

## Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People? The Problem of Evil, Part II

*In 1999, George Barna, the public-opinion pollster, conducted a national survey in which he asked a scientifically selected cross-section of adults: "If you could ask God only one question and you knew he would give you an answer, what would you ask?" The Top response, offered by 17 percent of those who responded, was: "Why is there pain and suffering in the world?"*<sup>1</sup>

*"There is only one question which really matters: why do bad things happen to good people? All other theological conversation is intellectually diverting; somewhat like doing the crossword puzzle in the Sunday paper and feeling very satisfied when you have made the words fit; but ultimately without the capacity to reach people where they really are."*  
— Rabbi Harold Kushner<sup>2</sup>

### A POINT OF REVIEW FROM WEEK 1:

#### I. The Christian Definition of Evil.

Evil is a *lack* or *twisting* of the good. It is not a "thing" which can exist as an independent entity, on its own, apart from good.

Augustine (354-430 A.D.) argued,

*"Good can exist without [evils]. . . Evils, on the other hand, cannot exist without goods, because the natures in which evils exist are good insofar as they are natures. Moreover, evil is removed not by removing any nature or part of a nature that evil brings to a thing, but by healing and correcting what evil has damaged and deformed."* — St. Augustine of Hippo<sup>3</sup>

#### II. Some Object:

- A. If God were all-powerful, he *could* abolish evil.
- B. If God were all-good, he *would* abolish evil.
- C. Evil exists.
- D. Therefore, God is either not all-powerful, not all-good, or does not exist.

#### III. A Problem With The Objection

- A. To say there is such a thing as evil, presupposes there is such a thing as \_\_\_\_\_.
- B. To say there is such a thing as good, presupposes there is a \_\_\_\_\_ law, on the basis of which to differentiate between good and evil.
- C. To say there is such a thing as a moral law, presupposes there is a moral law \_\_\_\_\_.

Conclusion: This objection to God presupposes the existence of \_\_\_\_\_. The framing of the question is as much a problem for the one asking the question as it is for the one attempting to answer it.

<sup>1</sup> The OmniPoll, conducted by Barna Research Group, Ltd, January, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People* (New York: Avon Books, 1981), 6.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *Political Writings*, translated by Michael W. Tkacz, Douglas Kries (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing), 101.

IV. Historical Christian Explanations For The Existence Of Evil

A. Evil is a necessary possibility for the existence of human \_\_\_\_\_. (free-will model)

OBJECTION: Couldn't God Have Created A Different Kind of World?  
(The best of all possible worlds).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Q: Wouldn't it have been better for God to have acted upon #1-3, rather than #4?

A: C. S. Lewis points out that the minute you use the word "better," you're invoking a \_\_\_\_\_, by which to measure what would have been morally good or superior.

B. Evil serves the purpose of \_\_\_\_\_ building. (soul-building model)

OBJECTION: Is this fair? Couldn't God just make us all like Jesus?

C. The full purpose of all evils is presently a \_\_\_\_\_ that will not be made clear until eternity.

OBJECTION: This is a post-dated check, for which there is no reason to believe.

D. The problem of evil is lessened in light that \_\_\_\_\_ has suffered because of sin and still suffers with \_\_\_\_\_. We must see suffering in light of the \_\_\_\_\_.

# How To Minister To Those Who Are Suffering

## I. When We Encounter One Who Is Suffering, We Must First Discern The Root Cause.

1. Is their questioning an \_\_\_\_\_ barrier to faith in God?
2. Is their questioning the \_\_\_\_\_ from an experience of wrestling with suffering?

## II. How To Minister To Those Who Are Suffering.

1. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ the suffering person.
2. Don't \_\_\_\_\_ the issue.
3. Don't say you \_\_\_\_\_ how they feel if you don't, and don't feel compelled to \_\_\_\_\_ their story.
4. Don't tell them to keep control of their \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Don't quote optimistic \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Don't feel like you have to say \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Don't feel like you have to \_\_\_\_\_ all their questions or \_\_\_\_\_ their theology if they are angry with God.

## III. What To Do

1. \_\_\_\_\_ patiently.
2. Be \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Be \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Be \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ for them.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ from suffering.

Hymn writer, Annie Johnston Flint<sup>4</sup> penned these words:

*"He giveth more grace when the burdens grow greater. He sendeth more strength when the labors increase. To added affliction he addeth his mercy. To multiplied trials his multiplied peace. When we have exhausted our store of endurance, when our strength has failed ere the day is half done, when we reach the end of our horded resources, our Father's full giving has only begun. His love has no limit, his grace has no measure, his power has no boundaries known unto men. But out of his infinite riches in Jesus, he giveth, and giveth, and giveth again."*

**CONCLUSION:** The reality of evil points us to the existence of God and *His* answer to the problem of evil on the cross.

## RESOURCES:

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*.

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Grief Observed*.

James Dobson, *When God Doesn't Make Sense* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers Inc, 1993).

Joni Eareckson Tada, *When God Weeps* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997).

Lee Strobel, *The Case For Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 25-55.

Peter Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1986).

Philip Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See Flint's Biography, *The Making of the Beautiful*.