

# Why Does God Allow Hurricanes?

The agnostic philosopher David Hume claimed that tragedies in the world such as Hurricane Harvey and its aftermath last week constitute prima facie evidence that God is either evil, impotent, or non-existent.

Admittedly, reconciling the reality of suffering with faith in a loving, all-powerful God is difficult. John Stott claimed that the existence of suffering in the world posed the single greatest challenge to faith.

When Lee Strobel was preparing to write his book “The Case for Faith: A Journalist Investigates the Toughest Objections to Christianity,” he conducted a nationwide survey asking, “If you could ask God anything what would you ask?” The top response was, “Why is there suffering and evil in the world?”

I realize that when people pose that question they are not as concerned with suffering in the world in general, such as what happened this last week with Hurricane Harvey, as they are with the reality of suffering in their own lives. If there is a God, why would He allow this unwanted divorce, undeserved termination from a job, or unexpected illness?

Think of it this way. You’re traveling on an interstate highway in the middle of nowhere in a driving rainstorm when your headlights go out due to an electrical malfunction in our car. You can’t see two inches in front of you, but you don’t want to pull over to the shoulder of the road for fear of being hit by another car. Suddenly, you spot an 18-wheeler in your rear-view mirror. You allow it to pass you, and then you simply zeroed in on its taillights and follow it safely into the city limits of your town.

Although there is no pat answer to the question, “Why does God allow suffering in the world?” the Bible does offer two truths (or “lights”) we can depend on to lead us safely through the storms of adversity that unexpectedly blow into our lives.

First, God is loving. The psalmist declared, “The earth, O Lord, is full of thy mercy ...” (Psalm 119:64). Even apart from the Bible, the world is filled with the evidence of a benevolent Creator.

Yes, occasionally hurricanes and floods bring indescribable heartache and even death. But such disasters are the exception rather than the rule. Most of the time rivers stay within their banks and winds are held in check. The outpouring of help by first responders and the financial support for those whose lives are destroyed by the occasional disaster are a reflection of the goodness of God in whose image we are made (Genesis 1:26-27).

Second, God is all-powerful. Again, the psalmist claims that God is in control of all His creation: “The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all” (Psalm 103:19). Some people find this truth troubling. If God has the ability to prevent natural disasters and human tragedy, why doesn’t He?

In an attempt to acquit God of responsibility for evil in the world, a growing number of people think of God as a loving but impotent old man who would like to help us, but is incapable of doing so. But do you find any comfort in the belief that you are simply a victim of random events? Fortunately, the Bible can teach us two very important points about national and individual suffering.

First, suffering is the fault of Satan (Job 1:12; Luke 13:16; 2 Corinthians 12:7). If everything good and perfect comes from God (James 1:17), then everything evil and wicked comes from the Devil. Second, although God does not cause suffering, He can use it. The first way He uses it is by chastening His children (Hebrews 12:5-11). Suffering is used by the Lord to show His people the error of their ways and to induce them to repentance. The second way He uses it is by strengthening the faith of His disciples. Peter wrote, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7).

One of the most famous analogies about God's purpose in suffering is that of a bear caught in a trap in the woods. The hunter, wanting to help the bear, approaches him, but the bear will not allow it. The hunter, determined to help, shoots a dart full of drugs into the bear. The bear is now convinced that the hunter wants to hurt him. The drugged animal, now semi-conscious, watches as the hunter actually pushes the bear's paw further into the jaws of the trap in order to release the tension. The bear has all the evidence it needs to conclude the hunter is evil. But the bear has made its judgment too soon, before the hunter frees him from the trap. At some point God will seem unfair to those of us trapped without the benefit of His revealed word.

Maybe through the darkness of the storm you cannot see what ultimate result suffering will bring, but you can find the truth and be comforted in your spirit.

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