

pain to make a way of ultimate escape from it. Jesus Christ came to “taste death for everyone” (**Hebrews 2:9**). “He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities...and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (**Isaiah 53:4-6**). The greatest evidence of God’s love in the face of our pain is that He shares it. He has not left us to suffer alone. That God came into our world and voluntarily experienced our suffering makes the God of the Bible totally incredible.

Whatever comes your way, here are two unchangeable truths you can be sure of: first, God is love and He loves you personally. Second, God will ultimately make all wrongs right and heal the wounds this world has given you. When Jesus suffered and died on the cross, He proved that God loves fallen, suffering humanity more than His own life. His death ensured that all who put their faith in Him will have a glorious future completely free from all suffering. The promise of the

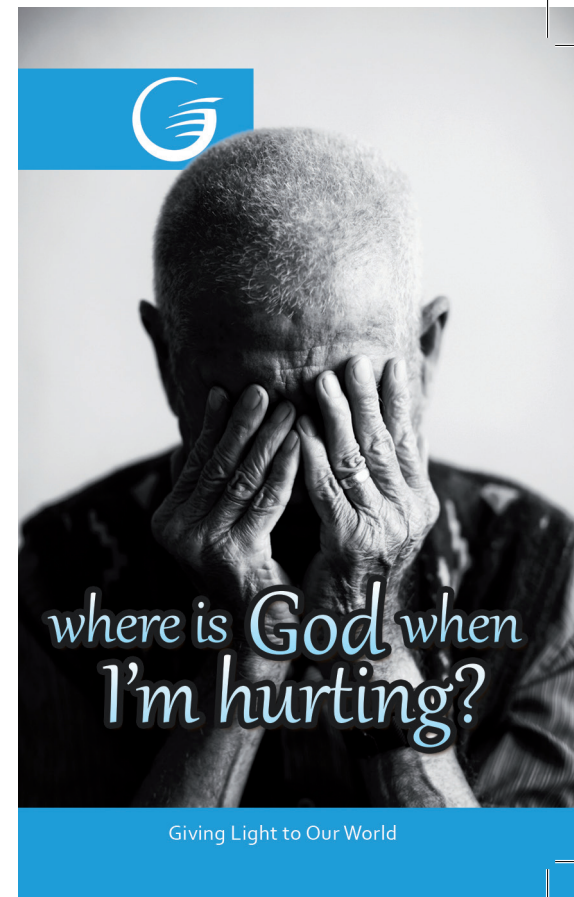
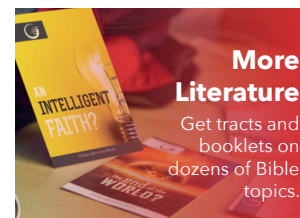
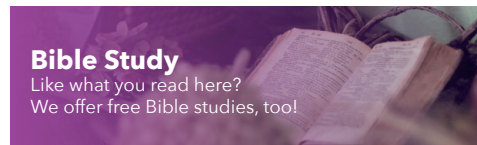
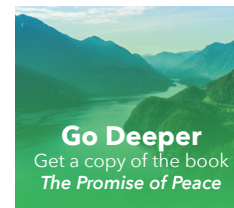
Bible, made sure by the death of Christ on the cross, is for you:

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (**Revelation 21:4**).

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture is taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2007 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Cover image: ©delihayat/Vetta/Getty Images



The day begins. Any given day. A family of five starts a drive across town. The crash is sudden. Metal, plastic and flesh are torn apart. Three are dead and two are severely injured. But the drunk driver in the speeding truck that hit them is merely bruised. Why?

A terrible dictator seizes control of an entire nation, and millions suffer his abuses. Why?

The doctor says, "I have some bad news," and then he sadly explains that you have cancer. Why?

Every day stories like these unfold. Sometimes we merely hear about them secondhand or on the nightly news, and other times the story is our own. Once we steady ourselves from the shock, we can't help but ask the most natural question in the world: if God is all-powerful and all-good, why do we suffer at all? It's hard to imagine a bigger or more important question. And we all ask it sooner or later.

Not many possible answers are available. Think about it. Either God is *willing* to prevent bad things from happening and can't, in which case He is not all-powerful. Or God is able to prevent bad things from happening but He's *unwilling*, in which case He is not good. Or, there's a third option: God is both able and

willing, but God is love, in which case there is a line that even Almighty God will not cross, and that line is our free will.

The Bible teaches the third position, and a better or more comforting answer is impossible to imagine. In short, the human story, as told in the Bible, goes like this:

1. "God is love" (1 John 4:16). This is the basic, fundamental truth about God.

2. "God created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). That is, God made humans with the capacity to love like God loves—by the exercise of free will.

3. Having been made with free will and therefore with the capacity for love, mankind has "sinned and fallen" from the glorious moral position of his original creation (Romans 3:23).

4. But here is good news: God has developed an incredible rescue plan by which any and all human beings who so desire will be saved "by grace...through faith" (Ephesians 2:8)—not by imposed power of force, but by the drawing, transforming power of God's love. Love is the only way God can destroy evil and suffering while at the same time preserving our free will and with it our ability to love.

## IS IT FAIR?

So the short answer to why we suffer is that we and other human beings—in the past and in the present—have chosen evil, and suffering is the result. It's not fair. It's not even reasonable. Sin is, by definition, unfair, unjust, hurtful, and wrong. It's downright brutal. But one thing it is not: sin is not God's will. God does not want us to suffer. But neither does He want to make us slaves or robots. To be human is to be free, and to be free means we can either choose good or evil with their respective effects.

The plain truth shows that love cannot exist without free will, and free will by its very nature allows for bad choices to be made. So when we say that if God were good He would not allow anyone to ever do anything to cause pain to oneself or to anyone else, we simply are not making logical sense. The opposite is actually true: precisely because God is good, He must allow us to make choices, both good and bad, and experience their outcomes. God always and only wants us to choose good, but He will *not* force us. God never wills evil or the pain that attends it. We do. Suffering is the

by-product of human choices, not God's. That is the sober reality of freedom.

Yet God is so good that He cannot remain isolated or insulated from our suffering. According to the Bible, He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15, KJV). Speaking of God's relation to human pain, the prophet Isaiah said, "In all their affliction He was afflicted" (Isaiah 63:9). God so deeply loves each member of the human race that Jesus basically said that anything we do for or against one another is as if we did those deeds to Him (Matthew 25:41-45). All suffering touches God. He is aware of all the tears we cry and the sorrow, grief, or anguish behind them. King David sang of God's deep sympathy: "You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book" (Psalm 56:8, NLT). Love is like that. It suffers with those who suffer.

## NOTHING TOO BIG FOR GOD TO CARRY

But the story gets even more amazing. Not only does God feel our pain in His heart from a distance, He literally plunged down into our