

Good Question! Why does God allow bad things to happen?

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Today, the question is *Why does God allow bad things to happen?* When I look at a question like this I'm wondering, "what are the emotions behind it?" Is this question being asked out of curiosity? Possibly. Some people want to know the answer to this question to satisfy some intellectual curiosity. I can also see this question asked out of personal confusion. I can see someone scratching your head a little while wondering, "God, what is going on? I don't get why you let the world get this way?" It's pretty easy to imagine this question being asked out of personal pain and suffering. Sure, life's not perfect, but it was going pretty well. And then *it* happened and now everything has changed. I can't sleep at night; I cry all the time. I can't concentrate at work. I've built walls all around my life now try to protect my fragile soul.

There are also particular angles to this question. There's the God-angle, meaning, we're wrestling with God himself. It reminds me of Lamentations 3:1-3 says, "I am the man who has seen affliction under the rod of his wrath; he has driven and brought me into darkness without any light; surely against me he turns his hand again and again the whole day long." This biblical writer is so bold as to say, "God is the problem; he's the one causing the pain." There's the personal angle - why did these bad things happen to *me*? To *my* son? To *my* health? There's also the meaning-angle, the purpose-angle. That's the angle we're going to look at this morning because I feel the scriptures address this way of asking the question most clearly and helpfully. *Why* would God allow bad things to happen? We know bad things happen; we know God is allowing it. But *why*? *Why* would he do that? What's the purpose? What's God trying to do in my life? We're not trying to solve a philosophical problem; it's not even so much that we're doubting God. It's just we don't understand. *Why* would God allow this to happen? (READ 1 Peter 1:6-7).

Peter begins vs. 6 by saying, "In this you rejoice." What he's rejoicing in is the promised salvation that every follower of Jesus Christ will receive in the last day; do you see that there in the end of vs. 5? *Why* wouldn't we rejoice in the day where all our sins will be forgiven, where we will be changed never to sin again, where there will be no more weeping, mourning, crying, or death! Peter has his eyes on that day and he's rejoicing in the total and perfect salvation he and everyone who follows Jesus will have. But Peter contrasts that coming day with the present reality; look at the next phrase: *though now*. We've got something in the future to rejoice in, though right now we've got some trials to contend with. Right now, we've got some troubles that are causing us grief. Right now, we have broken relationships. Bodies that are failing us. A deck that seems stacked against us. Opposition because of what we believe. Even though our future with Christ is going to be beyond amazing, we need help with today. *Though now...* you have been grieved by various trials.

He doesn't say what those trials are; he just says *various trials*. We see the same general reference in James 1:2 where James says, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds." This sounds like our question to me; *Why* does God allow bad

things to happen? Any kind of bad thing. The things that bring about suffering, heartache, and struggle? Wouldn't God want to spare us these things? Yes, indeed, we're rejoicing in the coming salvation, but what should we think about these bad things, the various trials, that are causing us grief today? Look at the word grieved - grieved by various trials. Just to make sure you know that Peter is talking about heavy stuff, heartbreaking and agonizing challenges, the mention of the grief these challenges produce says it all. Our heart aches for the day when these trials will be over. That's why Rev. 21:4 is such a powerfully hopeful verse - "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

We are not immune from those things, are we? Speaking very generally, too many FBCers have received bad news related to health. Cancer is becoming too familiar around here. Some of you have received other bad news related to your health or the health of a family member. We don't frequently announce that stuff publicly because it's not our story to tell; it's your story and we want to respect people's privacy. But I would encourage you to share it within your smaller circle of brothers and sisters who are walking the journey of Christ with you. It helps you and, truly, it will help your brothers and sisters. Christ calls us to bear one another's burdens and when we do that for each other, we experience the joy of linking arms in our worship of Christ. But I say this to emphasize that these trials are grieving us.

Let's keep moving to the good stuff; vs. 7 is the key verse, "so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Anytime you're reading your NT and you come to a *so that* phrase like in the beginning of vs. 7, you're seeing an intended result, an intended goal. It's about purpose - meaning. And that's the focus of our question, right? What is the meaning of this pain? What is God's purpose for me through these troubles? Peter is answering our question! He's telling us what God is up to when bad things happen.

Let me summarize Peter's answer and then we will get into it: according to Peter (who is an inspired author, which means he's speaking God's very words to us - these are God's words) we are grieved by various trials so that our faith becomes the kind of faith that results in (that produces) praise and glory to Jesus when we see him face to face. Or maybe another way of saying it might be: we are grieved by various trials so that our faith is changed and perfected in such a way where God is more glorified in us when we meet Jesus in the end. Now, let's talk about some of the details of this passage.

The first thing I want to draw your attention to is the phrase "the tested genuineness of your faith." Do you know what Peter is getting at here? You and I really don't know what kind of faith we have until we go through the fires of suffering. We think we know. We think we have a faith that is strong; we think we have a faith that will last or that will endure through the trials, but we really don't know until the bad things happen.

Do you remember how the people of God were led into the wilderness after God delivered them from Egypt? I have to think that those Israelites who were delivered from Egypt had the highest possible spiritual high. They must have felt like they were walking on water. 10 plagues. The Red Sea split in half. The armies of Egypt destroyed. The bounty of Egypt in their pockets. Talk about an unspeakable display of God's power and grace! But then, the wilderness. No water. No food. No home. Exposed to danger on all sides. It only took them one month for them to say, "Send us back to Egypt, Moses! Life was so much better there!" Just one month of the wilderness, just one month of struggle and they were convinced that God didn't love them and that Egypt, the place of bondage, was the best place for them. And they had a total of 40 years waiting for them in the wilderness.

Have you ever wondered why God led them into the wilderness? Why would God do such a spectacular job saving them from bondage in Egypt, and then send them into the wilderness of trouble? I think we wonder about that ourselves. God saves us from our sin, but not from cancer. He gives us forgiveness, but not relief from depression. God promises us the riches of heaven, but he won't give me a better job with more money so I can do a better job taking care of my family. Why does God allow these bad things to happen to me? Why does he keep me in the wilderness? Here's why God kept the Israelites in the wilderness from Deut. 8:1-2 (READ).

What was the purpose of the wilderness? To test the people. But this test isn't like a pass-fail kind of thing. It's about revealing, unveiling what's going on inside a person's heart. That's what the struggle, the wilderness, reveals. What you love, what you prize, what you trust isn't made known so clearly until the fires of suffering show up.

You and I need struggles, we need suffering, to reveal what kind of faith we have. And then do you know what we are to do when we see our faith isn't what we thought before the trials? We are to repent; we are to turn back to God. We are to say, "God, I thought I treasured you above all things, but I've seen through the through my divorce, through the loss of my child, through the cancer, that I didn't. I treasured comfort, I treasured stability, I treasured family, I treasured myself more than you. God, I'm sorry. Thank you for forgiving me. Help me turn back to you." Struggles facilitate in us a renewed and deeper faith in God.

Look what Peter says about this renewed and deeper faith in God; it's more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire. An ounce of gold is worth about \$1500. Just one ounce. When it comes to what just one ounce of gold can purchase for you, it's pretty valuable, isn't it? It's precious. Throw on top of that, some of us may have gold coins that were given to us by our late father or grandfather. Now it's even more precious because it has sentimental value, too. God Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth is saying "a faith refined, a faith renewed through the fires of suffering is more precious than gold that's refined by the fire."

The key to trusting God and loving God in the midst of your pain, my friends, is believing that a refined faith that leads to greater glory in heaven with Jesus is more precious than

anything you lose on this earth. You will not count it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds if you don't believe Jesus is your greatest prize and the things of heaven are of greater value and worth than the things of the earth. If your family is a greater prize, if your health, if your reputation, if your friends, if your life is a greater prize than Jesus and magnifying Jesus than you will curse God for your sufferings. You will blame him. You have to see and believe that the things of eternity are better than the things of the earth.

This is what Paul was getting at in 2 Cor. 4; let's turn there and read together (READ vs. 16-18). Do you see? Current afflictions can't be compared to the glory that is being prepared for you. And then notice how looking at our sufferings with the eyes of eternity makes all the difference. We can't see right now with these eyes the exceeding joy we will have in worshiping Jesus with a purified faith in the coming Age; we can't see with these eyes right now the lasting pleasure we will experience in the presence of Jesus with our renewed faith. What we can see right now is our trouble. We can feel the hurt to our bodies from the chemo treatments. We know the loneliness of being in a bed by ourselves. I guess what I'm trying to say is: I understand that the things of this earth feel so close and so real; like they are what's most important. But the scriptures are telling us the opposite. Do you see? The things we can see are transient, fleeting, temporary. They are here today and gone tomorrow. The stuff we can only see with the eyes of faith (the glory of God; the splendor of Christ; the worth of our refined faith; the joy of all of us being together at the Lord Jesus' table feasting and laughing together under his rule of love) will last forever.

So, can we talk strategy? Let's talk about what we need to be doing today so that when bad things do happen we're standing on a sure foundation. The first thing is revealed in that 2 Cor. 4 passage. Vs. 18 begins by saying, "as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen." That's what Paul is doing so that he doesn't lose heart when bad things happen. And that's what you can do. You have the ability, my good friends, by God's grace to set your eyes on the things above when everything inside of you and outside of you is demanding you stare directly into your problems. You don't have to do that. I know what we all do; like I said before, when the pain is excruciating, it feels like it's the only thing that matters. But faith in God looks beyond the pain to eternity, to the reward. So, friends, one of the things you must do is be resolved to look at the things of heaven on a regular basis. So, really, what's dominating your attention? Your focus? How much time are you spending focusing on God's truth in his word versus time looking at memes on facebook? Or videos on youtube? That gets at this in real practical terms.

The second strategic piece is embracing these things as true today and not waiting until you're thrust in the wilderness. When God is ripping the idols you've loved from your heart, your first inclination isn't to say, "Thank you, Lord, for refining my faith." It's, "God, what are you doing?" and "How could you?" So, it will help you immensely right now to say to yourself, "My faith needs to be refined; my heart isn't wholly devoted to the Lord. And some of the maturity I need will only come through suffering. God, help me see right now, and every day, that nothing compares with you; that you are my greatest treasure. And that having a refined faith is more

precious than gold that is refined by the fire.” You have a chance then. If you wait, it’s going to be infinitely more difficult.

After God reveals to the people of Israel his maturing goals for the people in the wilderness, he tells them what he was preparing them for; he tells them what they will achieve and receive when they finish their journey well through the wilderness. Listen to these words and I pray they encourage you to hold on, to not despise the discipline of the Lord, and to keep the faith when bad things happen (READ Deut. 8:7-10).