

If there is a God why did He let all those innocent people die in the great tsunami of 2005? Why are good Christian people sometimes robbed, mugged or murdered? These types of questions abound and are fodder for the agnostic and atheist. Even Christians sometimes ask these same questions. Although no one has answers for all such questions, the Bible and reason do give us enough answers to know that God is real and alive and that He cares.

If there is a God, why do bad things happen to good people and innocent children? Although this is a valid question, we must remember it has nothing to do with the existence of God but only deals with His character. We proved His existence in chapter 1, now we will see if there is a reasonable answer to some of these questions about His character.

Bad things happen to good people as the result of two types of forces: I) Human forces, II) Non-human i.e. natural forces and Spiritual forces. Of course, all the following reasons do not apply to every case of pain, but there is a high degree of probability that at least one of these reasons will apply to almost all cases of harm or pain experienced by innocent or Christian people.

I) Human forces. This category contains all the painful and bad things done by humans to other humans. How could God stop these bad things from happening? Of course, God is all powerful and could just stop it from happening. But how? He could simply strike people dead before they had a chance to fulfill their evil desires. Or He could confuse their minds so that they would be unable to carry out their plans. In other words, He would have to interfere with the free will of all those who intended to do evil. And since sometimes even good people do bad things, He would have to interfere with the free will of even good people when they intended to do bad things. But what kinds of bad things? If not *all* bad things, then how do we decide which things should be stopped? A very bad thing to one person is not so bad to another. ***Especially if the worse things were stopped, then the bad actions not stopped would seem very bad to us because we would have no worse actions to compare them to.*** Therefore, to be fair, He would have to stop all such activities and interfere with the free will of all people everywhere to prevent unjust pain. But this means He would, in effect, have to eliminate free will altogether. When God created us He decided to give us free will. We can make up our own minds about serving Him. With our free will we can choose to do good or to do evil. If God eliminated free will we would all be like robots, only able to do what the master controller said.

But God wants us to serve Him because we love him, not because we have to. God wants us to demonstrate our love for Him by doing good and following His directions by choice. If we had no choice in the matter, we could not show our love for Him. In fact, you cannot show any kind of love unless we have a choice. We all want people to love us from choice, not rote. Would we really want it any other way?

In addition to humans using free will to do harm to others, we can cause harm to ourselves by making bad choices. When we choose the wrong mate or wrong job, sometimes much pain comes to us as a result. When we stop and think about it, a lot, if not most, of the harm that comes to good people comes from the bad decisions they make. We choose to build our house on the Florida coast and then complain to God when a hurricane comes and destroys it. We invest poorly in a “get rich quick” scheme and then say “Why me?” when the investment fails. We go to a wild party and then look bewildered when the cops come and arrest those who are out of control. We choose to take some form of drugs and wonder why employers don’t want to hire us. We break all of the rules of society and then complain because we have no trustworthy friends.

Hosea was not just speaking into the air when he said in Hosea 8:7 ***“They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind.”***

Do we really want God to eliminate free will? He would have to, if He is to stop all the evil that people do to each other and to themselves.

II) Non-human forces. The Bible tells us there are several other reasons why bad things happen to good people, for instance:

1) Genesis 3:16-19 "16 ¶ *To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.'* 17 ¶ *To Adam he said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' 'Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.'*"

That perfect environment in Eden was disrupted by sin. But the results of sin are always bad for us, and many times painful. Anytime we sin we could (some may say "should") receive much pain and harm as a result. This deleterious consequence is not God's fault, it is ours because we choose to sin.

2) Job 1:1-22 "1 ¶ *In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. 2 He had seven sons and three daughters, 3 and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. 4 ¶ His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.'* This was Job's regular custom. 6 ¶ *One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. 7 The LORD said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?'* Satan answered the LORD, *'From roaming through the earth and going to and fro in it.'* 8 *Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no-one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.'* 9 *'Does Job fear God for nothing?'* Satan replied. 10 *'Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. 11 But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.'* 12 *The LORD said to Satan, 'Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.'* Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD. 13 ¶ *One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, 'The oxen were ploughing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, 15 and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'* 16 *While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell You!'* 17 *While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, 'The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'* 18 *While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, 'Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, 19 when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!'* 20 ¶ *At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship 21 and said: 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.'* 22 *In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.*

Satan is alive and active and seeking to do us harm. 1 Peter 5:8 says "***Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.***" The Devil is alive and has limited supernatural power and he uses this power to cause us as much harm and pain as possible. This is especially true in, but not limited to, the area of influencing us to make poor choices and influencing evil people to do evil things.

3) Isaiah 38:14-17 When Hezekiah received God's judgment that he would die he was sorely troubled and prayed fervently for the Lord to spare him and God did. After Hezekiah's recovery he wrote, in part, "***14 I cried like a swift or thrush, I moaned like a mourning dove. My eyes grew weak as I looked to the heavens. I am troubled; O Lord, come to my aid!***" 15 *But what can I say? He has spoken to me, and he himself has done this. I will walk humbly all my years because of this anguish of my soul. 16 Lord, by such things men live; and my spirit*

finds life in them too. You restored me to health and let me live. 17 Surely it was for my benefit that I suffered such anguish. In your love you kept me from the pit of destruction; you have put all my sins behind your back.

Hezekiah realized, as we should, that trouble sometimes befall us so that we “will walk humbly all our years” knowing that “surely it was for my benefit” that this hardship came into my life.

4) Isaiah 57:1-2 *“1 ¶ The righteous perish, and no-one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no-one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. 2 Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.”*

An untimely death to a young (or old) Christian is sometimes difficult to understand. This passage helps us to know why, sometimes, such things happen. We don't know the future. God does. On occasion He takes away the good, the healthy and the innocent to “spare them from evil.”

5) John 9:2-3 *“1 ¶ As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”*

When a good Christian woman gives birth to a child with a terrible defect (or maybe several) we want to cry out to God “Why?” But this verse can help us to understand that God could be displaying His might and power through this family by giving them strength, wisdom and endurance to teach God's love through this hardship (see also 2 Cor. 1:3-7). 1 Corinthians 10:13 gives us comfort, knowing that God will not let us be tempted beyond our capacity to endure.

6) II Cor. 1:8-10 *“8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us,”*

When Paul faced trouble, pain and sorrow he knew (or had he learned?) that the more he suffered the more he should trust God. We must learn from his example and use the cross(es) we bear as a means to increase our reliance on God and trust in His love and promises.

7) Heb. 12: 5-11 *“5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8 If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. 9 Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*

We should learn to endure discipline because God is treating us as sons. Please notice verse 11, that no discipline is pleasant, but painful. This discipline happens to all who are sons of God. This means that Christians will suffer pain, sometimes as discipline from God. Since His discipline is because of bad behavior or lack of good behavior, God is trying to get us to change. Whenever anything bad or painful happens to us we should pray to God and tell Him that we are willing to change. Ask Him to make it clear to us **how** He wants us to change and then do it.

The result of God's discipline is the most important part of this message, because it tells us why God is punishing us. This punishment will produce *“a harvest of righteousness and peace”* -- but only *“for those who have been trained by it.”* If we think that we are receiving more than “our share” of punishment, maybe its because we have

not been trained by all the previous discipline given to us by God. If we (yea, and all people) could just learn to learn from our discipline I'm sure that our "many" hardships would be greatly reduced.

8) James 1:2-3 ***"2 ¶ Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance."***

Sometimes trials, tests or hardships come to us as a testing of our faith. Like the previous example, this, too, can be from God as a means of "testing" or exercising our faith so that we can develop steadfastness or perseverance. Faith is like every other aspect of our lives, it will only grow as we exercise it. If we could but look upon every hardship as an opportunity to "grow our faith" we could endure it more easily and with more dignity and hope, thereby reducing the pain involved.

9) I Pet. 1:6-7 ***"6 ¶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed."***

Suffering grief in all kinds of trials is something that we all endure. Knowing the reasons for these trials should reduce the pain or at least, make them bearable. This message is, of course, very similar to the last example, repeated here for emphasis. Having an opportunity to prove our faith genuine should be looked at as a way to share with Christ in His suffering, showing our appreciation for all He did, and is doing, for us.

10) I Pet. 4:12-19 ***"12 ¶ Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering [fiery trial, as a test" - Grk.. cb], as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. 16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?" 19 So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."***

Our hardships, sufferings and pain should be considered as a test and as though we are participating in the suffering of Christ. I think it is like a husband having "sympathy pains" for his wife during pregnancy, or holding the hand of a dying friend, or shaving your own head while your best friend is going through Chemotherapy. Anything you might do to suffer alongside of a friend gives support and strength so that they can endure. Our suffering can be a show of support, appreciation and love for Christ and His sacrifices for us.

Verse 13 ends with ***"so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*** Why will our participating in His suffering cause us to be overjoyed when He comes again? Because if we handle our suffering as He describes, we will have confidence in our future and a special closeness to Christ which will give us inexpressible joy when our hopes materialize at His coming. The second coming will signify the end of all suffering, pain, crying and mourning. (Rev. 21:4) This alone will provide all the joy we can imagine. In addition to that, we will be able to see and experience the indescribable greatness of heaven.

11) Sometimes bad things happen to good people and innocent children so that we can appreciate the good in this life. Without pain, suffering and inconvenience we would not be able to understand, appreciate and enjoy the good things of life because it is only this contrast that allows us to enjoy something good, wholesome, beneficial and fun! And.....

12) Finally, the bad things in life cause us to tire of this life and look forward to the next. If this life was only good, happy, joyful, contented and positive, we probably would not prepare ourselves for the inevitable death and separation that comes to all.

Summary

Although these suggestions do not answer all the questions that might be asked about why the innocent suffer, I think these reasons are enough to cause us to trust God, knowing that He has a plan for all things, even though we may not be able to know completely what they are.