

# Why Does God Let Bad Things Happen to Good People?

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## The Question That Plagues Us All

*By Jim Anderson*

Why is God letting people suffer in the financial crisis today? Why is it that good people who have worked hard and sacrificed a lot to support their family being subjected to home foreclosures and job losses? Why does God let these things tear apart families and destroy marriages that would have otherwise survived? You'd think that God would at least protect His followers and their churches from financial disasters. Why are so many churches fighting with each other? Why are churches hurting so many of the people they are trying to help? Why does an all powerful God let all the people die in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars today? Why does He let terrorists kill innocent people? Why does God let the people in Africa starve to death? Why do couples who want children have babies born that die in birth or soon after, or are born with severe disabilities, if God could keep it from happening? Why does God let oppressive governments succeed in their efforts? Where is God in the problem of social justice? These are the difficult questions we ask, and they cause many of us to doubt the existence of a loving God. It stands in the way of any kind of a relationship with Him if He does exist. This is a major stumbling block to faith.

These are extremely important questions. We need to take them seriously. We need to find answers these questions. They could have significant implications on how we see life and how we live it. If you can't find good answers to these questions, you don't have any foundation for true faith in God. There are many Christians who lose their faith over these questions. When events happen like when our country was attacked on September 11, 2001, and the economic crisis that has started overtaking us in late 2008, we start to suffer from the consequences and some of us can't accept the idea that God would let this happen to them. This is a critical issue for Christianity. You have probably considered these doubts about God yourself, and you may have even come up with your own answers to satisfy your concerns. The problem is that almost all the explanations offered to address these issues are insufficient, if not outright false. They are founded on our own personal logic and understanding and have serious flaws that we haven't recognized.

So let's explore this issue and see if there are any more solid explanations than the ones we've already heard and adopted. Maybe you will be able to see the merits of these explanations, and maybe you will have to think more about them. No matter how you respond, what is important is that you are thinking about this issue. One place to find an explanation for this problem is actually in the Bible. In the Bible the responsibility for this problem is placed squarely on the shoulders of Adam and Eve who defied God's clear instructions. It then goes on to tell us how we have continued throughout the generations

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since then to make wrong choices. We are caught in the current of the resulting culture. The consequences of the actions of Adam and Eve have warped humanity so badly that we now have a natural inclination to make the wrong choices. This is referred by theologians as “original sin.” There is a difficult problem with this answer, however. It is not acceptable to many who hear it. It makes us responsible for the bad things that happen to good people. We are part of the problem. It also seems to imply that there is no hope. There is nothing we can do now to fix the problem ourselves. To fix the problem, it is going to require a miracle of some kind to break the cycle. So inevitably people are going to look for solutions that make sense to them, and keep experimenting as each solution fails.

Since the Biblical version seems a bit harsh to swallow, maybe even degrading to human dignity, modern thinkers have come up with alternate explanations. They dismiss the idea of “original sin” as oppressive and extremely limiting and arbitrary. So one idea that has blossomed out of this is the view that humans are good at the core and under the right conditions we see their good nature. People are basically good. If we are naturally good, then we don’t need moral laws, and we don’t need a god. This view has led to the idea that God doesn’t exist, and we are all simply the product of nature. Nature is given intelligence enough to create order. This is actually one of the most popular ideas today because it is at the root of Darwin’s theory of evolution, which is taught as fact in today’s schools. Darwin’s theory takes us through a process that assumes nature itself can bring order out of chaos. That is how evolution takes place. So this leads us to the idea that we no longer have to live under the guilt and moral judgment of an arbitrary God, or under the tyranny of His arbitrary rules, because He didn’t create us and so He has no say. We are independent and can make our own judgments of what is right and wrong. This is an “enlightened” paradigm, as many proclaim. It is a “utopian” view of the world. It is part of the worldview referred to as “Naturalism.” This is the predominant worldview in American society today.

A serious question I have about this “enlightened” philosophy brings us back to the original question about why bad things are happening to good people. Where are these bad things coming from? The explanation that is given is that the problems we questioned at the beginning of our discussion are “products of our environment.” They are the result of ignorance. We have allowed poverty to exist, along with other bad conditions because of our ignorance. So the solution is simply to improve our environment by better education, improved economic management, and through social justice in our social structures. The idea is that we have no limitations except what we impose upon ourselves, and we can become perfect if we work at it enough. So I question why we haven’t gotten it right yet after thousands of years of dealing with these issues. You’d think by now we would have tried everything. The reality is that we still have the same problems we had thousands of years ago, and we haven’t improved. So how is the idea that we can control our environment and thus overcome these bad things coming along? My observation is that it isn’t working. It still leads me back to our own failure, and that I am indirectly responsible for those bad things that are happening. It makes me feel an oppression of performance; that I am failing to reach my potential because I’m not doing enough.

If I am realistic, it takes me back to the idea that the Biblical view is a reflection of reality. I am part of the problem. It is an explanation that seems to reconcile with the thousands of years of recorded history. We repeatedly make the wrong moral choices at all levels from entire societies down to each

individual. On the other hand, the “enlightened” view has led to social experiments that have repeatedly failed, and no human has ever achieved any level of perfection to validate the idea that we are not living up to our potential. The social experiments continue even today. In our dissatisfaction with the pain and suffering in the world today, we have turned to our government for solutions, which is now offering the promise of a new hope in sweeping political changes in how we manage our society. Ultimately this type of utopian effort has led to a loss of liberty, as William Buckley once observed. This is because government can’t save us from ourselves, imperfect humans run the government. All the good intentions are corrupted to serve the self interests of those in charge. No one is immune.

So what is the answer to this question that plagues us? You will have to think it through on your own. However, my probe has left me seeing the recent rise of terrorism and economic crisis as a symptom of a problem in human nature. These problems didn’t just happen. They are the result of thousands of years of cumulative decisions that were mistaken and wrong. They were decisions that ignored the realities of how things really work, and therefore caused the damage to our moral fiber ever so slightly each time that we never noticed. There were consequences in nature that caused ever increasing damage to the balances in nature. Even the natural disasters that occur today are a symptom of the thousands of years of accumulated damage that came from our “sins.” This is the only explanation that ultimately withstands the test of time, more so than any other alternative explanation. It is a serious problem, and there is nothing I can do myself to fix it. It just continues to get worse ever so slightly.

So why did God let this happen? If He is really God of the Universe, the Creator, why can’t he make me so that I would not make the wrong choices? He could, and that is partly the point. He loves His creation so much that He has given us free choice. So He allows us to make our own choices between right and wrong. He has revealed what is right to us so that we can know the difference between right and wrong, but He gives us the total freedom to choose. If He didn’t give us the freedom to choose, we’d simply be puppets. That isn’t a good option. So His best option is to let us make the wrong choices and then when the time is right He has a solution for us. Anything short of this, and I would not have the freedom to make all the right choices at some point.

Ultimately, this does give me hope, in a strange sort of way. Because if I know what the problem really is, and I have correctly identified it, then I am one step closer to the solution. If I believe that God exists, and I believe that I am a creation of His that has strayed, then I should be able to go to God for the solution. So why does God let bad things happen to good people? He lets these things happen because we chose them as a human race, and He is honoring our choices for the time being and letting us experience the consequences. He has a solution to overcome the bad, but when He does overcome it, it must be forever defeated. He knows the perfect time to do that, because He is the Creator of the Universe, and these matters are beyond our understanding. In the meantime, He needs us to choose to follow Him to the best of our ability by accepting His solution. That is all He needs. He doesn’t expect perfection, and knows He won’t get it until He has provided the ultimate solution to eradicate evil. Even the Church is imperfect and makes a lot of poor choices, sometimes even turning good Christians away with their poor behavior. But the reality is God is still Creator of the Universe and has a plan to solve the problem of our “sin.” Our best hope is our faith in Him.