

# The Problem of Evil & Suffering

## مشكلة الشر والألم

Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate  
Diocese of Mississauga, Vancouver and Western Canada

St. Paul Theological Seminary

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**Evil is all around us**

**الشر في كل مكان حولنا**

Two Types

نوعين

Moral - أخلاقي

Sin - الخطية

The evil we do - الشر الذي نعمله

Natural - طبيعي

Suffering - الألم

The evil we suffer - الشر الذي نعانيه



# Two Problems

مشكلتين

## Logical - منطقي

Origin – المصدر  
Where did evil come from?

How can a God who allows  
evil exist?

يخاطب العقل

## Emotional - عاطفي

Purpose – الهدف  
Why do I suffer?

Where is God in all my  
suffering?

يخاطب القلب

# *Intellectual Perspective*

Addressing the Mind

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**What is the problem?**

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# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

- An All-Powerful God would be **able** to destroy evil
- An All-Loving God would **want** to destroy evil
- Evil exists
- Therefore an All-Powerful and All-Loving God does not exist

# THE FREE WILL RESPONSE

- An all-loving God gives the gift of free will
- An all-powerful God cannot give love and take it away
- God cannot do what is logically contradicting.

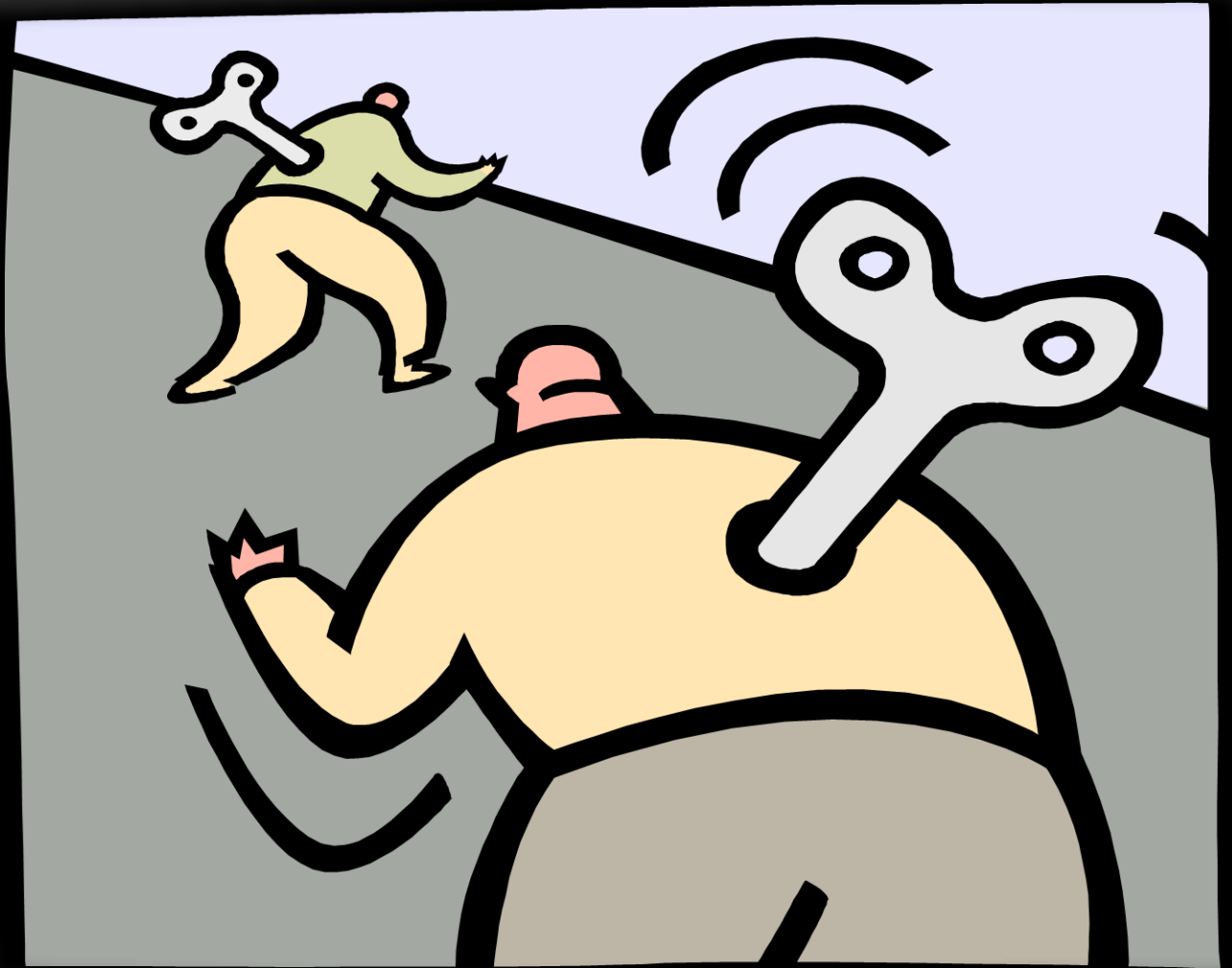


“If you choose to say “God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it,” you have not succeeded in saying anything about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words “God can.”



C.S. Lewis  
*The problem of pain*

Without this possibility  
of turning our backs  
on God we are not  
humans, we are  
robots.





# Summary of the Free Will Defense

Where there is love

There must be freedom

Where there is freedom

There must be a choice

Where there is choice

There is the possibility of evil

Where there is evil

There is the possibility of suffering

# The Problem Restated

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# IS GOD THE CREATOR OF EVIL?

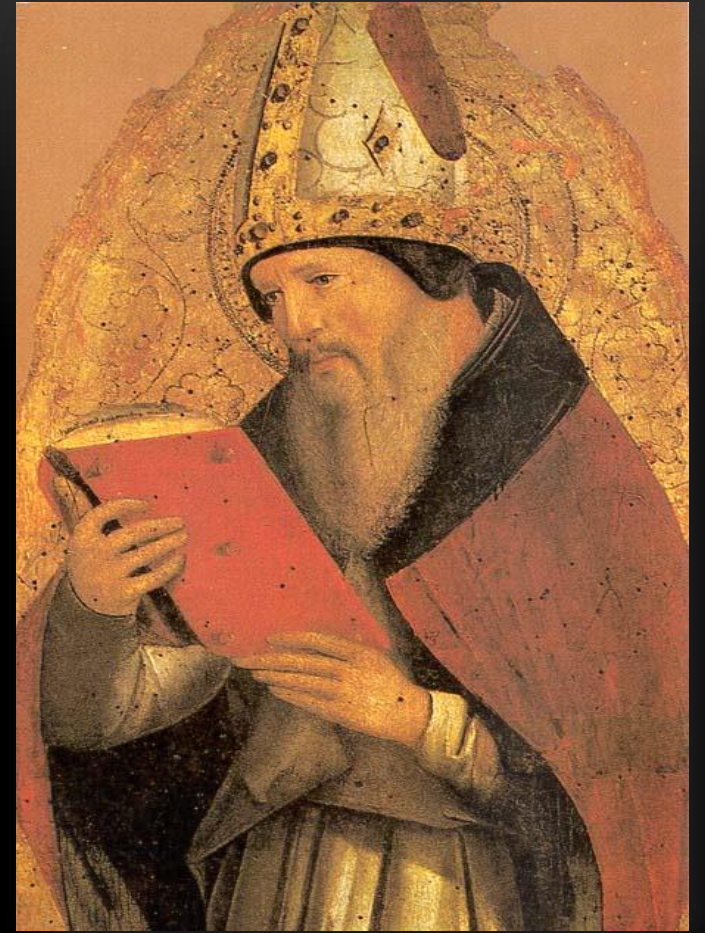
- God is the Creator of everything.
  - Evil is something
  - Therefore, God is the Creator of evil.
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**What is Evil?**

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# NATURE OF EVIL DEFENSE

- “Evil has no nature; but the loss of good has received the name evil”
- “Evil is not a divine creation, but rather a term created by humanity in our attempt to explain the deprivation of good.” St Thomas Aquinas



St. Augustine  
City of God

**Is Evil Only a Problem  
for Christians?**

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# EVIL IS EVERYONE'S PROBLEM

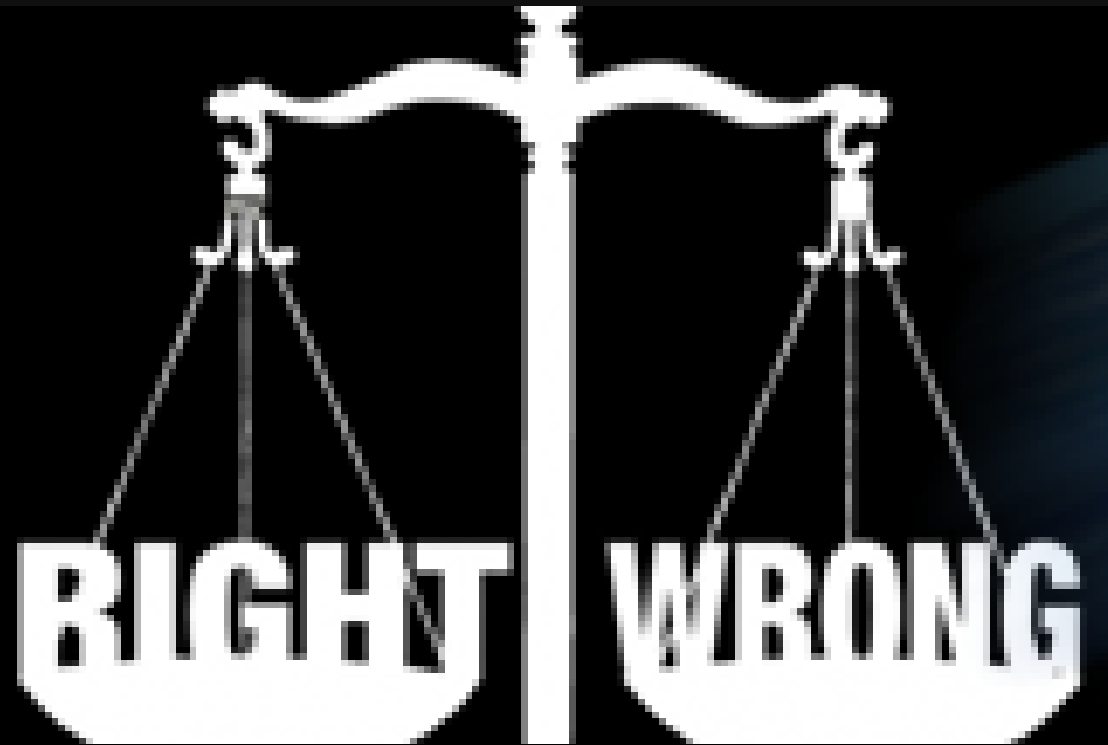
- Every world religion must provide a **diagnosis** and a **solution** to the problem of evil and suffering.
- The answer must meet both the **intellectual** and the **emotional** demands of the question.





# BIGGER PROBLEM FOR ATHEISTS

- Every judgment presupposes a standard.
- What is their standard for judging evil to be evil?



How can they even define evil?

# ATHEISTS RESPONSE TO EVIL AND SUFFERING

“Tough Luck”

“Too Bad”

“Oh Well”

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If something indeed came from nothing then nothing is really the answer to evil and suffering

# Evil as an Argument for God's Existence

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“When I was an atheist my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line”



C.S. Lewis  
Mere Christianity

**Who Can Legitimately Ask  
the Question of Evil?**

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# FORGET THE ANSWER, WHO IS ASKING?

**Pantheist**

Evil is not real, it  
is an "illusion"

**Theist**

Evil is real  
God is real

**Atheist**

No good no evil.  
Yet how can God  
allow evil?

# CHRISTIANITY IS THE ONLY FAITH THAT:

- 1) Accepts the reality of evil and suffering
- 2) Explains both the purpose and the cause
- 3) Offers God-given strength to survive it



# The Greater Good – Our Limited Perspective

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” Rom 8:28

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“Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” Ephesians 1:11



“God has permitted evil in order to bring about a greater good. Those things which appear evil only appear that way because of a **limited perspective**. When viewed as a whole, that which appears to be evil ultimately contributes to the **greater good**.”



St Irenaeus  
(2nd century)

“You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good,  
in order to save many people alive.” Gen 50:20





# THE BOOK OF JOB

## CHAPTER I

**T**HERE was a man <sup>b</sup>in the land of Uz, whose name was <sup>d</sup>Job; and that man was <sup>e</sup>perfect and upright, and one that <sup>f</sup>feared God, and eschewed evil.

2 And there were born unto him seven sons and three daughters.

3 His <sup>3</sup>substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man

<sup>a</sup> Ps. 34. 7  
<sup>ls.</sup> 5. 2

<sup>b</sup> 1 Chr. 1. 17

<sup>c</sup> Ps. 128. 1, 2  
Prov. 10. 22

<sup>d</sup> Ezek. 14. 14  
Jas. 5. 11

<sup>e</sup> Gen. 17. 1

<sup>f</sup> Or, cattle  
Prov. 16. 6

<sup>g</sup> ch. 2. 5  
& 19. 21

<sup>2</sup> Heb. if he  
curse thee not  
to thy face

<sup>h</sup> Is. 8. 21

Mal. 3. 13, 14

<sup>3</sup> Or, cattle  
<sup>4</sup> Heb. hand  
Gen. 18. 6

<sup>5</sup> Or, hus-  
bandry

<sup>6</sup> Heb. sons of  
the east

10 <sup>a</sup>Hast not thou made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? <sup>c</sup>thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his <sup>1</sup>substance is increased in the land.

11 <sup>2</sup>But put forth thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will <sup>h</sup>curse thee to thy face.

12 And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy <sup>4</sup>power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD.

13 <sup>5</sup>¶ And there was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking, and the eldest brother's ho

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# GOD'S QUESTIONS TO JOB

1. Who laid the foundations of the earth?
2. How were the dimensions determined?
3. Who did the surveying?
4. What supports its foundation?
5. Who laid the cornerstone?
6. Who decreed the boundaries of the sea?
7. Who clothed them with clouds and darkness?
8. Who barred them limiting their shores?
9. Have you commanded the morning to appear?
10. Did you cause daylight to spread?
11. Did you end the night for the wicked?
12. Have you ever robed the dawn in red?
13. Have you disturbed the haunts of wicked men?
14. Have you stopped the arm raised to strike?
15. Have you explored the springs from the sea?
16. Have you walked in the recesses of the deep?
17. Do you know the location of the gates of death?
18. Do you know the extent of the earth?
19. Do you know where light comes from?
20. Do you know how it got there?
21. Do you know about darkness?
22. Do you know where darkness comes from?
23. Can you find its source?
24. Can you go to its source?
25. Have you visited the treasuries of snow?
26. Do you know where hail is made and stored?
27. Where is the path to the distribution of light?
28. Where is the home of the East wind?
29. Who dug gullies for the rains?
30. Who laid out the path for lightning?
31. Do you know if rain has a father?
32. Where does dew come from?
33. Who is the mother of ice and frost?
34. Can you hold back the stars?
35. Can you restrain Orion and Pleiades?
36. Can you ensure the sequences of seasons?
37. Can you guide the constellation of the bear?
38. Do you know the laws of the universe?
39. How do the heavens influence the earth?
40. Can you shout to the clouds and make it rain?
41. Can you make lightning appear?
42. Who gives intuition and instinct?
43. Who is wise enough to number the clouds?
44. Who can tilt the water jars of heaven?
45. Can you stalk prey like a lion?
46. Who provides for the ravens?
47. Do you know how mountain goats give birth?
48. Do you know how many months of pregnancy?
49. Who makes the wild donkey wild?
50. Will the wild ox be your servant?
51. Will he stay by your feeding crib?
52. Can you use a wild ox to plow with?
53. Will he pull the harrow for you?
54. Will you let him decide where to work?
55. Can you send him out to bring in the grain?
56. Have you deprived the ostrich of wisdom?
57. Did you make the ostrich swifter than a horse?
58. Have you given the horse strength?
59. Have you clothed his neck with a mane?
60. Have you made him able to leap like a locust?
61. Do you know how a hawk soars?
62. Is it in your command to raise eagles high?

# ONE MORE DIVINE ATTRIBUTE

- God is All-Powerful
  - God is All-Loving
  - God is also All-Knowing
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Summary of the Greater  
Good & Limited  
Perspective Defense

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An all-knowing God

**knows** the end of all things.

An all-loving God

**wants** to bring all things to good end

An all-powerful God

**can** bring all things to a good end

Therefore

all things **will** come to a good end.

I don't know the purpose  
for some evil, but I know  
why I don't know.

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**Why do bad things  
happen to good people?**

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# THREE QUESTIONABLE ASSUMPTIONS

- Who is to say that we are good people?
  - Who is to say that all suffering is bad?
  - Who is to say that we must know God's reasons?
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**What about the death  
of a Child?**

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# CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

- God created the child's life; He has the power to restore that life again. (John 11:21-26)
  - When a child dies he/she goes to Heaven. (Phil 1:21-24)
  - God gives comfort to the family who lost the child. (Psalm 23)
  - Separation caused by death is only temporary (1Thes 4:13-18)
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# *Emotional Perspective*

Addressing the Heart

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A Transformed Perspective

(1)

**I Suffer With Christ**

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# PARTAKERS OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING

- 1Pe 4:12-13 “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you **partake of Christ's sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”
  - Rom 8:17 “If indeed we **suffer with Him**, that we may also be glorified together.”
-

A Transformed Perspective

(2)

**Christ Suffers With Me**

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“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?” Acts 9:4 | Zec 2:8 “He who touches you touches the apple of His eye.”

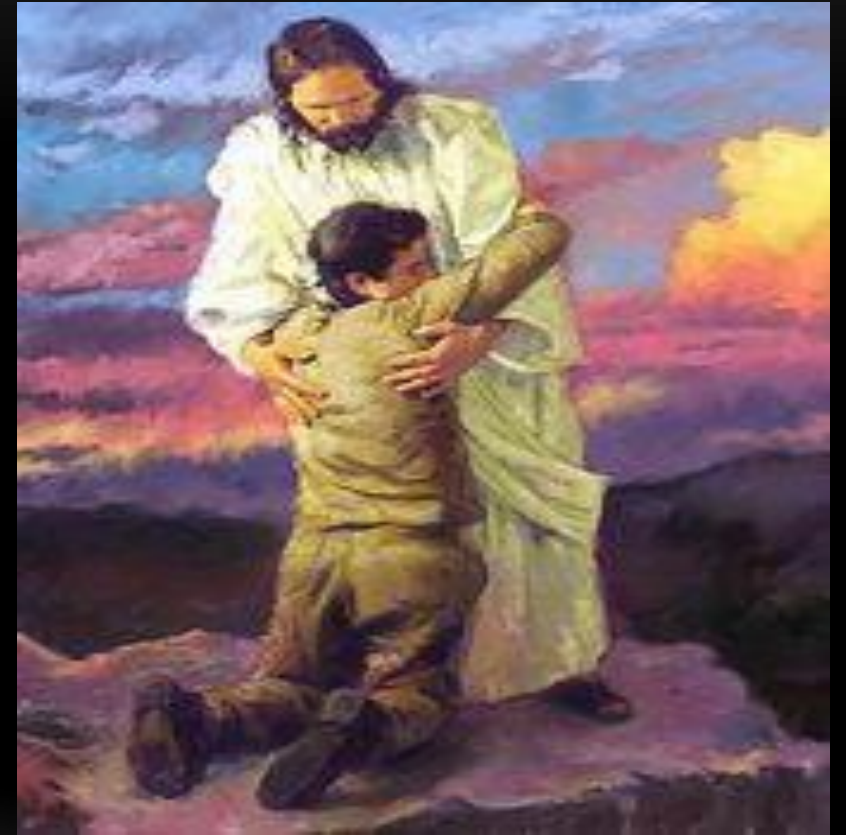


# SURRENDER AND BE COMFORTED

- Christ did not suffer to take away our sufferings but to take away our sins. He transformed our sufferings and made it fellowship with His (Phi 3:10).
  - He comes to us and says take my hand and trust in Me. My hand has more nail marks in it than yours ever will.
  - I alone can comfort your aching heart. Surrender and be comforted!
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# WHAT DO YOU NEED MOST IN SUFFERING?

- Someone who had gone through similar suffering to come and sit with me
- Their mere **presence** provides the greatest comfort



# Answer in Christ

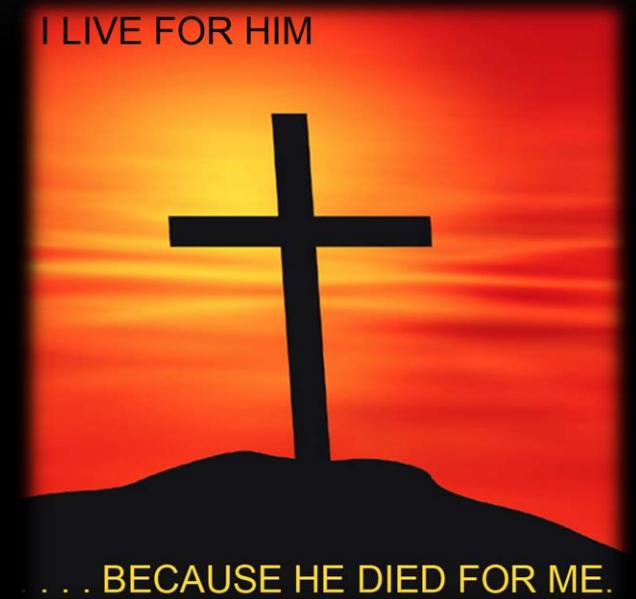
He provides the solution to the problem of evil  
and an explanation to the mystery of suffering

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Atheism provides neither

# CHRIST'S SOLUTION TO SUFFERING

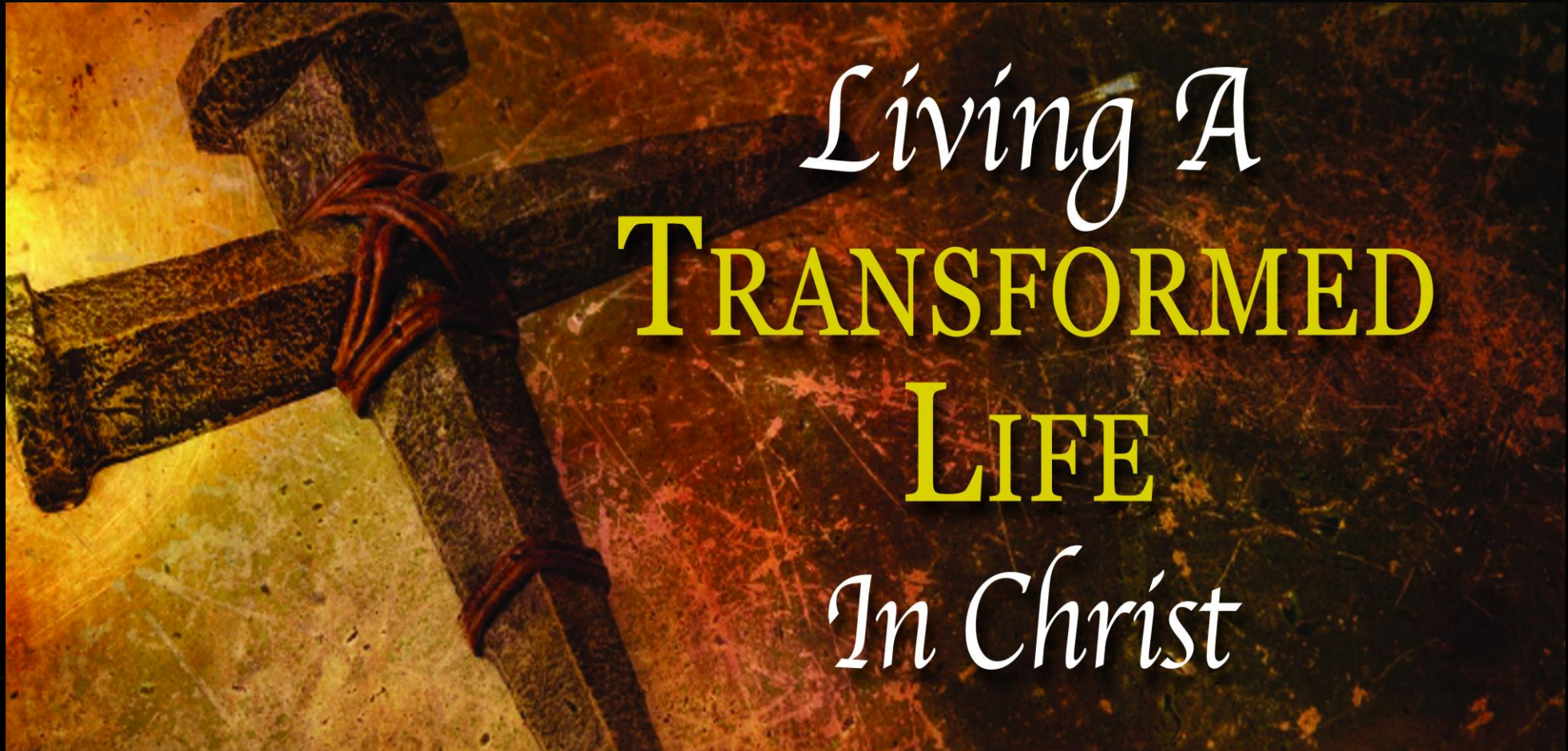
- He came to us, wept and suffered
  - Transforming the meaning of suffering
- He died on the cross
  - Transforming the meaning of death
- He rose from the dead
  - Transforming the meaning of life



He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. 1 Cor 5:15



When you are in Christ, He begins to transform what's **within** and that begins to transform our experience of what's **without**.



*Living A*  
**TRANSFORMED**  
**LIFE**  
*In Christ*

End of Part 3

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Faith & Hope

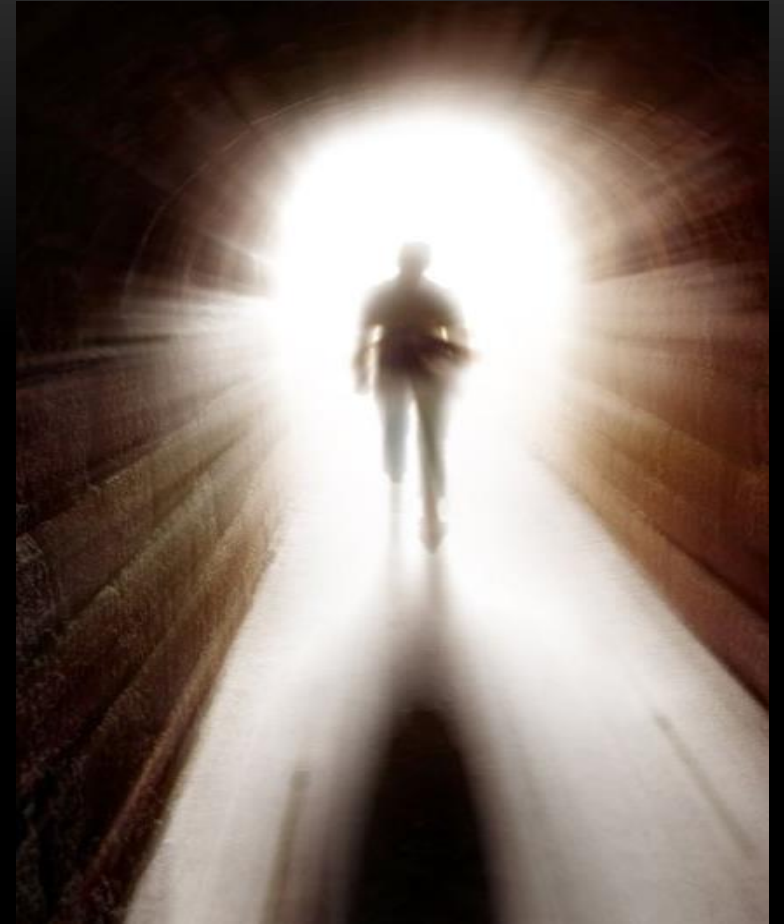
# The Story Continues

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“Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.” Mat 5:4

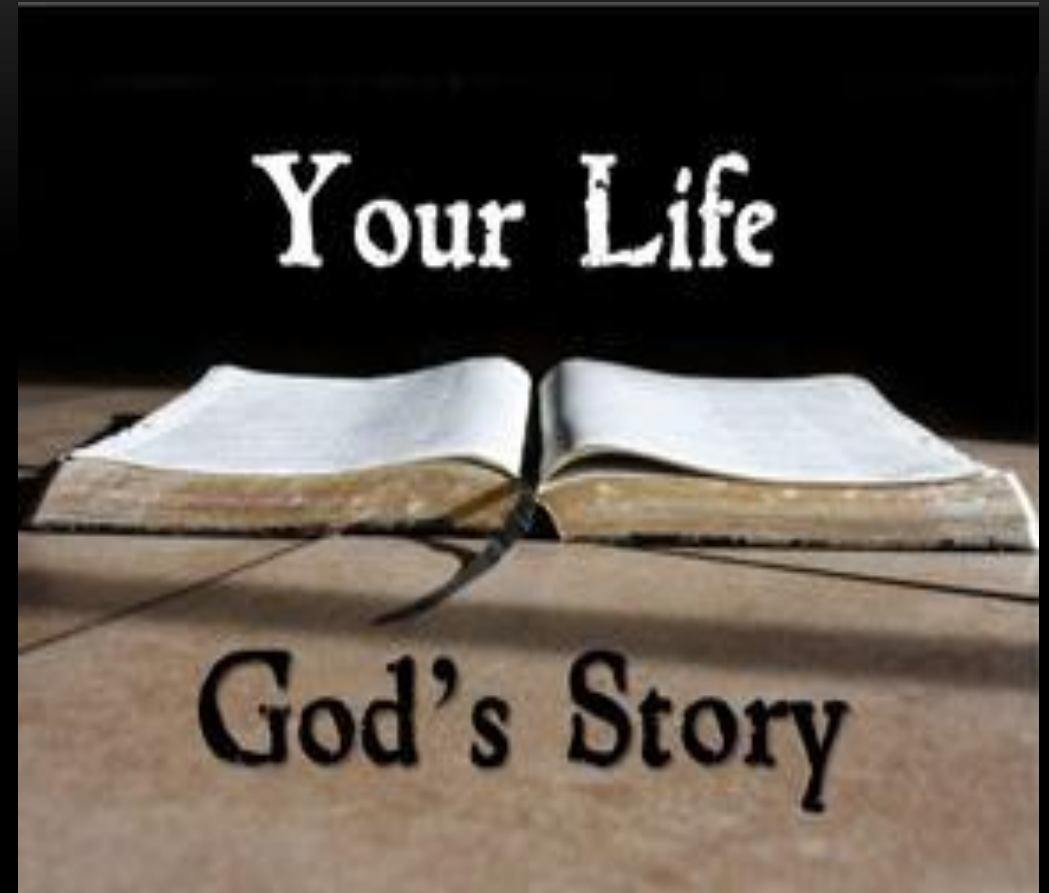
# IT IS NOT OVER YET

- This life is NOT the complete story. Our lives spill over into eternity +
- Would you read half the novel and blame the author for not resolving the plot? +





- If God can design such an incredibly intelligent and perfect setting for His story,
- Can He not also arrange a super intelligent and perfect plot?



Is He only a perfect mathematician and physicist but not the perfect psychologist and novelist?

# The Problem of Pleasure and the Purpose of Life

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- We believe that life is all about giving us pleasure and making us happy.
- Our personal pleasure, is the most important thing in life.



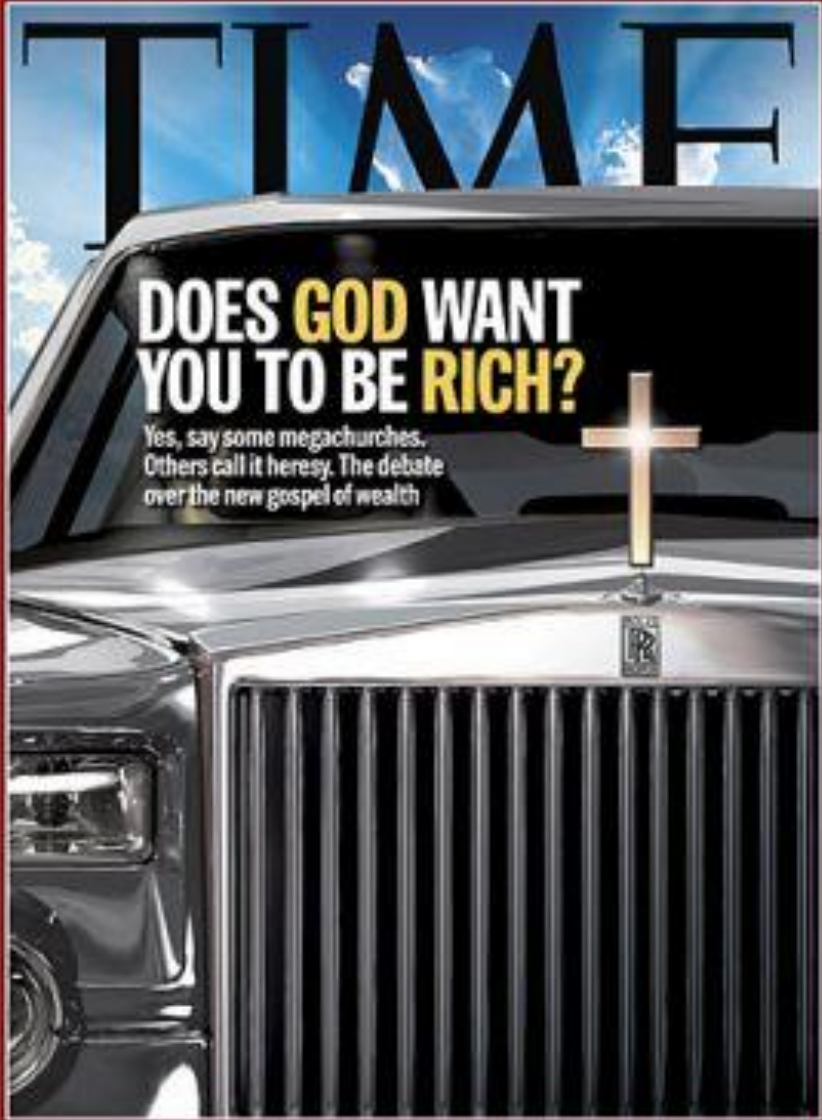
- Do you know what kind of person thinks that way?
- Our culture deals with us as a bunch of adult 2 year-olds.
- We believe it's our **right** to feel every pleasure we can feel and never have pain. And if we do, then God is to blame.



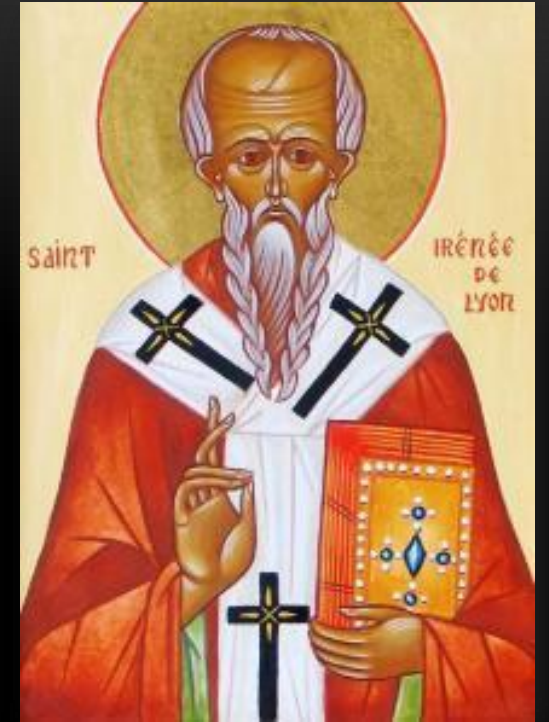


SEPTEMBER 14, 2004

www.time.com



“Man was first made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26), but it was God’s plan to make him grow into God’s likeness (Genesis 1:26)



St Irenaeus  
(2nd century)

# Blessings of Suffering

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# 1. DISPLAYS GOD'S GLORY

- Joh 11:4 “When Jesus heard that, He said, this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”
  - Joh 9:2-3 “His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.
-



“Jesus saw that in the end, Lazarus’s illness and death would be for the glory of God. This is not to say that the sickness came on Lazarus so that God should be glorified, for it would be silly to say this, but rather, since the sickness had come upon Lazarus, Jesus foresaw the wonderful conclusion to Lazarus’s illness.”



St Cyril of Alexandria  
Commentary on the Gospel  
of John 7

## 2. REFINES OUR FAITH

- 1Pe 1:7 “...you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith.. though it is **tested** by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory.”
  - Ps. 66:10 “For You, O God, have tested us; You have **refined** us as silver is refined.”
  - Jam. 1:2-4 “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the **testing** of your faith produces patience.”
-

“Suffering is a real bond, an encouragement to greater love, and the basis of spiritual perfection and godliness. Everywhere you see suffering being praised, everywhere it is accepted as necessary for us. For in the world there is **no one who wins a trophy without suffering**, who has not strengthened himself with labors and dieting and exercise and vigils and many other things like that.”



St John Chrysostom  
Homilies on the Gospel of  
John

# 3. HELPS US SYMPATHIZE WITH OTHERS

- 2Co 1:3-5 "...God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ. Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer."



“You have one deficiency but not another. The neighbor’s case is the opposite. He has another deficit but not the one you have. **You must bear his and he yours.** For thus is the law of love fulfilled.” - St Theodore

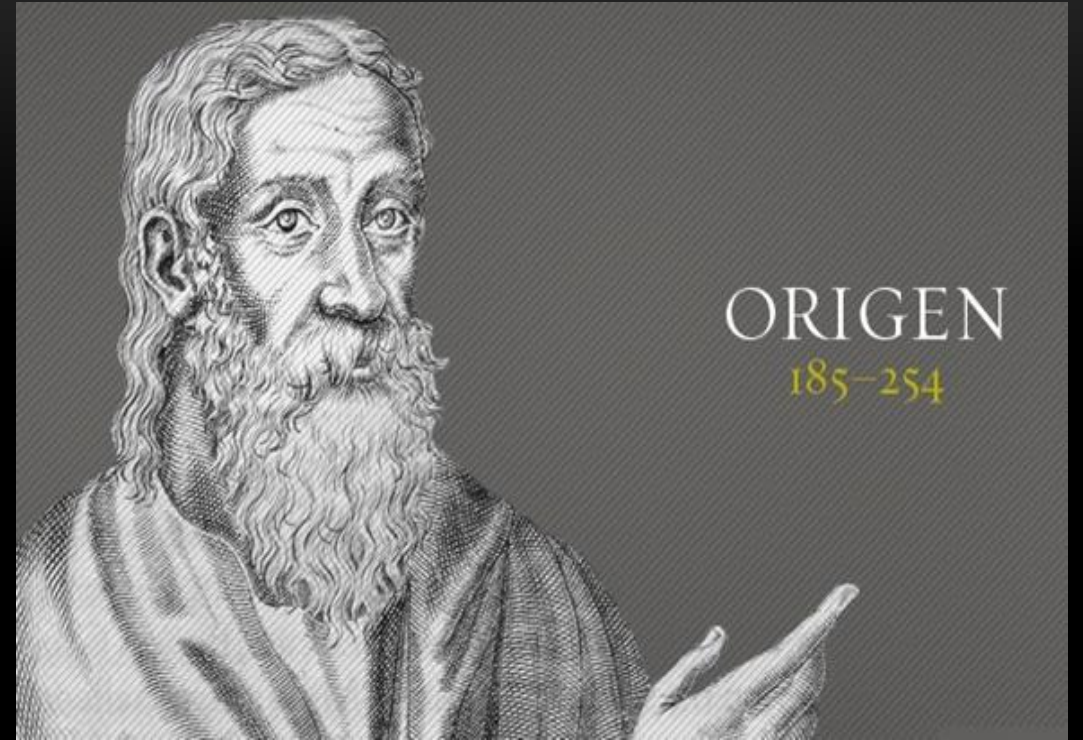


St Theodore  
(Epistle to the Galatians 6.2)

# 4. FOCUSES OUR EYES ON HEAVEN

- 2Co 4:17-18 “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”
  - Rom 8:18 “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”
-

“There is nothing which is worthy of comparison with the future glory. For how can what is mortal be compared to what is immortal, what is visible to what is invisible, what is temporal to what is eternal or what is perishable to what is everlasting?”



## 5. KEEPS US HUMBLE, NEEDING GOD

- 2Co 12:7-9 “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, **lest I be exalted above measure**. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly **I will rather boast in my infirmities**, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

Psalm 119:67 “Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.”



“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world”



C.S. Lewis,  
*The Problem of Pain*, 81

# 6. DRIVES US TO REPENTANCE

- 2Co 7:10 “For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”
  - 1Pe 4:1 “Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin”
-

“Sin produced pain, and through pain sin is annihilated. God tells Eve: “You shall bring forth children in pain.” (Gen 3:16.) And he showed pain as the harvest of sin. However, oh, how great He is! **That which he gave for punishment he changed to salvation.** Sin gave birth to pain; pain destroys sin. Just as a worm that is born by a tree consumes the very same tree, likewise pain, which is born by sin, kills sin when it is supplied by repentance. Pain is good for those who repent sincerely.”



St John Chrysostom  
Homily on Repentance and  
Compunction 7.6.19

# 7. REVEALS OUR TRUE CHARACTER

- Job 36:15 “He delivers the afflicted by their affliction and opens their ear by adversity.”

Heb 12:5-11 “My son, **despise** not the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for who the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you **endure** chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ...For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been **trained** by it.”

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# BLESSINGS OF SUFFERINGS

1. Display God's glory
  2. Refine our faith
  3. Help us sympathize with others
  4. Focuses our eyes on heaven
  5. Keep us humble, in need of God
  6. Drive us to repentance
  7. Reveal our true character
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# Final Words

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“If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you cannot know. You cannot have it both ways”

TIMOTHY KELLER

*The*  
**REASON**  
*for*  
**GOD**

*Belief in an Age  
of Skepticism*