

Finding God through suffering

My position: God is Almighty (El Shaddai), He can do anyone, He can heal everyone. So, why doesn't He? [Man at pool (Jn 5 v2ff – only he was healed), Trophimus left sick at Miletus (2 Tim 4 v 20), Paul's "thorn in the flesh".] Incomprehensibility of God (Isa. 53:8). We shall look at some possible answers.

Why do we suffer? The fall. It is now, part of being human. (cf question, why is the sky blue?). Free choice.

Suffering – what is it? A working definition: when something bad happens to us that is outside of our control. Physical, emotional, spiritual, circumstantial

Reasons for suffering:

1. Sin (numerous examples in O.T. and 1 Cor. 11 v29-30) – also discipline.
2. God's glory (blind man Jn.9 v 1ff)
3. Demonic/satanic (Job, Lk 13 v 11-16)
4. Testing (Abraham & Isaac) / Temptation (1 Cor. 10:13)
5. Persecution – but Jesus has overcome (Jn 16 v 33)
6. Develops our faith (persecution) – leads to perseverance, character, hope (Rom 5 v3-4)
7. Mystery (Lk. 13 v 1-5) – requires faith and trust in God. Ping-pong ball illustration (a microbe inside has no idea of the world outside. Likewise, our understanding is limited – only God can see the big picture.) Job, blind man, faith. (Job trusted, do we?)

Can good come out of suffering?

1. Athletes
2. the cross
3. God's glory
4. giving birth (baby – Jn 16 v21- but also from physical death to eternal life) John 16:21

A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. (NIV)

5. witness to others
6. our own character and faith
7. when we are weak we are strong,

Suffering is temporary – the cross. The world is only temporary, we are passing through. We are here to develop character, to become real, not just to become happy (pg 148-9). Things will be better one day (Rev 21 v 4).

He understands our suffering – the incarnation, the cross (Isaiah 53)

What is the question? Not, why do I suffer, but rather, where is God when I suffer? Scripture is silent on the first question, but loud and clear on the second: eg Job. God is there, alongside.

Where do we find God in suffering? Alongside. In His people (1 Jn 4:12)

A Challenge: How do I (can I) demonstrate God's love to suffering people? ...or... Could a suffering person "see" God in me?

Phil 1:29, 1 Pet 1:6-7, Rev 2:10, Rom 5:3-4, 1 Pet 4:12-13