

## **Why Does God Allow Evil and Suffering?**

On 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2008, 10 heavily armed gunmen caused an unspeakable amount of grief and terror in the city of Mumbai. They attacked 12 different places, the most tragic being the attack on the TajMahal Hotel. It left 166 people dead and more than 300 injured. There are so many tragic stories, so much pain. “Why? Why did God allow this?”

If you ask me point-blank, “Why exactly did God allow the gunmen to spray the Taj Hotel with gunfire?” the only answer I can honestly give consists of four words – “I do not know.”

I cannot stand in the shoes of God and give a complete answer to that question. I don’t have God’s mind. I don’t see with God’s eyes. First Corinthians 13:12 says, “Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as God now knows me completely.” But for us, let’s focus on the big, overarching issue of why God generally allows suffering in our lives – your life and mine. Even though we can’t understand everything about it, we *can* understand *some* things.

Let us consider these seven points:

**1. God is not the creator of evil and suffering:** “Why didn’t God merely create a world where tragedy and suffering didn’t exist?” The answer is: He did! Genesis 1:31 says: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” But if God is not the author of tragedy or evil or death, where did they come from? When God decided to create human beings, he wanted us to experience love. But to give us the ability to love, God had to give us free will to decide whether to love or not to love. Why? Because love always involves a choice. So in order for us to experience love, God bestowed on us free will. But unfortunately, we humans have abused our free will by rejecting God and walking away from Him. And that has resulted in the introduction of two kinds of evil into the world: *moral evil* and *natural evil*. Moral evil is the immorality and pain and suffering and tragedy that come because we choose to be selfish, arrogant, uncaring, hateful and abusive. Romans 3:23 says “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” So much of the world’s suffering results from the sinful action or inaction of us and others. For example, people look at a famine and wonder where God is, but the world produces enough food for each person to have 3,000 calories a day. It’s our own irresponsibility and self-centeredness that prevents people from getting fed. The second kind of evil is called natural evil. These are things like wildfires, earthquakes, tornadoes and hurricanes that cause suffering for people. But these, too, are the indirect result of sin being allowed into the world. Nature began to revolt. The earth was cursed. Pain and death became part of the human experience.” The Bible says it’s because of sin that nature was corrupted and “thorns and thistles” entered the world. Romans 8:22 says, “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” In other words, nature longs for redemption to come and for things to be set right. That’s the source of disorder and chaos.

**2. Though suffering isn’t good, God can use it to accomplish good:** He does this by fulfilling His promise in 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.” Notice

that the verse doesn't say we all will see immediately or even in this life how God has caused good to emerge from a bad circumstance. Remember, we only see things dimly in this world. And notice that God doesn't make this promise to everyone. He makes the solemn pledge that he will take the bad circumstances that befall us and cause good to emerge if we're committed to following Him. The Old Testament gives us a great example in the story of Joseph, who went through terrible suffering, being sold into slavery by his brothers, unfairly accused of a crime and falsely imprisoned. Finally, after many years, he was put in a role of great authority where he could save the lives of his family and many others. This is what he said to his brothers in Genesis 50:20: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives." And if you're committed to God, He promises that He can and will take whatever pain you're experiencing and draw something good from it.

**3. The day is coming when suffering will cease and God will judge evil:** A lot of times you'll hear people say: "If God has the power to eradicate evil and suffering, then why doesn't He do it?" And the answer is that because He hasn't done it yet doesn't mean He won't do it. The Bible says that the story of this world isn't over yet. It says the day will come when sickness and pain will be eradicated and people will be held accountable for the evil they've committed. Justice will be served in a perfect way. That day will come, but not yet.

**4. Our suffering will pale in comparison to what God has in store for his followers:** I certainly don't want to minimize pain and suffering, but it helps if we take a long-term perspective. Look at this verse, and remember they were written by the apostle Paul, who suffered through beatings and stoning and shipwrecks and imprisonments and rejection and hunger and thirst and homelessness and far more pain that most of us will ever have to endure. These are his words in II Cor 4:17: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all." It's like the story that British church leader Galvin Reid tells about meeting a young man who had fallen down a flight of stairs as a baby and shattered his back. He had been in and out of hospitals his whole life — and yet he made the astounding comment that he thinks God is fair. Reid asked him, "How old are you?" The boy said, "Seventeen." Reid asked, "How many years have you spent in hospitals?" The boy said, "Thirteen years." The pastor said with astonishment, "And you think that is fair?" And the boy replied: "*Well, God has all eternity to make it up to me.*" I Cor 2:9 says "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him." That's absolutely amazing, isn't it?

**5. We decide whether to turn bitter or turn to God for peace and courage:** There are many examples of how the same suffering that causes one person to turn bitter, to reject God, to become hard and angry and sullen, can cause another person to turn to God, to become more gentle and more loving and more tender, willing to reach out to compassionately help other people who are in pain. We make the choice to either run away from God or to run to Him. But what happens if we run to Him? He offers us the two very things we need when we're hurting: peace to deal with our present and courage to deal with our future. How? Because he has conquered the world! Through His own suffering and death, He has deprived this world of its ultimate power over you. Suffering doesn't have the last word anymore. Death doesn't have the last word anymore. God has the last word!

**6. Does God care?:** Maybe the question that bothers us the most is whether God cares? I think that the best way to answer this question is to look at Jesus. Did Jesus care? Just read the Gospels and you know that the answer is obvious. Of course Jesus cared! He spent most of the time healing the spiritually and physically sick. Like Philip Yancey says,

"Because of Jesus, we have the assurance that whatever disturbs us disturbs Gods more. Whatever grief we feel, God feels more. And whatever we long for, God longs for more." With this, we can understand God's character; maybe we just don't understand his ways.

**7. God's answer to suffering:** God's ultimate answer to suffering isn't an explanation; it's the incarnation. Suffering is a personal problem; it demands a personal response. And God isn't some distant, detached, and disinterested deity; He entered into our world and personally experienced our pain. *Are you broken?* He was broken. *Are you despised?* He was despised and rejected by men. *Do you cry out that you can't take any more?* He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. *Did someone betray you?* He was sold out. *Are your most tender relationships broken?* He loved and He was rejected.

Now, let's go back to the Mumbai terror attacks. For all the things it leaves us confused about, one of the truths it clearly illustrates is that life is so fragile and short. These people were in a Hotel! They had no clue that this might be their last moments in this world. In this sin scarred world, we never know when death will come knocking. Often, we don't get any warning when a heart attack strikes, or when an airplane crashes. And so the question I'm compelled to ask you is this – "Are you ready?" First John 5:13 says "These things I've written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God in order that you may know that you have eternal life." How can we know for sure that we will go to Heaven? Salvation comes from knowing Christ personally and receiving His provision for your sin and your future. It comes from making him your Saviour, by asking Him to forgive your every sin, and by asking Him to lead your life. But it doesn't happen automatically. It doesn't come by attending a great church, or being baptized or taking communion, or hanging out with a bunch of Christians. It comes from deciding in your heart that you want to turn from your sin, to stop trusting in your own resources, and to accept the forgiveness and eternal life that Jesus purchased on the cross and is offering you as a free gift. That is how you gain God's peace and confidence.

*(Adapted from Lee Strobel's Sermon)*