

## God Suffers with Us in Our Suffering

*Our Daily Bread University*  
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### Reason 9: God Suffers with Us in Our Suffering

**Doug Groothuis:** A tremendous reason to believe in the Christian faith is that God is involved in human suffering. Many people are concerned—and legitimately so, this is a good question—that it seems strange that God would be all-powerful and all-good and allow as much suffering as He does.

**Vernon Grounds:** There's a...you know that old dilemma that the unbeliever struggles with: If God is good, how can He allow suffering—if He has the power to prevent it? So perhaps He doesn't have the power to prevent it. We'll believe He's good, but we'll have to accept His limitation and say that He's not a God who is all-powerful. If there are embittered atheists, embittered because of some experiences they've gone through and they talk about this, they feel that it means a God who is heartless, a God who is cruel, a God who was indifferent to human suffering. That's the picture they have.

**Doug Groothuis:** Now there are a variety of philosophical ways of dealing with that, that God brings good out of evil, and so on. But I think the most powerful way of looking at this from within a specifically Christian worldview is that God is involved in the suffering of the world. We might think that God is distant, God's somewhere in heaven, and He's not participating in the suffering and problems of the world....

**Vernon Grounds:** And over against that, we have to put the biblical disclosure of God, not as indifferent, not as cruel, but as One who, according to Isaiah, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" [Isaiah 63:9]. Or the apostle Paul confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" [Acts 9:4], so that somehow the persecution which Saul (later on Paul) was inflicting on the Christians—all the pain and the martyrdom—that was being somehow felt by Jesus Christ, "Why

are you persecuting Me?”—the Lord of the church, one with His people in all of their experiences.

**Doug Groothuis:** And so God has really experienced the evil of the world more profoundly than any human being. Because when Christ offered Himself as the forgiving sacrifice for sins, the way of being reconciled to God, He was the ultimate innocent victim. But He did that out of love.

### Isaiah 53:3–5 (NKJV)

Those who believe God suffered for us in the person of Christ see His suffering anticipated in the words of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah said;

*“He is despised and rejected by men,  
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;  
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.  
Surely He has borne our griefs  
And carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,  
Smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But He was wounded for our transgressions,  
He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,  
And by His stripes we are healed.”*

**Doug Groothuis:** So although God is all-knowing and all-powerful—He created the world—He is not ultimately threatened by sin or evil. He chose to experience that in Christ such that we could be forgiven, we could be set right with God, and we can know that God understands suffering and pain from the inside, and He gives us hope. Because it didn’t end with Christ on the

cross saying, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” [Mark 15:34]. It really ends with the triumph of the Resurrection and the Ascension. But you can’t have the Resurrection apart from the crucifixion. And the crucifixion explains God’s involvement in the human race, giving meaning to our suffering, giving hope that suffering makes sense, and that ultimately for those that come to Christ, and trust Him, who give their lives to Him, there will be an end to suffering.

**Kerby Anderson:** The Bible tells us that unlike other religions, we have a great high Priest who understands our own suffering. We don’t have some distant God who does not understand the human condition. That God became Man in the Person of Jesus Christ, and He suffered and He understands our suffering. And He has empathy for us. So we can go to a God who understands our need, understands our pain, understand alienation, understands sin and the consequences of it. And that’s really the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Vernon Grounds:** One reason I’m so thankful that I heard the gospel and came to believe it, is what it tells us about God, a God who is willing to enter into our lot and to take upon Himself the sufferings which He did not deserve and for which He was not responsible. And I say that because it’s the misuse of human freedom that has brought into our world the anguish and the misery which are on every hand.

But the gospel is the story of how in Jesus Christ God comes into our situation and shares all of our experiences and is willing even to go to the cross and die for us in order that we by that death might be free forever from pain. So you get a totally different picture of reality, not as the old Greeks thought, say, in Aristotle: God, a sort of cosmic icicle with no feelings, always aloof from what’s going on in our world, simply contemplating what’s taking place. No, the God of the Bible, as shown especially in Jesus Christ, comes down and identifies Himself with us and takes upon Himself the burden of our sin. And then opens up the way by which we may eternally be exempt from pain and instead experience glory and joy forever.

**Ravi Zacharias:** Elie Wiesel, the Nobel Prize winner, talks about the time he was at Auschwitz, at one of the death camps, and he along with others of his Jewish friends were asked to see three Jewish people who were going to be hanged, two men and a young lad. And they were coerced to come out and witness this hanging.

The two men died very quickly, while they were hanged. The young boy somewhat struggled in the throes of death, desperately trying to hang on to life, and it was a very painful thing for the men and women to witness this. And Elie Wiesel said he heard a voice muttering behind him. “Where is God? Where is God? Where are You, God, in all of this?” Elie Wiesel said [paraphrase], “Out of my innermost being, I felt well up, too, ‘Where are You, God? Where are You in all of this?’ ” Now listen to what he says, he said, “Somewhere in the silence of my own soul, emerged the answer, ‘Hanging right there on the gallows.’ ” And Jürgen Moltmann the theologian says, “Any other answer would have been blasphemous.”

When you talk about the problem of suffering, there is no other answer outside the cross of Jesus Christ. He took the ultimate indignity in suffering. And having died on the cross, He is able now to bring hope and bring meaning, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross and despised the shame [see Hebrews 12:2]. Sin and evil are real. You cannot gloss over it. And the cross gives to us the concrete expression and answer.

According to the Bible, no one has suffered more than the Father in heaven. No one has paid more dearly for the allowance of sin into the world. No one has so continuously grieved over the pain of a race gone bad. According to the Scriptures, no one has suffered like the One who paid for our sin in the crucified body of His own Son. No one has suffered more than the One who, when He stretched out His arms and died, showed us how much He loved us. It is this God who, in drawing us to Himself, asks us to trust Him when we are suffering and when our own loved ones cry out in our presence.