

Suffering Comes With the Freedom to Choose

Our Daily Bread University
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Pain and suffering. Common denominators of human experience. For some, pain seems to awaken belief in God. For others, suffering looms as troubling arguments against His existence. Pain and suffering. How could a good God allow the kind of disaster that no human parent would willingly permit?

Reasons for faith. Reasons for doubt. “Ten Reasons to Believe in a God Who Allows Suffering, Part 1,” on this *Day of Discovery*.

This is the land of the Bible. Modern Israel. A nation known for its land, its people, and its suffering.

Israel, nation of irony. God’s chosen people. Conquerors of the Promised Land. Victims of the Holocaust.

This is Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust Memorial, where a nation remembers and vows never to forget the suffering.

Jimmy De Young: Look, a rescued Torah scroll from the Warsaw ghetto.

Mart De Haan: It raises a lot of questions, doesn’t it? It makes me wonder if I’d been living in Poland and seeing this happening, what I would have done. And there’s the larger question. I can understand why so many people wonder how a good God could allow such suffering.

How could anyone believe in a good God who would allow such suffering? To answer that question, we need to step back from the Holocaust and consider the wider problem of pain and suffering that the Holocaust itself reflects. Problems like famine, disease, war, earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, accidents, relational abuse, and countless other personal tragedies. In this kind of world, how can anyone believe in a God who would allow such suffering?

That's the question we're going to attempt to answer as we consider "Ten Reasons to Believe in a God Who Allows Suffering."

Reason 1: Suffering Comes with the Freedom to Choose

Loving parents long to protect their children from unnecessary pain. But wise parents know the danger of overprotection. They know that the freedom to choose is at the heart of what it means to be human.

Ravi Zacharias: There is a legitimacy to the allowance of suffering in the human frame of reference. Because if love is the supreme ethic, love is not possible without freedom to not love or the freedom to hate. Love cannot be brought about by robotic coercion; it has to be done by freedom of will. And where you give freedom, there's also the possibility of rejection and evil and wickedness. And so in this world in which we live, the freedom that God has given to us, love, the supreme ethic is possible, but also the rejection of love and the consequences of evil are possible.

Dr. Paul Brand: If someone came to me and said that they would like to believe in God, [but] they simply couldn't understand how if there were a good God that He would allow so much suffering in the world. Suffering, say from innocent children, etc., it's a very real problem for many people.

But I ask that person whether he would like to be free from the possibility of pain in exchange for the loss of his free will. If every time he was going to move into a dangerous situation, he found that he was paralyzed, and he could only move his legs in another direction, that God controlled everything he did and everything he thought, that would make possible a pain-free life. And I have never found anybody who feels that in exchange for the gift of free will, he would accept the gift of painlessness. And I think it's really as simple as that. That God in a sense took a risk when He said that people could say yes or no to the commandments.

Michael Blackler: Adam made choices. Adam made a bad choice that has tremendous consequence for his life in this world, obviously, but it comes down to us. We know from Scripture that death and suffering and disease came to the world because of sin, and that was a choice. I have a choice now to say, OK, now what am I going to do with this? Am I going to become bitter, or going

to be hard, or am I going to blame God? And God gives me the choice. What am I going to do with this situation?

The freedom to choose is at the heart of what it means to be human. A world without choice would be worse than a world without pain. Worse yet would be a world populated by people who could make wrong choices without feeling any pain. No one is more dangerous than the liar, thief, or killer who doesn't feel the harm he is doing to himself and to others.

R. Douglas Geivett: You cannot do good without freedom. On the other hand, you can do evil if you are free. And so a great deal of responsibility for suffering or for evil generally in the world today is rooted in our own natures—and how we exercise the freedom that we have.

If freedom to choose is essential to our freedom to be human, we can begin to see why a good God might allow suffering.