

# The Problem of Evil and Suffering: A Biblical Perspective on Pain, Trials, and Christian Hope

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[0:00] I've got an interesting topic tonight, the problem of evil. the problem of evil or suffering, understanding pain and trials biblically.

! It's an old chestnut in a difficult or unresolvable question or problem. I think biblically it is resolvable as far as we can get an understanding about it.

So that's my object tonight. You can see in the heading there it says, A Practical Theology of Theodicy and Christian Hope. So you've got a new word to learn tonight. I've only just learnt it. Theodicy. And I had to look up what that means. So here's the definition. Theodicy, it's a way of defending or explaining God's goodness and power in the face of all the evil, pain and suffering that we see in the world.

Theodicy, the reasons or explanations that help people trust God even when life is hard. So that's the objective tonight. So it's a bit of a practical theology topic.

[1:02] And in essential terms, why God allows evil. Now, we'll do our best to put some concepts forward about that.

Because it's something that you often get. I know when we've been door knocking, often you get different retorts that people come up with. And it's something some people often might use as an objection as to why they're not a Christian.

Well, there's all the evil in the world. How could there be a God? A good God. So it's a practical kind of topic and something that we ought to have an answer for, or try to at least have some kind of framework to talk to.

It's a biblical and theological framework to understand the existence of evil and suffering. And personal trials, look, we've all got our burdens of one kind or another, troubles. How can we help people who are going through that, going through pain and giving them some kind of Christian hope?

So it's trying to answer the big question, if you like. The big question, why does suffering exist? If God is so loving and powerful, why do bad things happen?

[2:08] And it's this concept, theodicy, which is based on two Greek words. Theos, God, and then deki, justice.

In other words, it's understanding God's justice. He's a just God, even though life is hard sometimes. Understanding the justice of God, especially when life seems unfair or painful. Defining the problem of evil. What is the problem of evil? That's the kind of terminology for this kind of topic. Evil. It challenges God's omnipotence.

God is all-powerful. His omniscience is all-knowing. And there's another technical word there. Omnibenevolence.

In other words, God is perfectly good. He's all-powerful, all-knowing. And he's omnibenevolent, which means he's all good.

[3:11] His goodness. And so this is something that people would say, well, if there's a good God, why is all this evil? Basically. And some have called it a key objection to faith.

Even called it the rock of atheism. The rock of atheism. Something that they go to to justify why they don't believe. Why they deny God. So it's got a lot of philosophical and emotional weight.

And, of course, we all face it. We all face life's troubles in one way or another. And it's the primary reason people reject the existence of God. So it's really good to have it in your head. Hey, how can I answer that then?

This objection that people come up with. Why does it matter? The survey's been done. And this is a universal question. People have been asked, what would you ask God if you had the opportunity

to?

What question would you ask God? And the top question people would ask of God is, why is there pain and suffering? And it's not just an academic question. It touches the heart of everyone, doesn't it?

[4:12] Human experience. Natural disasters. Like you say, recent tragic events. But there's tragic events every day, every week, all the time. And natural disasters, disease, personal tragedies.

You and me as believers too. We get our faith tested as well. And the problem of evil is this significant objection to God's existence. They argue if there's the presence of evil, then God is unlikely to exist.

However, the problem of evil does not disprove the Christian God. We can unpack that and hopefully give you some arguments and reasons why you can say, hey, that doesn't disprove the existence of God.

In fact, evil and God can coexist. They're not necessarily contrary, the idea. And atheists like Dawkins make contradictions, really.

When they claim that no justice exists, yet they call God unjust. So they would dare to say, God is mean and unfair.

[5:13] He's unjust. When really they don't actually believe in the biblical concept of justice, of a law. And a lawgiver, which the Bible talks about.

And so people like Richard Dawkins, they put this view forward that the universe is governed by blind physical forces and genetic replication.

The universe is devoid of purpose, design or moral categories like good and evil. Dawkins describes the universe as one of blind, pitiless indifference.

Indifference. Where DNA neither knows nor cares what's going on. And humans merely dance to its music.

Whatever the DNA does, it's like we just go with it. This worldview suggests that events like suffering or injustice are random, without reason, rhyme or justice.

[6:14] But this perspective faces a significant contradiction. Dawkins and other naturalists, atheists, they often label events like atrocities or suffering as evil.

Yet, if good and evil do not exist as objective categories, which what atheists or naturalists would say, then such judgments are incoherent. For example, if perpetrators of violence like school shooters, naturalism's logical consequences, the abolition of moral categories, so they cannot condemn evil meaningfully.

Whereas we, as Bible believers, we know what evil is. God says what's evil. God says what's good. So there's this problem for the atheist, this big problem for the atheist worldview of subjective morality.

They really can't define morality because there is no final authority for them. So they cannot condemn evil. And yet, it's universal for mankind that there is a right and wrong.

There is justice and injustice. There are moral categories that are real, even for atheists. So this is the dilemma for the atheist. And a philosopher, Charles Taylor, argues of this concept of rejecting the divine lawgiver, people will struggle then to find meaningful concepts of moral right and wrong.

[7:37] So even the concept of evil, atheism can't really define it or make it clear. Whereas we, we've got a moral framework. We know what evil is. God tells us what it is.

And these sceptics, they've got like a double standard too. So they would argue, well, God's failing to intervene directly about evil.

So that proves that he's absent or indifferent. But when God has intervened decisively, so for example, the flood, various judgments, critics label him a moral monster.

So this creates a heads-eye-win, tails-you-lose scenario. So they can't win, basically, where God is criticised whether he acts or he refrains from acting.

They blame God or criticise God whether he does something or does not do something. But we know that God's strategy is not to eliminate evil abruptly, but he will address it through the rescue plan of redemption, through Christ's incarnation, death and resurrection.

[8:43] So as Bible believers, we've got the answer that God does intervene. He did intervene. And ultimately, everything will be sorted. This question, this dilemma of evil, this problem of evil, it's not just a Christian problem.

It's a universal question. And so there's different worldviews that look at this matter, and every worldview looks at suffering a bit differently.

So the secularism view, suffering is meaningless. New Age says suffering is an illusion. Hinduism says suffering is due to karma. You just endure suffering.

It's going to improve your future life. Buddhism says that suffering is an illusion caused by attachment, and that enlightenment will eliminate perceived suffering. Islam says suffering is God's will.

Just submit to it without questioning. Atheism says suffering is random, no purpose or justice. As Richard Dawkins says, the universe is blind, pitiless, indifferent, and they see suffering as a natural thing for evolution.

[9:51] In contrast to all of that, all of those non-Christian worldviews, non-biblical worldviews, we see the Christian worldview is quite unique. It has a unique response to the question of suffering.

And it tells that suffering is real, often unfair, granted, but it's meaningful. In the Word of God, it talks about suffering as a reality, about grief.

It's a real thing. And yet it assures God's presence. And so you see the examples of suffering. Bible characters suffered. Our Lord suffered.

And it shows God's empathy too. It talks about how God holds all of our tears in a bottle. So it rejects the karma views of just go with it. Or as the book of Job, it rejects all of that.

That assumes that suffering is always deserved. You know, some of Job's comforters said, well, you got what you deserved. But no, that's not how it works, as we'll talk about after. The next concept to consider is that God is omnipotent.

[11:05] And so atheists would say, well, if God is all-powerful, why doesn't he do something? But there's limits to omnipotence, so God's power. God cannot logically do impossible things.

For example, God can't make a square a circle. God can't make sin. An atheist's assumption of unlimited omnipotence is flawed.

So for whatever reason, God might choose not to exercise his power. Atheists assume God has no good reason for allowing evil, is the next thought, which is this concept of a hidden premise.

That atheists assume God has no reason for allowing evil. But we as humans, we lack omniscience. We don't know everything, like God does. We can't judge fully about all the possible purposes that God might have for something happening.

We're not God. So who are we to make that judgment call? And actually, you could put that evil is an evidence for God. Surprisingly, because without God, there's no objective category of evil.

[12:10] Who says what evil is? God tells us what evil is. It's actually an evidence for God. And you see that in Ecclesiastes and Romans 2, that God's given everyone this consciousness of morality and helps all of us to recognize evil.

This concept of recognizing evil, it's in all of us, in all of mankind. It's actually an evidence that there is a God, that we see. We've got the sense that something is wrong, something is evil.

Moral consciousness suggests that there must be a divine standard. So God tells us what evil is.

God's the lawgiver. That's the law of the Lord. It's his word, isn't it?

The Ten Commandments. We know what evil is. He defines it for us. Next one. Just unpacking this thought further about what is evil. The question, what is evil?

And you see on this slide here, you've got two aspects. So you've got the moral evil, which is basically bad actions committed by humans.

[13:11] Moral evil. It's human choices and the actions of men and women as free agents. So whether it be various crimes, injustice, theft, abuse, that's human choices.

And it comes from human sin or angelic sin too, Satan's sin, that they rebelled, they defied, they objected and they rebelled against God.

So it's sin and rebellion, so the moral evil. Then on the other side, you see another kind of evil is called natural evil. So we see that in disasters, disease, natural processes, events beyond human control, earthquakes, floods, genetic defects.

That's called natural evil. And you could understand that it's following on from the fact that we're living in a fallen planet. We're living in a fallen world.

Creation fell in Genesis. Romans 8 talks about it there too. So evil is not a substance, but it's a privation or corruption of good.

[14:25] Like darkness is the absence of light. Putting it in a basic statement, there's this logical problem. How they put it, as we talked about, if God is omnipotent, he's all-powerful, he can prevent evil.

If he is omnibenevolent, he's all-good. He wants to prevent evil. Yet evil exists. How can such a good God exist?

So another one put it here. Is God willing but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able but not willing? Then he is malevolent. So he's not good.

And so this is the logical problem, they call it, of evil. It uses terminology, good and evil, when you think about it, that only makes sense if God exists. Because good and evil, God says what that is, as we said.

That's really called the logical problem. Then there's this evidential problem where because we see so much suffering, it makes God's existence seem improbable or difficult to believe.

[15:32] And then there's the existential. In other words, at the core of every human existence, we all face it. Every individual, we all have suffering or we have issues with our identity, with the meaning of life, with death.

It's that personal aspect of it. Why? Why me? When I've got something, you know, some sickness or hardship, some trial, some trouble.

Where is God in my pain? So it boils right down to that emotional, that level of the feelings of feeling abandoned, angry, full of doubt. And so there's this intellectual problem of evil and even the emotional side of it too.

Intellectually, how do we rationally explain that God and evil can coexist? That's the intellectual, then emotional. How do we address this emotional dislike of a God who permits suffering?

We might actually think, oh God, you're being unfair to me. So you have that, both sides of it, intellectual and emotional. We've got to go back to the scriptures. We've got to go back to the Bible.

[16:41] What does the Bible tell us about this issue? And the scripture is very honest with us. It's a lot of raw honesty about this issue where the Bible acknowledges this tension.

It doesn't offer simplistic answers. But there's some concepts, there's some principles we can take heart in. So, for example, Genesis 18, 25, it says, Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

There's this concept. Whatever's going on, he is the ultimate one. He says what's right and wrong. He's the ultimate arbiter, the ultimate judge. The fairest and the most just judge.

God's justice and fairness is absolute. Even though we've got human questions. So, shall not the judge of all the earth do right? That's a good scripture to have in mind.

That God is always just. Even though we don't always understand it. Habakkuk 1 verse 2, Habakkuk cries, Oh Lord, how long shall I cry? And thou wilt not hear.

[17:40] There's instances of that in the scriptures too, where it's people being very raw and human and just venting and crying out, lamenting.

Why is this happening? They're honest with their laments, with their crying unto God. And then we see even our Lord in Matthew 27, 46, his cry, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Even the Son of God experienced suffering, the weight of it. The Word of God provides different insights, but the full why can be somewhat of a mystery for us.

This side of eternity. We need to just anchor our faith in God's character and know that Christ's work works for us. Trusting him even when things are unknown.

That even Christ bore that suffering in our stead on the cross. Let's look at some other Bible foundations about evil and suffering.

[18:44] And it gives us this whole narrative about telling us when evil actually began, as we know, in the garden. It talks us through the creation, the fall, redemption, and ultimate restoration.

So there's this whole narrative about managing evil and how we're going to cope with it, the reality of it. And through it all, God's sovereignty, that he's overshadowing, and his goodness.

We see there, evil was not part of the original creation. What happened? God created all things, and he said it was very good.

So you see there, on the left side, you see, very good. The initial creation, everything was perfect. No death, decay, no disorder. And then Genesis 3, evil came in through mankind's rebellion, Adam and Eve's disobedience, fractured relationships with God, others, themselves, and creation. And Romans 5 tells us, by one man, sin entered into the world, and death by sin. So death passed upon all men for that all have sinned. And then Romans 8 talks about how creation now groans under this curse, the curse of the fall.

[20:05] And naturally then we have disasters, decay, some of those things that we've got to cope with. So evil was not part of the original creation. How did it begin?

We see that it was through Satan's rebellion that we notice there different passages like Isaiah 14, 12. Talks about how there was an angelic rebellion, that Satan fell.

From heaven. From heaven. And with numbers of angels fell. And Satan tempts humanity now. So there was Satan's rebellion. Then there's human sin. Genesis 3, where Adam and Eve had free will, but they misused it.

And now we're all copying it. The suffering, misery, death. And yet, even in Genesis 3, God foretold that the serpent, he would crush at the cross.

So evil, it's an intrusion into God's creation. God, nevertheless, still has that overarching control. He permits evil, but he's not the author of it.

[21:18] And you see the various notes there. For example, how in Joseph's case, the brothers meant evil, but God meant it for good. So God overshadowed and controlled all of those goings-on for his good.

The crucifixion, when you think about human history, that is the greatest evil that man has ever committed. To kill Christ, the sinless one on the cross, was the greatest evil.

It was part of God's redemption plan. So God's sovereignty ordered it and planned it so. And we see as it reads through there. Next one, the concept of man's free will plays a role.

We've got freedom. We're free agents. We were created that way in the garden. And there's the call through the word, for example, Deuteronomy 30 verse 19, choose life.

We've got a choice. Choose death or choose life. And evil exists because God's granted us, every one of us, to be free agents, to choose, to be free, to love authentically.

[22:30] It requires the freedom to choose evil. So God gave Adam the choice right back in the beginning. Make a choice. He didn't make him a robot saying, love me, I'm going to program you to love me.

But no, he gave Adam the choice. And sadly, Adam exercised his free will to rebel. We see free will even exists in heaven.

Belled, there was that free will that he exercised to. And our freedom includes the ability to choose evil. It's everyone's choice. And free will is necessary for love and choice.

An author, C.S. Lewis, says, two kinds of people in the world. Those who say, thy will be done, to God. And those to whom God says, thy will be done.

In other words, if you want to reject me, your will be done. It's that simple, isn't it? And so genuine love rings. And ultimately, we can choose hell.

[23:34] If we realise the horrors of rebellion, hopefully we'll wake up and not choose hell. Next point is, why do we suffer? Consider suffering's causes, the causes of suffering and the consequences of it.

So suffering can come from personal sin, other sin, or just the fact that we're living on a fallen planet. And it's not always personal sin. So we can't always define it, why the suffering.

We know, for example, in Job's case, his trials were not a punishment. Some of Job's friends were kind of saying to him, oh, you're getting this problem because you're not righteous, you're in sin.

It's your fault, Job, that you're getting this suffering. But we're not to use that kind of angle. We can't have this simplistic idea of blaming. Oh, it's their fault they're suffering, or it's my fault that I'm suffering.

For example, with the blind man in John 9, his suffering wasn't due to his sin or his parents' sin. Christ told the people that. But sin has got a ripple effect.

[24:43] When we see sin, it can affect families, individuals. And we see Adam, it's affected the whole of creation. There's that ripple effect. And there's this spiritual warfare aspect too about suffering.

Yet we've got God's armour to wear. And suffering, also it's got a universality. It's the whole world. Every human is faced with it.

The Bible portrays evil. It's this distortion of God's good creation. Man's misuse of his freedom. Yet still under God's sovereign control. There's lots of complex factors here.

And different causes for suffering. So it's hard to be exactly precise about why suffering's happening in every case or situation. But next section we look at these, to use that kind of technical term, these theodicies.

This idea that we can perhaps better understand God's ways. And we can try to understand God's character and his plan.

[25:51] This term theodicy is a way to defend that God is working. A way to defend God's righteousness when evil is happening.

So we'll unpack here. There's some various ones here. There's a number of different ways. So in other words, there are kind of different facets we could look at. Different ways we could look at evil and think, well, it could be in that aspect or in this context.

Or this is what's going on. So the first one is, we see that there, that this concept, this idea, it's in your notes, it's 3A, that evil is the absence of good.

So for example, darkness is the absence of light. When God created everything, it was good. Evil came because of free will. Basically, they lost what they had.

They lost the wonder of the lovely garden of Eden. They basically chose to lose it. So God allows free will to be misused.

[26:59] And so we can lose that good that we have. So this concept of evil as the absence of good, it's like darkness isn't a thing by itself.

It's what you get when there is no light. So when people don't have God, then there's evil. It's like this evil happens when good is missing. It's what people get when they turn away from God's goodness.

That's the concept of it. So there's different approaches to explain about evil and suffering in the world. So the next one, as the slide puts it, that there is a certain benefit to suffering.

So for example, suffering builds virtues. And trials refine our faith like fire. For example, 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 6 through 7 talks about the trial of your faith.

It's going to produce this gold quality faith. And then like the picture of the diamond kind of illustrates it. You think of a diamond. It emerges out of the ground.

[27:59] It's been created by intense heat and pressure. And then that uncut diamond has got to be shaped and polished to reveal the diamond within.

So that diamond goes through a whole lot of pressure, heat, then polishing, cutting, shaping. It makes the diamond.

And you could see it as suffering. Sometimes the suffering is the making of us. There's a benefit that we get from it. Next slide. This idea of free will.

So you see the picture there kind of illustrates it that a control freak, a puppeteer, a puppet master. He allows us free will. So the picture is in an illustrative way that he cuts the strings.

He gives us the opportunity, the free will, to choose evil or to choose the right. He doesn't want a world of automaton. So in other words, a world of robots.

[29:01] He gives us that free will. And that genuine freedom, it's necessary for us to love. He doesn't say, love me or I'm going to make you love me. No.

Hopefully we'll come to that natural willingness to love him. He doesn't force you to love him. He doesn't force you to be saved. He invites you. He offers it.

He extends it to you, that offer. And so we've got that sense where we're a world with free creatures who sometimes choose evil.

But that is better than having a world where we don't have a choice. It's God's blessing for us to have the capacity to have a choice, to have freedom.

There's a value for us there. Okay. Next concept. This next concept is the concept of evil for greater good. That God allows evil for greater purposes.

[29:59] So as he went through, that God brought him out on the other end of it and there was good out of Joseph's life. And it's like in Romans 8, 28. All things work together for good, for those who love God, for those who are caught according to his purpose.

So there's this concept that evil has a greater good. So for example, the picture there of a tapestry. Think of a beautiful tapestry. It needs the darker threads to make it beautiful.

It's the same with our lives, isn't it? That the darker threads will make it beautiful. Now sometimes we look at a tapestry from the underside. It's all this messy tangle where it's all been, all the various colours have been threaded through.

And it's all a bit of a tangled mess from the underside. But on the top, it's a beautiful tapestry. It's got that concept, yeah. God's doing something. It's for our greater good, ultimately.

When we're in the tangled bits underneath, we don't always understand the mess that our life might be in at times. But there's a greater good concept. It's often hidden.

[31:05] And that can make it hard for us to accept it and understand it. And you've got a couple more concepts there. I don't have slides for those, so I might just skip those. It's Christ's suffering.

When you think about this concept of evil, again, like I said before, the worst evil was what we did to Christ. Sometimes I use this when I'm witnessing to people, really, when you think when they say, well, there's so much suffering.

Well, the worst suffering is what Christ suffered for you and for me. It really puts it down to it, doesn't it? That God's answer to suffering is personal.

He intervened at the cross. And through Christ's crucifixion, we see that God enters into human pain, into human suffering at the cross.

Philippians 2, 5 through 8. We think of Christ's empathy, his very suffering at the cross. God's not removed and remote. He participated in the suffering of the cross for you and me.

[32:08] It says it all, doesn't it? Think of the pain of Calvary. Now, all of those kind of concepts we've gone through, no single one fully resolves the problem.

They're all kind of different insights and facets we can use. Maybe we can see a bit here, a bit there, that we can trust in God's character and trust in his work. And there's a future hope that ultimately we'll understand.

We'll understand by and by. For the moment, there's still some mysteries and complexities. And we might still question, as even Job didn't get all of his questions fully answered about his own suffering.

So that's just how it is sometimes. Moving on, how do we understand pain and trials biblically?

There's various scriptures that give us different perspectives about how God relates to suffering. Believers are called to interpret trials through this lens of faith and dependence on God. Faith will help us to hang on to God through such a time of suffering.

[33:11] The first concept there is that suffering is as a discipline and correction. Hebrews 12 talks about God chastens the ones that he loves, his sons.

He disciplines his children out of love, not punishment, not to be mean and nasty, but because he loves them. And so there's an aspect. Sometimes we do have some tests and trials.

It's part of God's testing. It's part of his discipline to produce something in us, holiness and peace. It tells us in Proverbs 13, 15 that the way of transgressors is hard, but discipline aims at restoration.

God's not hard on us in that way, but in more of a discipline. He's correcting us and guiding us, training us. You see the concept there as like a gardener would prune a tree for growth.

Discipline can be like he's snipping off something so that that tree is going to flourish. That is a benefit. There's a discipline that's going to produce something good. So the next one is suffering as

a refinement.

[34:18] Suffering as testing and refinement. So trials produce steadfastness and maturity. We know in James it says, Count it all joy when you fall into diverse temptations. So different kinds of trials.

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith is going to produce power, the refining. Job 23 says, When he's tried me, I shall come forth as gold. We see that picture of refinement.

And it produces character and hope. As you see there, Romans 5, 3 to 5, 2 Corinthians 1, 8 through 9. Here's how someone put it.

Out of the presses of pain cometh the soul's best wine. And the eyes that have shed no rain can shed but little shine. There's the sense where when we go through suffering, it's going to make us stronger for it.

We'll be better for it. Spurgeon said, Many people owe the greatness of their lives to their tremendous trials. You think of some of the heroes of the faith. Some of these great men and women of God, missionaries.

[35:17] People going through all kinds of trials and testings, their faith is strong. Think of Christians behind the bamboo curtain, behind the iron curtain when it was up. And all of the trials and testings of Christians in persecuted lands, they're often the finest Christians because their suffering produces that character and hope.

Next one, we see that there's a suffering for righteousness sake. So as we've seen the spiritual growth that comes from suffering, now moving on, suffering for righteousness sake.

We can suffer for Christ's namesake. As we talked about, Christians in persecuted countries.

Philippians 3, Paul talks about the fellowship of his sufferings. Matthew 5, the Lord says, Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake.

So there's a certain blessing that comes, suffering for God's sake, for Christ's sake, for righteousness sake. And next one, there's the sense of suffering as a witness.

1 Peter 2 talks about enduring this unjust suffering. It reflects Christ. The disciples in Acts 5, they rejoiced in the persecution.

[36:28] And it can be true for you, brother, sister, as you might face challenges and even persecution as a Christian, you can make an impact as your testimony will stand strong.

You'll testify through pain. And of course, we know in times past, our fellow brothers and sisters of that time were willing to go to the stake and be burned for their faith and testify as witnesses, as martyrs for the faith.

Our suffering can be a witness. It goes on there. There's other purposes for trials as well. I'm going to skip through that section there. We need to be conscious of avoiding simplistic answers.

So there's not always a good explanation for everything. And God rebukes Job's friends for their judgmental explanations. They tried to blame Job. God says that they were wrong.

They didn't get it right. And the reality is we've got a limited human perspective. Our understanding is finite. We don't really know everything. And we don't know about that bigger picture of, the broader picture of time and space and intelligence, whereas God is above all of that.

[37:45] He sees the end from the beginning, doesn't he? He knows what it's all going to pan out to. And yet for us, suffering can seem pointless.

But ultimately, there'll be an understanding in eternity. Moving on to the next section, number five, Christ and the problem of pain.

The incarnation is a real truth about suffering, isn't it? That Christ entered into our pain.

He endured it and he overcame it. That God enters suffering. The word became flesh and dwelt amongst us. He became human, Christ.

God became man, experiencing vulnerability, temptation and pain. He took upon him the form of a servant, made him the likeness of men.

[38:42] And we see Hebrews 4, it says we have a high priest. He knows how we feel. He can enter into our feelings. He was tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

And you think about Christ's experience of suffering. He faced temptation in Matthew 4, yet remained sinless. He experienced sorrow at Lazarus' death. He was despised and rejected of man, a man of suffering. And then the cross, the brutal crucifixion, the scourging. Relational pain too. Betrayed by Judas. One of his closest. Deserted by the disciples. And then the spiritual anguish. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? So Christ knew suffering. God enters suffering. And it's really telling, isn't it? That at the cross, God confronts evil. Christ took upon himself the consequences of our sin.

[39:47] He hath borne our grace and carried our sorrows. A man called Dostoevsky says, no other God has scars. That's Christ, isn't it?

He's the God with scars. The God with human skin. The God with skin on. And more than that. The only God who has scars. He entered into human suffering such that he suffered for us. And then we see the victory. That the greater good is the victory out of it. That he's spoiled or he's conquered. Principalities and powers. He's made a show of them. Triumphant over them in the cross.

And, of course, redemption. The suffering was for redemption. The greater good. Salvation. Again, it's that truth that the cross is the most unfair act in history. People would say, well, why did God allow this? Why did God allow that? Why is God allowing this in me? Well, look at the unfairness of the cross. That's the ultimate, isn't it?

[40:49] The execution of Christ to satisfy God's justice for our sin. God turned the worst act of humanity into the greatest act of salvation.

It's the wonder of it, isn't it? And even an atheist, this fellow Albert Camus, acknowledged Christ's suffering undermines the claim that God is detached. We can't say that God's not here and God's not involved.

Christ shows us that. He is very much involved. And Christianity shows us God doesn't remain aloof. He enters human suffering. God incarnate, experience human suffering, hunger, betrayal, torture, death, to demonstrate his love. And he takes on the consequences of human sin without violating free will. He offers forgiveness and restoration. So it's over to us, isn't it? What are we going to do about the cross? And then further, the resurrection. It shows God's triumph over evil.

[41:52] Not only did Christ vanquish sin at the cross, the resurrection, further testimony, isn't it, of God's triumph, his victory over sin and death and hell.

And it promises for us eternal life. That one day evil will be fully conquered. And we've got that hope today because of the cross, that wonderful victory.

Moving on, section six, we're just skipping through a few things there. Section six, it's headed eschatological hope. So eschatology is about the end times, the last days. It's saying, really, this is the ultimate. This is the ultimate. If not better than the Garden of Eden. We'll see that God will redeem the world while he still preserves the freedom to love. There is still this tension, though. Christ has defeated sin and death. But for the meantime, we've still got this kind of waiting time till the ultimate future glory. It's not yet, but it's coming.

[43:00] And it's really days away in the scheme of things, isn't it? The future glory. In Romans 8, Paul says that the sufferings of this present time, they're not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed.

So for the moment, it's just in this holding pattern till the future glory. The ultimate victory, the ultimate restoration of all things. When we see that God will create a new heaven and a new earth, that death, the last enemy, will be defeated, that there'll be peace, justice and judgment and all the evils will be addressed. So this future hope, this future glory, it doesn't negate that for the present we've got some pain, but it gives us that perspective. Hey, in the scheme of eternity, it's all going to be righted. All the wrongs are going to be righted. The suffering that we have now is temporary, but God's victory is eternal. Next section, section 7, we see that the idea of, given this comfort that we have, there's ways we can help the hurting.

We can give pastoral response, in other words, caring for others who are going through trouble. And we can help, hopefully, support those that are suffering with compassion.

[44:29] We can be used of our Lord to show His love to a hurting world. And there's all of these concepts there, and we're in 7a.

How do we respond to personal suffering? Your honest grief before God, like Habakkuk. There's faith there, that we can trust Him to see us through, rely on God's wisdom.

We can pray, casting all our care upon Him, for He careth for us. And there's that sense where we can bear one another's burdens, help one another out. This world of suffering and evil, hey, we can be part of God's comfort to those that are suffering.

And it says, though inwardly, we're wasting away, yet inwardly, we're being renewed. So think about it, I suppose, for each one of us, hey, sometimes we think about our own suffering, but actually think about others too.

And I know there's friends of mine involved in soup kitchens and different things. There's ways we can minister to the suffering. There's ways we can minister to the hurting. And that's all part of the Christian response to evil, isn't it?

[45:37] To do justly, to love mercy. Talks about caring for orphans and widows. We can share that hope that we have. We can minister to others that are suffering.

And we can be like our Lord. He's nigh unto them that are of a broken heart. Let's have that heart for people. Have a bit of empathy. And serve others.

We can embody Christ's compassion. Because the suffering of the world, it gives us an opportunity to minister to the suffering. Next section, number eight there, we're going to look at, quickly, just some case studies about the problem of evil.

and some biblical examples. So, some case studies. As we touched on, Job shows for us innocent suffering. He was the most righteous man, the most just man.

Lost his wealth, health, family, and faced God's silence for a long time. And Satan tested Job's faith.

[46:44] Job questioned over and over without really getting a full explanation. But in all of it, he still had trust amid the mystery of it. He said, though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.

And then, ultimately, we see the restoration. God restored Job. God allows, but does not cause evil. And Job's faith endured despite the loss.

So, in the book of Job, and it's a classic, really, about this issue of the problem of evil, God doesn't explain Job's suffering, but he reveals his sovereignty. That, hey, actually, I'm watching over you. That, I've got this under control. And, if we can just trust in God's sovereignty, even though suffering may not always be clear why it's happening.

Another example is Joseph. And, again, as we touched on, it shows God's redemptive plan. That, the long-term divine purpose is going to see things sorted.

[47:50] Betrayed, enslaved, imprisoned, yet Joseph rose to save nations. And God's sovereignty was in it that, though his brothers intended to harm him, God intended it for good.

That picture again, that the long-term purpose, God's one who endured much suffering. He was imprisoned, beaten. There's records of all kinds of suffering that, that Paul went through.

Paul went through all kinds of suffering. And he talked about a thorn in the flesh. So, something, maybe it was some, some affliction, it was some, health problem of some kind.

It's not really explained. But whatever it was, he asked God over and over. And God said, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in weakness.

So, and the way that thorn kept Paul humble too, you could see, and he just kept rejoicing, even in the suffering, for the gospel. So, suffering can, help you lean on God's grace, and find his strength in your weakness, and help you to minister.

[48:55] There's other cases there. We'll skip over that. And, next section, number nine. it boils down to, having faith, amidst the mystery.

This idea that, we're holding on to God's hand. That, he's going to guide us through. We can trust God's heart. That, he's watching over us. God's ways are higher than our ways.

All things are going to work together for good. And we're going to have faith, over our full understanding. So, we're not going to have, necessarily, a complete, intellectual understanding.

We're not going to necessarily know, hey, why did that happen to me? This, you know, awful thing that happened to me. It's like a child, holding a parent's hand, in the storm. We can trust God, trust his heart.

And, even though there's a mystery, to some of what happens in life, we're not necessarily, going to have all the answers, for every, instance of suffering. But, we can trust in God's goodness.

[49:58] That God is good. Just like, for example, when a child, and I can relate to this one, has to trust their parents, during a painful medical procedure. You know, the parent's got to take, it took me down the, down the hospital, and I had to have, injections, and, and, stitches, and whatnot, because, it was for my good.

At the time, as a little one, I probably didn't, fully understand it, that my parents, were taking me to the hospital, so, I could be made well. It's the same sometimes, with life, isn't it?

That, it's kind of a similar concept, that, we may not understand, what God's putting us through, but, ultimately, it's going to be, the best thing. And, this idea that, we cannot, trace God's hand, but we can trust his heart.

We can trust, even though his ways, are mysterious sometimes, and we can question, like Job did.

We don't always understand, God's wisdom, but we can trust, learn to trust, learn to have faith.

And, the last one there, the last point there, is about suffering, that, on this fallen planet, we are God's witnesses. We're meant to be, shining as lights, in this world that's broken, in this fallen world, in this world that's dark, we can be the light, we can be like Habakkuk, that he rejoiced, despite suffering, like it says in 1 Peter 5, that God will strengthen us, because of suffering, and we've got to hope.

[51:32] Like, in Habakkuk it says, although the fig tree, does not blossom, yet will I rejoice, in the Lord. And, 1 Peter 5, after you've suffered a while, God's going to make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.

We're seeing through, this study, hopefully some, different facets, different ways of looking, at suffering and evil, that, at the end of it all, we are, his messengers, to this planet, that's fallen, and this hurting world, we can offer Christ compassion, and we can offer that, truth that, God has revealed in Christ.

While we may not be, clear about, all the, ins and outs of suffering, that we will know, that all mysteries, are going to be resolved, in his glorious presence. So, in conclusion, there's, various paradoxes here.

We acknowledge, God's sovereignty, and yet, human freedom. There's, meaning, in suffering, while, we don't always understand, it at the time, and we can hold fast, to that, future glory, while faithfully, in the present, we live, for Christ.

And, to know that, there's eternal fellowship, ahead. And, God's won the victory, but we're just not there yet. We just haven't quite, got, to glory yet.

[52:57] But, he's done everything, to, defeat the devil, and, overcome, sin and death, at the cross. And, he's done everything, that he could, in that, most awful, unfair, unjust act, of man killing Christ, that, in that, act of love, he's done everything, for our redemption.

So, we can find strength, to endure, we can find reasons, for hope, even when, there's mysteries, evil exists, because, man, has chosen, to reject God.

We've got this, fallen world, it's really, Adam's fault. It's, my fault, because if I'd have been, in Adam's shoes, I'd have done the same thing. And, so would you. And, so, we're all subject, to the consequences, of that rebellion, and it's in all of us, the cost of sin.

But, God does not abandon us, through the cross, he bore our sin, the way of evil, and he offers redemption, and eternal life, to all who will accept it.

So, while for the meantime, we've got suffering, yeah, it's real, it's painful, and we're going to go through it, hey, it could get worse, who knows. Yes, but, thank God, it's temporary, amen, suffering is temporary, and the joy of eternity, is going to overshadow it.

[54:15] So, we've got that, ultimate answer that, the God who suffers with us, dies for us, promises to restore all things. It's in his hands. He's intervened, in regards to this problem of evil, this problem of suffering, and sin.

In summary, evil doesn't disprove God, it requires God to define it. So, those would say, oh, this is wrong, God's unfair and unjust, well, they're making a judgment about, against the ultimate judge, and it should be the other way around, that we should actually come, under his judgment.

And, suffering can actually lead to faith, not just disbelief. So, there's occasions where someone has gone through, great suffering, that they've cried out to God, because they got, deep down in the pit, they've realised, to call out to God.

And so, suffering can actually lead to faith. Every worldview, must address evil, like we talked about, but it's only Christianity, that offers a meaning, and a God who suffers.

There's nothing else like that, in any other religion. We offer, in Christ, the God who suffers, and, there's meaning to, our suffering.

[55:26] As, helpers, hopefully for others, we can, point people, to the cross. It's the ultimate answer, isn't it, really, that shows God's compassion, his provision, and, where, ultimately, Revelation 21, the world will see, the future glory.

That, there'll be a place, a time, where there'll be no more, death, no more crying, no more tears, there'll be no more undertakers, no more hospitals, and people sick.

It's going to be, glory, the future glory. So, thank God, the problem of evil, he's really addressed it, in prospect. We've just got to, trust him, for the meantime, while in our human span, we're still going to have, that testing.

So, hopefully, that's given you some, thoughts, and different ways, you can, kind of address that question, of evil. When someone says, why do bad things happen? And, sometimes they say, why do bad things happen, to good people?

Well, the reality is, there are no good people, because there's none good, no, not one, actually, we all deserve, God's judgment, against our sin. The only goodness we have, is that Christ has saved us, and given us, his righteousness.

[56:36] But, thank God, that we can, at least, have some, ways to, kind of, hopefully address, some of those, concepts today. So, let's pray. Lord, we thank you that, you are the ultimate, good God, and you're the, best judge, and Lord, who are we to, defy you, or to, question you, for your judgment.

Lord, we pray, help us to, just to trust you, and most of all, to put our faith in you, to know that, at the cross, the most unfair thing, the most evil thing, the greatest suffering, and the greatest injustice, happened, where we nailed you, to the cross, in the person of your son.

Lord, help us to, truly love you, and know that compassion, that took you to the cross, and then to the resurrection, where we see the victory, that you have accomplished, and we can, know that same, eternal life, that resurrection power, by faith, in you.

Lord, we thank you for that, and help us, Lord, to take these truths, and make them live, in our lives, in Jesus name, Amen.