

Vietnam Vet Tom Bosworth and his wife Linda decided to go on a picnic through the backcountry of New Mexico when tragedy struck. Testing the limits of his newly refurbished jeep, Tom spun the vehicle too quickly, flipping it onto its side and leaving the couple stranded in the hot and hostile canyon. Making their way through the extreme heat, the elderly couple struggled to survive, but after four days with minimal liquids, dehydration finally set in. Sitting down, Linda refused to go any further, urging her husband to go off on his own and find help. Eventually, he agrees and wanders off, but his resolve also wanes, and he soon collapses in the dust. The next morning he awakes, but his strength is gone. Shuffling through the dirt, he again collapses.

Now, after four days of being stranded in the wilderness, Tom finally realizes his utter helplessness to survive. In despair, he falls on his knees, clasps his hands together, and cries out, "God, please save my wife and me." Opening his eyes, he is amazed to hear the approaching flutter of helicopter blades making their way in his direction, amazed that God has so timely and miraculously answered his prayer. As I heard this story, I was not amazed that God answered the prayer so timely, but rather that Tom had waited so long to cry out to the only One who could actually save him and his wife.

The story of Tom and Linda is such a fitting illustration of why people suffer. So often, we complain about God, ignore His will, and willfully disobey the teachings of the Bible, and then we get angry when God lets us suffer. The main reason that God allows suffering is because He is trying to get our attention, and this is the most effective way of doing that. What we do not seem to realize is that most are not going to go to heaven, but have chosen hell. They have chosen to live apart from God, chosen to follow the devil down his path of disobedience, and have chosen to sin. While many flatter themselves that they are basically good, the majority of people will end up in hell unless God can somehow get their attention.

While Tom and Linda were trapped and dying in the wilderness for four days, the thought of praying to God did not occur to them through their ordeal. They continued to try and save themselves until they were one step away from death. It was not until the very end that Tom finally thought to pray. God had finally gotten his attention. This is a beautiful spiritual lesson. So many of us are just like Tom. We are trapped in our sin and spiritually dying, but we seem to think that we can save ourselves, so we refuse to humble ourselves and cry out to God while God is just waiting to come to our rescue. So many people will be eternally lost because they refused to call on God.

While many get angry that God allows us to suffer, God weighs things on an entirely different scale than we do. We think death is a big ordeal, but to God, it is not. Death is simply the last step before entering into eternity. When we think about this life in contrast with forever, we could say that this life is like one drop of water in the ocean of eternity. We could say this life is like one speck of dust in the vast expanse of the universe. We could say that this life is like one grain of sand in comparison to all the sand on every beach in the world. Still, all these illustrations do not even compare to the measure of a life when we hold it next to eternity.

This life is nothing in comparison with eternity. While we think our seventy years of life are long, they are the smallest drop of time. God did not create us to live for seventy years. God created us to live forever. Those who refuse to choose God are choosing this life over eternity. That would be like reaching into a bucket of diamonds and pushing aside all the precious stones so you could pull out a rock. It's nothing, and God knows that. That's why God is trying to get our attention, to take our eyes off of this life and place them on eternity. The only way to get to gain eternal life is by finding God and surrendering our lives to Him, and yet so many people don't even acknowledge God, so He has to get our attention.

It's rather ironic, really. When life is good, people say, "I don't need God. Only people who are weak need God." Then when God allows trials to come into our lives to show us that we are weak, we complain, "If God is good, why does He allow people to suffer pain." The reason God allows us to suffer pain is so that we will see our weakness, realize that we are lost and on our way to hell, and turn to God to lay hold of eternal life. Tell me this. If you had a child you dearly loved, and you knew that the only way to save them was through suffering, would you allow them to suffer? Of course you would. In such a case, allowing suffering would be done as an act of love.

If your child had cancer, would you allow them to go through chemotherapy if it could save the child? Of course, you would. You would welcome suffering if it meant saving your child's mortal life, even though they are still going to die eventually. Why is it so hard to understand why God allows suffering in this life if it might lead some people to gain eternal life—forever in heaven! While we may not like suffering, and we may not understand suffering, God has a very specific purpose in allowing people to suffer. The Bible says, "no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it" (Heb. 12:11).

The Bible repeatedly tells us that suffering serves a purpose. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says that our "affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." 1 Peter 1:6, 7 says, "you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more than precious gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Romans 5:3, 4 says that "we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope." This concept is confirmed all through the Bible.

Even if a child dies in this life, that could just be God's means of saving the child. Think

about it. The Bible tells us that “difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matt. 7:14). That means most people will be lost, and God knows this. God knows “the end from the beginning” (Isa. 64:10). He knows the future. So perhaps God looks into the future and sees that if the child grows up, they will eventually turn away and be lost, so He lets the child die. If God allows a child to die now instead of letting them grow up, turn to a life of sin, and become lost, wouldn't it be better to lose the child in this life and gain them for eternity? Of course! What reasonable person can deny that?

I know that pain, suffering, and death hurt, but we cannot hold suffering against God. Suffering is ultimately the result of sin, but God can use suffering to bring good out of the bad. Romans 8:28 says, “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” The Bible says everything that happens works together for good if we will simply learn to trust God through the pain. God can make lemonade out of the lemons in life. God can take the most horrible tragedy and turn it into good if we will just trust Him.

Sadly, many of us wait until we find ourselves on the brink of disaster. Like Tom, we seem to think we are all-powerful, thinking we can save ourselves instead of turning to God. Good times come, and we say, “I don't need God.” So God allows Satan to throw tragedies in our lives in hopes that we will see our helplessness, and yet we get angry at God, while the devil just sits back and laughs. Still, in the midst of trials, some people actually learn the most valuable lesson in life—that of our own helplessness. We realize that we are weak and that we need God, and so we turn to God in those hours. Many people have turned to God and become saved through hours of crisis. That's why God allows suffering.

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why is there so much suffering?