

# Dear God, where are you in my pain?

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning. If you do not know me, I'm Hong Park and I'm bringing God's Word this morning.
- Today we are continuing our series which is titled Christmas is the Answer. And we are looking at the question, Dear Lord, where are you in my pain?
- Let me say from the start that today's sermon will be a slight change from the expository verse-by-verse preaching that we are used to in KAC.
- So today is a topical sermon, even though I'll be using the passage that we just read as the foundation. Let's commit this time to God.
- Now, speak, O Lord. Let what is spoken, what is heard, and what is meditated upon be acceptable to you. Let your name be glorified. Amen.
- [ 1 : 0 4 ]     Dear God, where are you in my pain? Dear God, where are you in my pain?
- It is a refrain that echoes all over the world from the times of old. In verse 1 and 2 in our passage today, we see a people in darkness, walking in a land of deep darkness.
- Verse 4 and 5 gives us an idea why the Bible describes them as being in darkness. If you look at the passage, they were in slavery.
- They were greatly burdened and under oppression. Probably they were occupied by enemies. They were suffering. In the two hours that we spent in church this morning, 42 people in Malaysia would have died.
- One case of child abuse would have been reported. Ten people would have received a diagnosis of cancer. And hundreds would have experienced the loss of a loved one.
- [ 2 : 2 0 ]     Perhaps some of us here today are also going through our own trials. It may be the illness. It may be illness in our own lives or in the lives of someone we love.
- The loss of a loved one. A difficult work situation. A financial setback. Unemployment. Unemployment. Family conflicts.
- A heartache of a wayward child. Or perhaps an irresponsible parent. Or an unfaithful spouse. In the current news, we have reports of acts of war, epidemics, acts of terror, floods, forest fires, religious persecution, political oppression.
- All adding to human pain and suffering. It is true to say that no one is immune. Something will eventually come our way.
- In 2010, I sat with my wife in our living room and cried after she received a diagnosis of colon cancer. She had a surgery and a few months later, a few months of chemotherapy.
- [ 3 : 3 3 ]     It was not easy for her or for the family. Two years later, in 2012, I experienced what we call a trigeminal neuralgia, which made eating and speaking extremely painful.
- A scan confirmed that I had a brain tumor. As I was waiting for my brain surgery, I unexpectedly discovered I also had a massive collection of fluid and a cyst in the right side of my chest, in my right pleural cavity, which put the surgery on hold.

What followed was a month of uncertainty and pain, when my colleagues could not agree on the best way forward. In a most unexpected way, God provided a cardiothoracic surgeon willing to operate on my chest first.

A few weeks later, I finally had my brain surgery. In 2018, I had a second brain surgery and I am looking at the likelihood of a third one.

Living in Malaysia, we are surrounded by people of other belief systems. Our Buddhist friends say that we suffer because we are too attached to our desires.

[ 4 : 50 ] The Hindu says suffering is due to karma, a payback for all the bad deeds that you have done, either in this life or in a past life. The Muslims say that suffering is punishment for sins.

While the atheists find no reason, no meaning or purpose to suffering, and say that the existence of evil in this world clearly shows there is no God.

What about the Christian landscape? The majority of Christians are well acquainted with pain, being victims of persecution around the world.

When a disaster strikes, believers and non-believers suffer alike. The Indonesian tsunami in 2018, it cut short the lives of hundreds of students attending a Bible camp.

Tornadoes don't skip over the houses of Christians and damage only the houses of unbelievers. There are Christians, especially who live in the West, who believe that God is there to make their lives easy, especially if they live what they believe to be a good Christian life.

[ 6 : 01 ] If they suffer, they expect God to do something about it instead. What good is God if he doesn't do that? I remember in the early days of the charismatic movement in the 70s and 80s, people were taught that Christians should not seek medical help because that would show a lack of faith in God.

They should only pray and expect healing. Today, there are preachers who teach that good health and monetary prosperity is the right of all Christians now.

And all you need is faith enough to name it and claim it. Such preachers seem to have misread the numerous reference to pain and suffering and physical needs in the New Testament.

This morning, I want to try to answer the question, Dear God, where are you in my pain? By looking at some of the things the Bible have to say about suffering.

It is a vast, complex and emotive subject. We are fellow sufferers and I am no expert on the topic. What I will do is just give you some things to reflect upon.

[ 7 : 15 ] Our real understanding of suffering will come only when we undergo suffering ourselves. I hope to show today that Christmas is the ultimate answer to the problem of our pain.

Let's start at the very beginning. God's pristine creation. Most of us are too familiar with this story. God's original creation recorded in Genesis was a paradise.

It was very good. There was no evil, no pain, no suffering, no disease, no death, no work stresses. Suffering was not God's intention for mankind.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve sinned by giving in to Satan's temptation to God-likeness. They ate from that one tree that God warned them not to.

And God said that if they did, the consequence was death. So God pronounces just judgment and paradise was lost.

[ 8 : 21 ] The command to be fruitful and multiply will be accomplished through pain. The command to work the ground is now painful toil. And death and decay awaits us all.

Sin made its home in the human heart, passing from one generation to the next. And creation itself was subjected to decay.

Natural disasters, disease, death, marked the once perfect creation. So we can say that suffering and death, in general, is a natural consequence and just judgment of God on our sins.

Well, you may then ask, has God lost control of the earth? Has the earth run wild? Well, no, he has not.

The Bible is clear that God is sovereign. And in fact, even before the creation of the world, he has already planned to rescue mankind from sin, to put an end to evil, pain and suffering, and to restore his creation.

[ 9 : 35 ] Now, God is 100% in control of human history. This powerful God works his perfect will in such a way that it does not violate human freedom.

Human beings are still free agents. God never forces people to do anything they don't want to do. And he is also not responsible for the evil that people do.

James says, when tempted, no one should say, God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone. But each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.

And John writes, God is light. In him there is no darkness at all. So the good and the bad that people do, that you and I do, are within our own control.

And we bear full responsibility for them. And yet, they are in God's perfect plan. For example, when Judas decided to betray Jesus, it was something that he wanted to, that he did freely.

[ 10 : 55 ] He considered it, and he acted on his own free will. And yet, it was part of God's plan. Jesus could therefore say, the Son of Man will go to his death as it has been decreed, but woe to the man who betrays him.

Judas was responsible. Paul wrote, God works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, both for the individual and for the whole of mankind.

Nothing happens by accident. Suffering would not be outside God's plan, but a part of it. Remember how the nation of Israel, how the nation of Israel was birthed from the suffering of the patriarchs in Genesis.

Look at the suffering the patriarchs had to go through before Israel was born. And of course, suffering continues from then on. Okay.

So far, we have established that pain and suffering are part and parcel of this fallen world. and that God is still in total control of what happens, even pain.

[ 12 : 11 ] But you say, this world is not fair. Why doesn't God, why doesn't God allow suffering only for those who do evil? Look, the bad live relatively stress-free life, pain-free life, while the good suffer, and often at the hands of the bad people.

natural disasters are so random and indiscriminate, and good people do die young. Surprise, surprise, the Bible agrees with you.

The psalmist and the writer of Ecclesiastes, among others, express exactly the same sentiment. While it is fair to say that suffering and death in general is a consequence of our sin, and, in general, a man reaps what he sows, one of the lessons from the book of Job is that no one can presume to know the reasons God might have for any particular instance of suffering.

You see, the Bible affirms that Job was blameless and upright, a man who feared God and shunned evil. nobody deserved suffering less than Job, and yet, few have suffered more.

His calamities would have crushed most people. He lost family, lost fortune, and lost health. He asked the same questions we would.

- [ 13 : 47 ] Why me? Did I do anything wrong? Is God trying to tell me something? His three friends came to him and said, come on, don't deny it, you have done a great sin.
- Why else would God cause you to suffer like that? He is fair, you know. One conclusion of the book, and there are many other conclusions, was that the friends' moralistic arguments were wrong.
- God said to one, I am angry with you and your two friends because you have not spoken of me what is right as my servant Job has. So don't look, so please don't look at a suffering person and jump to the conclusion that he is a worse sinner than you.
- We often do get, we often do not get what we deserve or deserve what we get. And of course, the most innocent of all sufferers was Jesus.
- He knew no sin and yet he suffered greatly. So if you are suffering at this moment, don't jump to the only conclusion like some, that God is punishing you or has abandoned you.
- [ 15 : 07 ] Okay, okay, I got another question. Since God is sovereign and he allows suffering to continue even for the godly, can I really trust him?
- can I really love him? He is like, you know, sitting up in heaven in splendor and comfort, looking down on our misery and pain.
- Doesn't that make him unfeeling, whole or even cruel? Does he really care? why don't he just remove all evil and pain now?
- To answer this question, let's turn back to our passage. Verse 2, these people are walking in darkness and that is us, a light has shone.
- From verse 4 to 5, these people start to rejoice as burdens are lifted, oppression and wars are ended. And what caused this?
- [ 16 : 12 ] Verse 6 tells us, for to us a child is born, to us a son is given. Christmas was what happened. How does Christmas provide further answers to our question of the day?
- Dear God, where are you in my pain? The answer lies in the identity of this baby. Look at verse 6.
- He is wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. We just sung that just now. Hey, this baby is God himself.
- This is an unprecedented event. The creator of this world enters a broken creation as a weak human being. We give this event a name, the incarnation of God.
- And see how the gospel writers describe it. the light of all mankind came into the world. The word became flesh. An angel tells Mary, you will conceive and give birth to a son and you are to call him Jesus.
- [ 17 : 31 ] He will be great and will be called son of the most high. An angel tells Joseph, you call him Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.
- And a choir of angels announced at his birth, today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord.
- So we see in these few verses that God became flesh in the person of Jesus Christ to be a saviour. Jesus was fully God at the same time fully man.
- And he came to save people from their sins. Some may ask, why didn't Jesus just bring God's justice and punish all evil and sin upon his arrival?
- Why allow the darkness to continue? We are still in darkness sometimes. Underlying such a question is the belief that only some people are terrible sinners.
- [ 18 : 34 ] what the rest of us are, not too bad. But the Bible is clear that there is no one who is righteous. All have sinned and fallen away, even the so-called good people.

If Jesus snapped his finger to remove evil, poof, there goes every human being too. No, the first time Jesus came was not to bring God's justice, but to bear it.

His destiny was the cross. Peter says he himself bore our sins on his body on the cross. And Paul says God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God.

Jesus took our sin and its punishment on the cross and in its place, give us his righteousness to make us right with God and no longer children of wrath.

This exchange is ours by grace through faith. Paul writes, for it is by grace you have been saved through faith. And this not of yourself, it's the gift of God, a gift, not something that we can earn on our own merit.

[ 19 : 56 ] God and why did God even want to do this? It was because he loved us. John says, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Now note that this is given freely only to those who accept what Jesus has done on their behalf. So Jesus came to prepare for himself a people saved by grace so that the next time when he comes back as judge, he can put an end to evil and pain and suffering without destroying us all.

When we reflect on the incarnation, we see a God who is not remote, uninvolved, sitting in the comfort of heaven, deaf to the sound of our misery.

No, no. When he saw the world in darkness, he got involved. In Jesus, he left the riches of heaven, immersed himself in our darkness, suffering with us and for us.

Jesus' interaction with suffering people is very telling of what God thinks of sufferers. He had compassion on them. he reached out and healed.

[ 21 : 23 ] He raised their dead. God set aside his divine privileges and experienced the weakness of the human body with its normal human limitations, pain, tiredness, thirst, hunger.

His life was filled with cries and tears. He was tempted in every way common to man and yet without sin. a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief.

He experienced bereavement of friends and family, being pursued by people who wanted him dead, even from childhood. He was a refugee, often misunderstood even by family, betrayed, abandoned by friends, suffered the injustice of a sham trial, abused, tortured, and finally murdered at the hands of his creatures.

Jesus, who was sinless, suffered. On the cross, not only did he experience the agony of torture and death, he also know the darkness of God-forsakenness.

He cried out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That perfect and infinite love he shared with the Father was disrupted by God's own wrath against sin.

[ 22 : 49 ] Jesus experienced forsakenness so that we might never ever be forsaken by God. if we ever doubt that God loved us, look at the cross.

He proves his love on the cross. See the extreme length God would go to save us. Jesus could have abandoned his mission.

He could have got down from the cross, but he did not. He endured the agony because, the Bible says, of the joy set before him. What joy?

The joy of accomplishing the redemption of humanity. Suffering was the cost to God for our forgiveness.

John Dixon writes, what the Muslim denounce as blasphemy, the Christian holds precious. God has wounds. If you are a Christian and you are undergoing suffering, remember that your sins are already forgiven and that your punishment has been taken by Jesus.

[ 24 : 02 ] If after seeking the Lord, you are made aware that it is because of a sin in your life, then it is God getting your attention so that you may repent and make a cost correction.

God is disciplining you like a child, not punishing you like an enemy. When faced with their own mortality, many will ask, have I done enough?

am I good enough for heaven? Christian, look at Jesus on the cross. It is finished, he said.

Trust in the finished work of Christ. It's not about you. It's about what Jesus has done. God is pleased with Jesus. And if you are in Christ, you are forgiven, and God accepts you.

So, what can we say? Our sovereign God is not careless, unfeeling, cold, or cruel.

[ 25 : 05 ] He did not exempt himself from suffering. He joined us. He experienced human sorrow and grief. And so he is able to empathize with our weaknesses, having been tempted in every way.

And when we look at the cross, we know how much he loves us, and the extreme length he will go to for our good. And so when we suffer, we can trust in his goodness towards us.

We know he will not abandon us. We can go to him in confidence that he will not turn us away. We have an advocate in heaven who graduated from the school of suffering.

Because of Jesus, God understands. He truly understands our pain. And in a very strange way, God suffers with us.

Remember when Saul was persecuting the church? What did the reason Jesus say to him? Saul, Saul, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? Who are you, Lord?

[ 26 : 15 ] Saul asked. I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Jesus feels the suffering of his persecuted followers. And likewise, he feels the pain that you are going through today.

After all, if you are a Christian, he dwells in you, doesn't he? The New Testament writers are not surprised by suffering.

They told Christians to expect painful trials of many kinds. and yet they told them to consider it pure joy. Not joy because of the pain, but joy because it is an opportunity for spiritual growth.

Suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope. And when we walk with God through our pain, it will make us mature and complete, not lacking in anything.

And end, it will result in praise, in glory, and in honour when Jesus comes again. Paul writes, all things work together for the good of them who love God, even suffering.

[ 27 : 33 ] Some twist the statement to mean only good things will happen to those who love God. No, no, no. In fact, Paul is saying exactly the opposite. When we suffer, our faith is tested like gold being purified.

The impurities that are still present in our souls will be removed, while the gold, the godly attributes in us, will be refined. Suffering draws us to God like nothing else can.

Peter tells sufferers that they should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good, promising that the god of all grace after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong.

But that's not the end. The final promise to us is yet to come. God promises you that this present pain is only temporary.

And we look forward to the day where Jesus will come back for the people he prepared and to bring God's justice. On that day, we will share in Jesus' resurrection.

[ 28 : 51 ] And our final hope is one of a painless future with God. Paul wrote, if only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

At the last trumpet, Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body. We will be changed in a flesh in the twinkling of an eye.

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will rise imperishable. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, sorry, when the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true.

Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your victory, where, O death, is your sting? And God will bring in the new heaven and the new earth.

John writes in Revelations, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

[ 30 : 05 ] He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

This, this is our true destination. So, dear God, where are you in my pain? The answer is that God is with you in your pain, suffering with you, walking with you through it, promising you that he can use this pain for ultimate good.

Through your pain, you will get to know him more completely. You may not see it yet, but he tells you to trust him. Remember that Joseph, could not see the good that was to come while he was lingering in prison in Egypt.

You can read of his story in Genesis. Look at the cross and know that he can be trusted. His love for you has no limits. Bring your pain to him like the psalmist.

Cry out to him like Job. Seek him in the scriptures. He understands and cares. He himself had hurt, bled, cried and suffered.

[ 31 : 24 ] Then you take the next logical step. If you have to repent, do so. If suffering is caused by others, we learn to forgive.

Reach out to the people you can trust. Ask your church family to pray with you so that you can be strengthened. Relief from suffering may not come soon, and so we may have to learn to walk with God through it on the long haul.

If you are suffering because of illness, go and seek medical care, which the good Lord has given to us. If it is an illness, ask God to heal you.

I believe God still heals today. And he heals not because we can name it and claim it or declare it or by saying the right prayer or encountering the right healer.

We cannot manipulate God. He heals miraculously if he wills. And he may heal through the medical discoveries he has graciously given to us.

[ 32 : 37 ] But if suffering is a test, there is a possibility people will fail. Here I would like to caution that many have lost their faith when plunged into suffering.

They just cannot believe God allows this to happen to them. So we have to prepare ourselves to face suffering. As noted, it will come that's just life.

And one way to prepare is actually to read. Read good books like Philip Yenzi's Where Is God When It Hurts? Or Timothy Kellis Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering.

They will help us to equip ourselves for and in our own suffering. When I faced my health issues, one of the lessons I learned was that I was never in control of my life.

Often we are deluded to think that we are in control. As a doctor I make decisions for the health of others. That time I could not decide.

[ 33 : 51 ] The issues were very confusing. What was the correct next step to take? So I had to learn to trust God. I had to learn to rest in Jesus and to let him lead.

I had to learn in my heart not just in my head that he is the good shepherd. He is the one in control of all things.

And he often leads us to quiet waters and green fields and in paths where we feel everything is just right with this world. But sometimes he leads us through the darkest valleys which can frighten us.

But don't be afraid. The same Lord is leading us. He does not abandon us in the dark. He suffers with us and he comforts us. His goodness and love still pursues us.

And eventually one day one day when we breathe our last we will realize that we have arrived at our destination and we will dwell in his house forever.

[ 35 : 05 ] The last word is not death my friends it is life eternal. Thank you. Let's just pray.

Lord we just ask and thank you for reminding us that you love us and that you went all the way on the cross for us and so we can trust you even as we go through our own sufferings.

thank you that you can make something beautiful out of it and we look forward to that day when you will bring your new heaven and your new earth and we can rejoice with you forever.

Amen.