's both ignorant and arrogant of mankind to blame God for our world of suffering, when it's us that made it this way, not God!**

But there are other factors at work, contributing to human suffering. If we are going to paint a complete picture of the ongoing causes of suffering, we have to also speak about ...

## **THE CONTEXT OF DEMONIC ACTIVITY**

 We can't discuss the problem of suffering without referring to the book of Job. It is an extraordinary account of God allowing Satan to inflict the most horrendous suffering upon a righteous man, killing his family, destroying all his possessions and devastating his health. The purpose of the suffering was hidden from Job, but it seems to have revolved around God proving that Satan could not destroy the faith of those whom God has sealed.

 It is difficult to determine to what extent the satanic causes of suffering, indicated in the book of Job, are either normative or exceptional. At the very least, however, it is apparent that Satan is, on at least some occasions, able to cause sickness, suffering and even death.

 We shouldn't underestimate the violent and evil nature of Satan's rebellion against God that is being played out in the physical universe. In Ephesians 6:12, Paul writes, ***"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."***

Part of the devil's rebellion manifests itself in what seems to be a determined effort to ruin everything that is good, including destroying the quality of human life. He delights in sickness, violence, addiction, squalor, injustice, abuse, misery and death.

That sickness and suffering are sometimes caused by the devil is beyond dispute.

 In Luke 13, Jesus declared that the woman he had healed of a crippling disease had been ***"crippled by a spirit"*** (Luke 13:11) and he referred to her as the woman ***"whom Satan had kept bound for 18 long years"*** (Luke 13:16).

In Peter's sermon at Cornelius' house he states that  Jesus ***"went around healing all who were under the power of the devil"*** (Acts 10:38).

Scripture does not indicate the normalcy or otherwise of demonically caused suffering, nor does it explain why God allows demons such latitude. The question that we naturally want to ask is,  ***"Why does God let the demons get away with this?"***

I think part of the answer is that God is allowing demonic rebellion to run its course in the same way that he is allowing human rebellion to run its course.

But the other part of the answer is ...

## THE CONTEXT OF GOD'S UNSEEN INTERVENTIONS

Sceptics will often ask,  ***"If God exists, why doesn't he intervene to alleviate our suffering more than he does? Surely a compassionate God would want to rescue His creatures from their suffering? Why doesn't He protect us?"*** There are two parts to this answer.

**Firstly**, God has promised to eventually remove all suffering from the world, when He recreates the universe in its original splendour and perfection.  The prophecy of Revelation states, ***"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away"*** (Rev 21:1).

 The reference to a new “heaven”, is a reference to the Jewish concept of the first and second levels of “heaven” – the realm of the stars and planets. In other words, the Bible prophesies that the entire universe will be recreated in perfection at the end of history.

That is good news! The bad news, however, is that in order for God to remove all suffering from His wounded universe, He will need to remove the cause of that suffering,  by bringing all mankind to judgment and finally ending our rebellion eternally!

So, to those who demand that God ends all suffering, I often respond by saying, ***“You have no idea what you’re asking for! I don’t think you really want Him to do that just yet - because that would mean bringing you to judgment!”***

God can’t remove all suffering without removing the cause of the suffering – and that’s you and me!

The second part in answering the question,  ***“Why doesn’t God protect us more from suffering?”***, is – ***“How do you know He doesn’t?”***

 There is the very real possibility that our world would be infinitely worse than it is, except for the constant restraining hand of God, continually intervening to keep us from sliding into unthinkable chaos.

Who knows how many times God intervenes to avert disaster and protect people from danger, without us even realising? The very fact that you arrived here safely tonight, may well be that God averted a disaster that would otherwise have befallen you. You aren’t aware of it because it didn’t happen!

 Only in eternity will we become aware of how much and how often God has intervened in our lives and in human history to stop things getting even worse. Without God’s restraining hand, our world may well have spiralled into a violent darkness far more chaotic than we can imagine. Those who criticise God for allowing the suffering that He does, are only looking at one side of the equation.

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 There are several other important aspects to the topic of suffering, if we are going to even come close to reconciling the existence of God with the enormous amount of suffering in this world. I can’t hope to do justice to them in an hour long presentation; So what I am going to do is give you a very, very quick summary. And really all I am doing is defining further areas for you to investigate.

## THE REMEDIAL NECESSITY OF SUFFERING

God can use suffering to bring about good purposes in the lives of His people: To remediate them.

 ***1 Peter 1:6-7 says “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater***

**worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed”**

 C. S. Lewis famously stated, **“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.”**

## **THE PROVIDENTIAL NECESSITY OF SUFFERING**

God can use suffering to bring about his wider purposes globally.

 For example: In Galatians, Paul states that his sickness led to him preaching the gospel in parts of Asia that he would not otherwise have visited.

 Galatians 4:13-14 **“As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you, even though my illness was a trial to you”**

## **THE ESCHATOLOGICAL NECESSITY OF SUFFERING**

God can use suffering to bring about his purposes not just in other parts of the world, but in other epochs of time.

 William Lane Craig:

***“Certainly, many evils seem pointless and unnecessary to us – but we are simply not in a position to judge. The brutal murder of an innocent man or a child’s dying of leukemia could send a ripple effect through history so that God’s morally sufficient reason for permitting it might not emerge until centuries later or perhaps in another country...”***

***... Once we contemplate God’s providence over the whole of history, then it becomes evident how hopeless it is for limited observers to speculate on the probability of God having morally sufficient reasons for the evils that we see. We simply are not in a good position to assess such probabilities with confidence.”***

 EG: Paul’s imprisonment led to the writing of the prison epistles which we are reading 2,000 years later.

## **THE TRANSCENDENT NECESSITY OF SUFFERING**

A transcendent, trans-dimensional God will inevitably have inscrutable higher purposes that are completely indiscernible to frail human minds.

 **Isaiah 55:8 says, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”**

## THE CONTEXT OF GOD’S COMFORT AND STRENGTH

God does not abandon us to suffer alone, but gives us his presence, comfort and strength.

 **Psalm 23:4 “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me. Your rod and your staff they comfort me.”**

This directly refutes the accusation of sceptics that God, if he exists, has abandoned us to our suffering.

## THE CONTEXT OF ETERNITY

While we mustn’t diminish the terrible nature of suffering ... the Bible is very clear, compared to the joy of eternal glory, the sufferings of this world are inconsequential.

 **2 Cor 4:16-18 says, “Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day...**

**... For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”**

 I said last week, and I’ll say it again tonight, **we tend to value this temporary mortal existence too highly, and value eternity too little.**

 In 1 Kings 14, Jeroboam, King of Israel, has turned away from God to the worship of idols. So God says to him, through a prophecy given to his wife ...

 **“You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have aroused my anger and turned your back on me.**

<sup>10</sup> **“Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel—slave or free.<sup>[a]</sup> ...**

*... I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone. <sup>11</sup> Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, and the birds will feed on those who die in the country. The Lord has spoken!*

 <sup>12</sup> *“As for you, go back home. When you set foot in your city, your son will die. <sup>13</sup> All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the Lord, the God of Israel, has found anything good.”*

 This seems incredibly unfair on the son, doesn't it? After all, he has apparently found favour with God! He is the only one God ISN'T angry with, and yet God is allowing the son to die! We think to ourselves, How Unfair! But that's because we have everything back to front! We value this life more than we value eternity.

 We think the worst thing that could possibly happen to us is to die, but in God's eyes, for those who are loved by Him, it is the BEST thing that could happen. To be transported to a state of perfection. Perfect joy, perfect peace, perfect health.

 We need to view even death itself, through the context of eternity.

## THE CONTEXT OF THE CROSS

The cross is the ultimate context for our understanding of suffering.

To those who demand of God, ***“Where were you when I was suffering?”***, God replies, ***“I was dying for you on the cross.”***

There can be no greater sign of God's great love for mankind than that the Creator of the universe should step down from His eternal transcendence and submit himself to a torturous physical death in order to save us from our sins.

 John Stott reflects on the significance of the cross :

*“I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness.*

 *That is the God for me! He laid aside His immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of His. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the*

*cross that symbolizes divine suffering. ... The cross of Christ ... is God's only self-justification in such a world as ours."*<sup>3</sup>



Jesus' death on the cross has profound relevance for our understanding of this topic of God and suffering. It answers the accusations of Stephen Fry and others who claim that if God exists at all, he is evil and malicious.

-  It shows us how deeply God cares for us
-  It provides a solution to our sin, which is causing all the suffering – forgiveness and the promise of eternal life without suffering
-  It answers the philosophical question – surely God could have created a world without the possibility of suffering? The answer is – apparently not! Surely, if there was any other world that God could have created, that didn't involve human suffering and the need for Christ to go to the cross, God would have done so. But the extreme action of God actually dying on the cross for us, tells us that there was NO alternative to this world.



We may never fully understand every aspect of this complex issue, but by looking at the cross, we can be absolutely assured of God's profound love for us, and we can trust that His purposes and plans for us are good.



.....  
A CONCLUDING THOUGHT: ***God's No.1 priority is NOT to give us a happy comfortable life ...***



***...It's to save as many people as possible and bring them safely into His eternal kingdom.*** And he will do whatever it takes for that to happen.



My mother's death.



Romans 8:28 ***"And we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."*** God is good, and he can bring great good out of even the worst of circumstances.

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<sup>3</sup> John Stott, op cit, pp.335-336