

The Problem Of Evil And Suffering

The problem of evil and suffering is a very real problem that all people struggle to understand. Some people believe that evil is an illusion. Others believe that mankind is getting better as time moves on so that evil and suffering slowly recede. Other people recognize evil for what it is, but have rejected the God of the Bible due to this classic dilemma:

1. If God allows evil because He can't stop it, then He is not all-powerful.
2. If God won't stop evil even though He could, then He is not all good.
3. Either way, the all-good and all-powerful God of the Bible cannot be true.

There are several examples of suffering and evil in the Bible. Genesis 37 tells the story of a young man named Joseph who was loved by his father more than any of his other ten brothers. After years of listening to the talk of Joseph, his brothers seized their chance to beat him violently and sell him into slavery to a group traveling to Egypt. When Joseph was bleeding and hopelessly crying for help, there is no doubt that his pain was real and that real evil had visited him that day. Rejection from his brothers, the loneliness he experienced as he was removed from his parents and everything that was familiar to him just added to his suffering.

Joseph's story doesn't end in pain and suffering for God's plan was bigger than Joseph could have imagined at that point. Through an extraordinary set of circumstances, Joseph rose to become the second most powerful man in Egypt after many years. Because of a great famine in the land, Joseph became the one who saved his family from starvation. When he looked back on the entire ordeal with his reconciled brothers, Joseph said in Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

This story illustrates a very powerful principle for us as we think about evil. In the reality of evil God's plan was at work in the life of Joseph. Would Joseph have desired to be beaten, rejected by his family and sold into slavery? We don't think so. But God's plan was bigger than anything that Joseph could have imagined. God did allow evil and suffering into Joseph's life for a higher purpose. We too, can sometimes see during our later years the good that has come to us through pain and suffering. Do we desire or even understand the pain while we are struggling through it? Usually not, but we must acknowledge that God can work out events for our good in the long run. If we can sometimes see the good coming from the difficulties of our lives, isn't it possible that God has bigger purposes in the world for allowing evil?

Finally, the story of Joseph points to God's ultimate solution for the problem of evil and suffering. God is not removed from the pain of this world, He has experienced it firsthand. The Bible teaches that Jesus, God in the flesh, experienced the greatest evil and suffering ever. Jesus suffered the brutal beating of the Roman soldiers, the shame of being stripped naked before the jeering crowd and the agony of dying on a wooden cross. But even more importantly, Jesus was rejected by God the Father. All this happened to an innocent man. Why? Just like Joseph, Jesus experienced the reality of evil so "that many people should be kept alive."

There is evil in the world and if we are honest with ourselves, we are part of the problem. Evil is part of our being as humans. No, we're not as bad as we could be, but none of us even live up to our own standards. We make promises we don't keep. We try to "do better next time" but fail again shortly thereafter. And we all have to face God and take responsibility for the part we have played bringing evil into the world. God's plan was to save a people to himself – people who don't deserve to be saved just like Joseph's brothers. Jesus' death on the cross was the payment for the evil committed by God's people. The penalty has been paid, if you accept the work of Jesus on your behalf. Evil is a problem for all of us, not just the Christian, but God is great and He has a great plan.