

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Few questions press harder against the Christian faith than *If God is both all-good and all-powerful, why is there so much suffering?* Christian thinkers offer several answers. No single answer is complete on its own; their strength lies in combination.

1. The Free Will Defense: (Evil is the price of free will)

Suffering exists because God gave us free will and true love is impossible without it. A world of free beings who can choose the good is more valuable than a world of puppets who cannot. That freedom can be turned to cruelty, injustice, and violence. Evil is the price and the possibility of freedom.

Limit: It explains evils caused by human choice but not earthquakes, famine, and disease.

2. Moral Character Development: (Suffering builds perseverance, character & hope)

God did not create finished, perfected beings but placed us in a world where struggle, hardship, and suffering become the means by which we grow into courage, compassion and patience. Those virtues would not exist in paradise. Paul voices the same logic: “Suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope” (*Romans 5:3–4*).

Limit: Some suffering crushes rather than build, and the scale of certain horrors strains this answer.

3. The Greater-Good and Providential Answer (Greater Good of God’s Plans)

God permits evil only because he can bring from it a greater good that would otherwise be impossible. The biblical archetype is Joseph, sold into slavery by his brothers, who later tells them: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good” (*Genesis 50:20*). Augustine said that God, being infinitely good, would permit no evil unless his power and goodness could draw good out of it. Paul generalizes this as “Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us” (*Romans 8:18*). The final restoration of all things outweighs and redeems present pain.

Limit: Requires trust that goods we cannot yet see justify evils we feel acutely now.

4. Suffering God of the Cross: (God can be found in Suffering)

God is not a spectator but took on flesh and endured betrayal, torture, and crucifixion, sharing human anguish from the inside. Martin Luther called this the “theology of the cross”, God is found not chiefly in glory and power but in the suffering and weakness of the crucified Christ.

Limit: It answers “where is God in my pain?” more than “why does the pain exist?”

5. The Answer of Job: Mystery and Trust: (We can not comprehend God’s full plan)

The Bible’s own longest treatment of innocent suffering pointedly refuses a tidy explanation. Job demands a reason for his losses; God’s reply is not an argument but a sweeping vision of the wisdom and vastness of a creation Job cannot begin to comprehend. Humans simply lack the vantage point to see how each instance of suffering fits into the whole, and that the fitting response is trust in God’s character and plans.

This answer runs through much of Christian thought as a deliberate check on overconfident explanations. A reminder that a God small enough to be fully explained would not be God.

Limit: Offers consolation and posture more than intellectual resolution.