

HOW COULD A LOVING GOD LET A PANDEMIC HAPPEN?

SVCC Sunday Morning Online Bible Study

April 5, 2020

Much of the following material is adapted from William Lane Craig, On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision (David C. Cook, 2010), chapter 7 ("What About Suffering?"), pages 147-176; and his Defenders Podcast, Series 3, Excursus on Natural Theology, Parts 30-34, June 15, 2016 to July 6, 2016 (available in text form at <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/s3-excursus-on-natural-theology/excursus-on-natural-theology-part-30/>).

The Problem

We say God loves human beings. We say God cares. Yet people by the thousands are suffering and dying from the new coronavirus. It has upset life across the globe. It threatens us all. And it comes in addition to a myriad of other forms of suffering across the world: childhood diseases, tragic accidents, cruelty, grief, pain, and so on. How can God be all-loving and good and yet allow such terrible suffering to occur?

A Biblical Voice on the Problem

Job 3:20-26 — Job asks, Why does God give human beings life just to make them suffer?

Job 30:16-23 — Job asks, If God is good, why does he make me suffer so much?

Question for the Brain: Would a truly good, loving, all-powerful God eliminate all suffering in the world? Isn't the reality of suffering evidence that God, if exists, is not loving and good?

Responses:

- Are there any benefits to human suffering that God might perceive, so that he then allows some suffering?

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10 — What benefit did Paul find in his own suffering?

- If God didn't give us free will, would he truly be a loving God? Yet in giving us free will, doesn't he permit all kinds of human-created suffering?

Exodus 22:22-23 — What suffering results from human sin in this type of situation?

- To what extent do we have the right to say whether God would or should prohibit all suffering?

Isaiah 55:8-9 — God's _____ & _____ are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

- Theologically-speaking, why is there suffering in the world? (Consider Genesis 3.)

Question for the Heart: How could God do this to us? Why, as Job asked, does God give life to people doomed to suffer?

- How did God answer this question at the cross?

Hebrews 2:14-18 — Why did Jesus suffer?

- How does God's promise of eternal life answer this question?

Revelation 21:3-5 — What destiny has God determined for suffering?

Romans 8:18-21 — Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with...

- What is the purpose of life? To be happy? To be free from suffering?

Revelation 21:3, 22:3-5 — What is God's goal?

John 17:3 — According to Jesus, what is the essence of eternal life?

- The highest good is not freedom from suffering, but _____.

- GOD DOES NOT ALWAYS ELIMINATE SUFFERING. BUT FOR THOSE WHO SEEK HIM, HE _____ IT.

*Posted on Facebook by John Mark Hicks (Professor of Theology at Lipscomb University), March 30, 2020
Dr. Hicks' first wife died suddenly a year or two after they were married. His son Joshua was born with a genetic disorder that caused him, beginning at age 4, to regress to infancy; Joshua died around age 14. Dr. Hicks is no stranger to suffering.*

Thinking About God in a Pandemic #5

I believe it. God is good—all the time. God is good and the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. At the same time, I don't confess that God is good because of the circumstances in which I find myself. Joe recovered from Covid-19, and we say, "God is good." Joan died from Covid-19, and we say, "?????" I don't confess the goodness of God because Joe lived. I don't deny the goodness of God because Joan died. Rather, I confess God is good because Jesus reveals God's goodness. "God is good" is the truth we confess in every moment of our lives. It is always true. We confess it because of Jesus and not because of the circumstances in which we find ourselves. God is good—all the time. We confess this whether we live or die, whether we have Covid-19 or not, whether we have a job or not, or whether we are anxious or not. We confess it because nothing can separate us from the love and goodness of God in Jesus the Messiah. God is good—all the time.

Upcoming Lessons

April 12 — JESUS' TOMB AND HOPE IN A CRISIS

April 19 — WHERE IS GOD? HOW TO LAMENT DURING THE PANDEMIC