

QUESTIONS YOU HAVE

BUT ARE AFRAID TO ASK

Questions You Have (But Are Afraid to Ask)

How can a good God allow suffering?

Genesis 50:20

1. If God is not able to prevent evil, then God is not all powerful.
2. If God is not willing to prevent evil, then God is not perfectly good.
3. If God were willing and able to prevent evil, there would be no evil.

BUT

4. There is evil.
5. Therefore, God (an all powerful and perfectly good being) does not exist

Genesis 50:20

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

How can a good God allow suffering?

What is evil?

- “As for you, you meant evil against me” (Genesis 50:20).
- “The truth is that evil is not a real thing at all, like God. It is simply good spoiled. That is why I say there can be good without evil, but no evil without good” (C. S. Lewis, “Letter to Arthur Greeves”).

- Types of Evil
 - Natural Evil – the product of the world being the way it is, comprised of events we cannot control nor did we cause (e.g., natural disasters, disease).
 - Moral Evil – the product of human action or the failure of humans to act in particular situations
- Where did evil come from?
 - Evil came from freedom
 - To be created in the image of God entails free will.
 - “And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (Genesis 1:16–17).
 - Humanity chose evil.
 - “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Genesis 3:6).

Who is God?

- “but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20b)
- God transforms evil for good because he can.
- God is omnipotent and therefore sovereign.
 - “God’s plan works *through* our choices, not around or despite them. Our choices have consequences, and we are never forced by God to do anything—we always do what we most want to do. God works out his will perfectly through our willing actions. . . . Suffering then is not outside God’s plan but a part of it” (Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, 140–141).
- God is not the source of evil, but he can use evil.
 - “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world” (C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 91).
- God transforms evil for good because he is good.
- Suffering shapes us
 - “In the gym, you *feel* you are getting weaker, and you may leave barely able to walk up the steps. And yet the experience of weakness, if you coach has been skillful, will lead to increasing strength” (Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*, 194–95).

What is God’s relationship to evil?

- “to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20c).
- God suffers evil for our good.
 - God not only has knowledge of evil, he has experienced evil
 - God defeats evil through the cross of Christ

- “14 Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery” (Hebrews 2:14–15).

But we really don't want answers; we want action.

- “Evil is not simply a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be endured” (Flannery O'Connor, *The Catholic Novelist In The Protestant South*).

God allows suffering because he loves us; God defeats evil because he loves us.