



DATE	May 6, 2018
SPEAKER	David Smith
TITLE	The Problem of Evil and Suffering
SERIES	Everyone has questions about God. They can be difficult and overwhelming and stir up doubts inside of us. Let's look for some answers as we investigate The Problem of God, because an informed faith is stronger than an assumed one.

Introduction: Skeptics argue that the presence of evil and suffering prove that a loving, powerful, good God doesn't exist. But does it? In today's study, we'll look at this argument and consider another side to it.

1. Do you know a skeptic among your family or friends that struggles with the reality that a good, loving, omnipotent God allows evil and suffering? Is this question an issue in your life, now or in the past? Have you found a way to deal with these doubts?
2. Pastor David said the Bible is honest about the reality of pain and suffering. Read the following passages: *Psalm 6:1-3, Habakkuk 1:1-3, Revelation 6:9-10*

Although each writer expresses heartache about God's apparent lack of attention, it does not appear to shake their faith. How do you account for this? How does their honest expression of feelings on the reality of evil and suffering affect your viewpoint? Does it strengthen or weaken your faith? Why?

3. Evil and suffering are summarized this way by the following religious thoughts:
 - New Age—since we're all part of a divine consciousness, evil and suffering are an illusion
 - Hinduism—evil and suffering are a result of karma. Good and bad things happen based on whether a person has been good or bad in their present or past life.
 - Atheism—Since evil and suffering is present, it proves a good God does not exist.
 - Deism-- Evil and suffering are real. God exists but is unable or unwilling to do anything
 - Christianity—Evil and suffering exists, and so does a loving, good God

As you consider your personal beliefs and observations on how the world really works, which one makes the most sense to you? What evidence supports your position?

4. Review Genesis chapters 1 & 2. What picture do these chapters present about a good God? Considering all the chaos in the rest of Scripture, what does it do to the assumption that a good God will always eliminate evil as far as He can?
5. Read Ecclesiastes 3:1; John 9:1-3; Genesis 3. Pastor David said a good God allows evil and suffering to retain free will and create a greater good. Do these passages support that idea? How do you see free choice as an element that figures into the whole idea of good and evil? Can we even choose "good" if there is no possibility of choosing evil? Do you agree with the idea that the only way to remove evil and suffering is to take away the gift of free will?

6. Read Genesis 50:20. Joseph tells his brothers that they meant to harm him but God meant it for good. How does Joseph's story and the other inspirational stories Pastor David shared support the idea of God's greater good? Have you experienced this in your own life? Can you share a time when some difficulty in your life made you stronger or brought about something good? Are these valid explanations on why a good God might allow suffering? Why or why not?
7. Read 2 Thessalonians 2:7. If you've read the book *Lord of the Flies* or seen the movie *The Purge*, you've seen imaginary possibilities of what it might look like if all moral restraints are removed. How does the idea that God might actually be holding back evil and suffering fit into your worldview? Does it change your perspective of God? Why or why not?
8. Pastor David said Christianity proclaims a God who became like us, suffered with us and for us. How do these thoughts present the idea of a personal, loving God? How do they provide comfort and support to you in your own faith?

Conclusion: It's natural to struggle in understanding and believing that God intends a higher, deeper and greater good by allowing evil and suffering. Perhaps that's because we fail to recognize how limited our own knowledge and understanding of this world and God's kingdom really is. And when suffering does not come with an obvious purpose, it's in those times we trust God.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose." - Romans 8:28