

WHERE IS GOD WHEN I SUFFER?

1. He Is Still Dealing with Us in Love.
2. He's Working out All Things for Our Good.

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is Himself the answer to our question, dear friends:

“I say to God my Rock, Why have you forgotten me? Why must I go about moaning, oppressed by the enemy? My bones suffer mortal agony as my foes taunt me, saying to me all day long, ‘Where is your God?’”
(Psalm 42:10)

Those words were written by the psalmist over 3000 years ago, but they could have been spoken by any of the people in the hospital over the past year. Where is God when I am suffering? Is he too busy with other things? Does he even care about my pain?

Of course, we know that he cares. We know that God loves us, that he hears and answers our prayers. This is what we've known and believed all our lives. God has to be watching over me.

But if he is, why does the pain continue day after day? Why is there no improvement in my condition? Why doesn't God help me?

These questions sometimes flow from the mind of a child of God when there is suffering, and when the suffering doesn't seem to get better. Even the strongest of Christians sometimes will ask these questions. If you have not asked the questions yourself, then you will, unless death comes so swiftly for you that you have no chance to ask them. These are the honest doubts and concerns of true children of God, and they deserve an answer, the best answer that I can give, an answer that comes from God's unchanging Word.

1. HE IS STILL DEALING WITH US IN LOVE.

People ask the question "**Where is God when I suffer?**" because suffering

seems to contradict what we have learned about God. The Scriptures declare that God loves us, he cares about us. He hears and answers our prayers. All of this would seem to indicate that we should enjoy a relatively comfortable and prosperous life on this earth. Prolonged suffering or troubles seem to contradict all that. It is only natural to look for some kind of explanation.

Is suffering incompatible with God's love and care for me? The author who wrote the letter to the Hebrews discussed this matter at some length in chapter 12. There he reveals to us that God disciplines us, like a loving father disciplines his children. Human parents are not perfect. Sometimes they apply the wrong discipline, sometimes too much, sometimes not enough, and sometimes the results are not what the parents wanted. But God is the perfect Disciplinarian. He knows exactly what we need and how much we need.

Sometimes people interpret suffering as God's punishment for sin. They think, *"Now God is balancing my account for those sins committed in my youth. Now God is settling the score for my sins by sending me this trouble."* But these thoughts either assume that Christ did not pay for all of our sins on the cross, or that God is punishing our sins a second time.

Let me remind you that Holy Scripture declares that **"the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin."** (1 John 1:7). God did not punish Jesus for 50% of our sins, or 90%, but 100%. Note that the Scripture says "sin", not "sins." This is to assure us that when Jesus Christ died for us on the cross, God lumped all of our iniquity into one total ugly mess and washed the entire business down the drain. We have been washed clean from sin - from sin in bulk!

No, when we suffer God is not punishing us for our sins. The God of the Christian Gospel does not carry grudges nor does he punish a second time the sin for which his own Son paid so dearly and so perfectly.

When you suffer pain, hardship, reversals, or loss, do not let Satan or your own unconverted sinful nature cast doubt on the love of God for you. Remember these words of our God: **"He spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all."** There is grace and love without any question-marks. You may not be able to comprehend the mystery of your trials. A thousand problems of this life may loom up before you as baffling puzzles, but when you raise your eyes to the cross, you see no question-mark there. The cross assures you that the God of all power, who created you, looks mercifully upon you, and with the deepest and highest love that he could show, **"He spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all"** at Calvary, where

burdened with our sin, he died to save us from hell.

That cross cries out to us: "God loves you." Let all doubts disappear.

2. HE'S WORKING OUT ALL THINGS FOR OUR GOOD.

Where is God when I suffer? Our text answers: "**We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him.**"

Whenever you read the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis, you can see how God does this. Joseph knew much suffering. When he was very young, his brothers sold him into slavery. For many years he was a slave in Egypt. Then, when he was unjustly accused of a crime of which he was innocent, he spent many years in a dark prison. He might well have asked, "**Where is God while I am suffering?**" Yet, God was there working out all things for his good and for the good of many other people. Through all of these trials and sufferings God was leading Joseph to the command of the land of Egypt and using him to provide grain during a seven year famine. When it was all over, Joseph could look back at his life and say to his brothers who sold him into slavery, "**You meant evil, but God turned it into good.**" (Genesis 50)

Today some of us may ask, "*How can there be any good in my troubles? How can there be any advantage in my broken health?*"

To us our Lord replies, "**What I am doing you don't understand now, but you will know afterwards.**" If we could see our lives from a higher vantage point, we could see how the troubles in our life were transformed by God's wisdom and power into heavenly gain. One day we will see how the reverses of life offered us a necessary discipline which kept us from pride of arrogance, boastful security, and idolatrous trust in ourselves. Just as the surgeon removes the cancerous parts to save the body, so our Divine Physician cuts off anything that would destroy the soul. Just as a forester saves a diseased tree by sawing off the dead branches and hacking out the rotten portions, so the heavenly Gardener prunes the tree of our life to preserve our souls from rot and decay. Do not charge God with cruelty when he seeks to save you from yourself. Is the life-guard cruel when he strikes a frantic, struggling swimmer into unconscious submission?

A few years ago a school bus was caught in the snowdrifts of a desolate Colorado road. The driver, who had set out to bring help, lost his way and perished in the cold. When night fell, the peril of the children in the bus had become acute. Fuel was exhausted, and the children were threatened by drowsiness and that falling into frozen sleep from which there is no

awakening. One of the boys, with rare presence of mind, systematically irritated his schoolmates, struck them as hard as he could, made them scream in protest, fight back, and exchange repeated blows. It was a strange spectacle, these children struggling in the bus, blanketed by heavy snow, but that struggle kept their blood in circulation and saved their lives.

Many of us, likewise, might now be on the road to hell instead of the pilgrimage to heaven if God in his unfathomable wisdom had not sent trials that similarly proved blessings in disguise.

There is much more that could be said about the good that comes from suffering and trouble, but time will not permit it. But let me end by asking you point blank: Do you love God? Do you love this Jesus Christ who loved you enough to die for you? If you do, then you have this certainty for your faith, that God will make all things in your life work out for the good. May God give you faith in this his truth. Amen.