WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

Perspectives are important, and I pray that you will gain a new perspective on how you view suffering and your faith today! We all put up barriers… 1 Barrier… If God is almighty, all-loving and all-powerful, why is there so much suffering in the world??? In fact, this is one of the most asked questions. Seventeen per cent of all people interviewed by the Barna Institute in a survey asked this question.TV and the media bring suffering right into our lounges… We sit baffled as to how a God who is almighty, all-loving and all-powerful can allow such injustice?? Why do millions face starvation? Do you know that today, 40,000 children under 5 died because they didn't have enough food to eat!! Why are the innocent murdered, raped, killed, bombed, struck by illness, accidents… When 6 million Jews were led into the gas chambers by Hitler…

- Why doesn't God do anything??
- Why does He allow suffering??

In other words, we are saying if we were God, we wouldn't tolerate such suffering, we would do something, right? On the surface, God doesn't seem to do anything!

Philosopher Epicurus – *"Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or He can, but He doesn't want to. If He wants to, but cannot, He is impotent. If He can, and does not want to, He is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how comes evil in the world?"*

This is our dilemma… Either God is all-powerful and not all-loving, OR He is loving but He doesn't have the power to do anything about it…How can God be all-loving on one hand and all-powerful on the other?? How come when we look to God, He doesn't seem to be involved in our world at all??? Is there a God, and if so, is He in control of the world?? In a Welsh village in 1964, an avalanche of coal killed 144 people… 116 of them children… The magazine 'Punch' carried a headline story "Should God Resign? "The chairman of the coal company offered to resign, but the magazine said, God is on top, He should…

I would like to make a number of observations, I'm not telling you how many… But a number!

No glib (superficial) answers…

God is an infinite and personal God… Hs ways are so much higher than ours…

Isaiah 55:9 *"For as the sky soars high above earth, so the way I work surpasses the way you work, and the way I think is beyond the way you think. - MSG*

Would you agree that the difference between us and God is greater than say us and a lion??? Imagine a lion in a lion trap… A hunter comes along and, out of sympathy, wants to free him… He tries to win the lion's confidence, but he can't… So he has to shoot the lion full of drugs… The lion will how however, see this as an attack and think that the hunter is trying to kill him… He doesn't realise that it has been done out of compassion…

Then to get the lion's paw out of the trap, the hunter has to push it further in to release the tension in the spring… If the lion was semi-conscious at that time… He would be even more convinced that the hunter was his enemy and was out to cause him pain and suffering, even trying to kill him… But the lion would be wrong… The lion would reach these conclusions because he isn't human… I believe that God does the same to us sometimes… We can't comprehend any more than the lion why we are going through things… As the lion could have trusted the hunter… So, we can trust God. Don't shake your fist at God and say, "Only as you answer my questions, will I receive you." It's only as we come humbly before God… That we begin to truly find Him…

1 WE HAVE LIMITED VISION…

Job was a man in the bible who went through an incredible amount of suffering… Job's friend tried to explain it away… Job complained to God and thought He had it figured out… You know what God said??

"Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much. Do you know how its dimensions were determined and who did the surveying? What supports its foundations, and who laid its cornerstone as the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?

"Who defined the boundaries of the sea as it burst from the womb, and as I clothed it with clouds and thick darkness? For I locked it behind barred gates, limiting its shores. I said, 'thus far and no farther will you come. Here your proud waves must stop!' "Have you ever commanded the morning to appear and caused the dawn to rise in the east? **(Job 38:4-12)**

We ride in the storms of life, and we see the waves in the boat we are in… But God sees the whole picture from above and sees the beginning and the end… Where does our understanding of God come from?? Is there more to God than we think? Love… Power… Justice… Holiness… Take away love… The only logical thing would be to just

wipe out the whole planet and start again… We need a balance of all 4, this is the key to beginning to understand WHY?

2 SUFFERING IS OFTEN LINKED TO THE FREEDOM OF HUMANITY…

Love necessitates freedom of choice… God gives us freedom of choice and risks rejection by us… This goes all the way back to Adam and Eve… God created a world where people were free and yet there was no sin… People were free to choose to love God or turn away from Him… The blame lies with us here… We messed up… We find ourselves in a place of tragedy of our own independence… We can't ignore our creator's instructions and then expect nothing to go wrong… Put a ball of tin foil in the microwave and see what happens… There was a group of men going parachuting… The instructor says to the 1st thing… Hey you must clip this into here to hold into the parachute… The guy says no I'm fine, I'm going to do it my way… SPLAT!! You can't ignore God's instructions and not expect things to go wrong… Now God could have created us with no choice… Sure there would be no pain… But so much worse; there would be no love!!

3 SUFFERING IS OFTEN LINKED TO THE SIN OF HUMANKIND…

Sometimes it's linked to sin… Sometimes bitterness and Unforgiveness and cause sickness…

Philosopher Yun*: "It is becoming obvious that it is not starvation, nor microbes, nor cancer but man himself who is mans greatest danger"*

Bono concert WORLD AID – Raised $5 million for poor in Africa – That night the EU dropped $250 million worth of veggies into the Med to keep the price up…

Sometimes through our suffering we begin to see our own sinfulness and insufficiency… Jesus helped people realize their need for God…

Mat 7:13 *"You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose the easy way.*

Now God very often puts barriers on the broad road… and if we continue in that road then we have only ourselves to blame…

4 SUFFERING CAN BE LINKED TO THE SIN OF OTHER PEOPLE…

No man is an island… humans are greedy, selfish and rebellious… There is so much suffering that is caused by human greed… We all know that there is enough food to feed every person on the planet… But the food doesn't reach the hungry… 40 000 children died today because of starvation!!

Poor people's homes are built along rivers that can flood… Or in areas that are susceptible to earthquakes etc… There is a whole lot of human choice in suffering… We have the power to stop it…

The overwhelming majority of pain in the world is caused by our own choices to kill… slander… be selfish… to stray sexually… to break our promises… and to be reckless…

C. S. Lewis – "*Pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world"*

If I put my hand on a hot stove… It's really good that I feel the pain and move my hand otherwise something worse could happen… Only a fool ignores painful warnings…

5 PAIN CAN BE GOOD FOR US…

I had to have a number of accidents and 1 that nearly killed me, putting me in hospital for 6 months… my cousin who was like my brother killed in car accident… and my father murdered…Before I realized I was ignoring God and those closest to me…

If you want olive oil…? You have to crush olives… You want wine…? You have to crush some grapes… You want perfume…? You have to crush some flowers…

Sometimes the crushing is necessary…

Suffering and evil have the potential for good… God always seems to turn our suffering around for the good… Not all of us learn and benefit from suffering… That's where free will comes in…

1 prisoner in a concentration camp will react quite differently from another… It's the choice each one makes to respond to his environment…

Man and he found a cocoon with a moth in it… He took it home and watched it… Eventually moth began to emerge… Then it stopped and for what seemed like hours only the moths head stuck out… The man out of his kindness got a scissors and cut the hole bigger freeing the moth… Much to his dismay the moth's body was swollen and its wings were all shriveled… He thought that it would change and be able to fly… But the moth lived its whole life like that…

You see the man in his kindness didn't understand that the struggle and time the moth needed to get through the hole was the time God gave it too force the fluid out of it's body and into its wings…

Just as with this moth… Sometimes we need to struggle to become the people that God intends for us to be…

God doesn't take away our problems and difficulties… BUT He promises to be with us in the midst of them… To restore us and to make us into better, stronger people… We can all reflect on our past and say I learned from that hardship, I'm a bigger and better person for having gone through that… or become embittered and resentful…
He saves us through the storm, not from the storm…
Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. **(Psa 23:4)**
Go through the valley… If you feel like you are going through the valley, don't stop. Sometimes we need to struggle to become the people that God intends for us to be… God doesn't take away our problems and difficulties… BUT He promises to be with us in the midst of them… To restore us and to make us into better, stronger people…
Now there are 2 types of suffering MINOR and MAJOR… Minor is what you are going through and Major is what I'm going through!!
There was a man who cried out to the Lord… "Lord, my cross is to heavy a burden for me to carry, please take it from me!" The Lord said "My son, come into the cross room and choose another…"
The man laid his cross down and wandered for hours through the cross room… Seeing crosses of all sizes… Some so big that you couldn't even see the tops of them… Eventually, he came across one that was the smallest of the lot… "I think I'll take that one, Lord!" The Lord replied, "My son, that's the one you came in with."
Romans 8:28 *And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*
IT'S Not my situation, but my reaction to my situation that counts… If I am bitter and resentful… I still have my situation, but I am also bitter and resentful…
Romans 5:3-5 *Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;*
Romans perseverance, character; and character, hope.
Romans And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
We experience difficulties that will help us grow… We know that God is using life's difficulties to build our character… The problems we run into will build our perseverance… Which in turn will strengthen our character… Deepen our trust in God… And give us greater confidence about the future…
You probably find your patience tested in some way everyday…??
When we bleed… When we suffer as Christ did… Maybe this is God's way of defeating the devil…
At the time of the crucifixion, the disciples couldn't see how any good could come from it… Similarly, we face struggles and trials and suffering, and we can't see any good coming from it… We can trust in our own case, we will see the good too…
Some of the greatest Christians in history have said that their suffering ended up bringing them closer to God… So sometimes this is the best thing that's happening; Not the worst…
John Stott – *"I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross… In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who is immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples all around Asia and stood respectfully before the statue of Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing around his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged into God's forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in light of His. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the Cross which symbolizes divine suffering…"*
Perspectives are important and I pray that you will gain a new perspective on how you view Christianity today!
<u>Ballad of the Oyster:</u>
There was once an oyster whose story I tell… Who had become grumpy because a grain of sand had got into it's shell… It was only a grain, but it gave him great pain, because oysters have feeling although they're so plain… Now did he berate the harsh workings of fate, that had brought him to such a deplorable state…? Did he curse to the government, cry for election and claim that the sea should have given him protection… "No" he said to himself as he lay in his shell… If I can't remove it, I'll try to improve it… Now the years rolled on as the years often do and he came to his ultimate destiny stew… And the small grain of sand that had bothered him so, was a beautiful pearl all brightly aglow… Now the tale has a moral for isn't it grand what an oyster can do with a small grain of sand…
What couldn't we do if we only began to change those things that are under our skin…

Remember that every pearl got its start irritating an oyster!!!
If you want a rainbow… You have to put up with rain… We can either complain that the rose bush has thorns… or get excited that the thorn bush has roses… It's up to you… How have difficulties, challenges, and even pain shaped your character and values???

How are you different today as a result of the problems you have had to face in life???
I believe in Jesus based on historical and biblical evidence as well as my own experiences… But my relationship with Him goes way beyond the evidence… I have to put my trust in Him and walk with Him daily…

ANON – "When Jesus was all I had, I discovered that Jesus was all I needed!"

Have you got faith as big as this (Mustard seed) … Well plant it in Jesus today…
You can say, well, I haven't got much Jesus, but I do have this…
In a moment, I'm going to ask you to pray with me… Do you need a miracle… Do you need healing… Do you have questions…
Have you encountered this Jesus that we have been speaking about…
Pray a simple prayer: Jesus, I don't have much faith, but I want to know that my past is forgiven… I want your power in my life… I want to know that my hand is in Yours… I want to encounter you, the true and living God…
HOLY SPIRIT COME!!