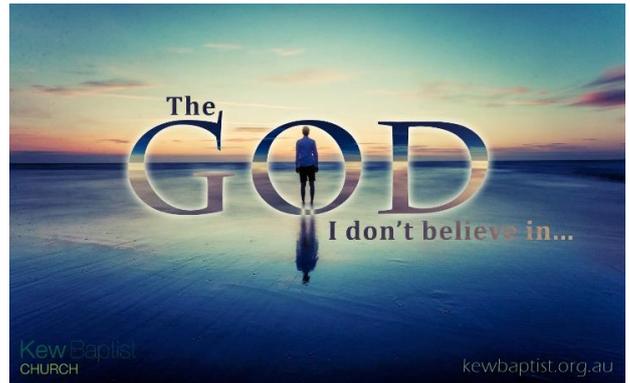


The Uncaring God



1. All people, in all places, over all times of human history experience suffering of one sort or another. And as such, every worldview, philosophy, religion-even atheism-must deal with the question of suffering. Consider the following quote: "When belief in God becomes difficult, the tendency is to turn away from him; but in heaven's name, to what? (G.K. Chesterton). Do you think suffering disproves God's existence?"
2. In the book of Job, God permits Satan to cause Job great suffering. In the course of some 30+ chapters, Job's friends try to answer and deal with the question of why Job has suffered as he has. IN the end, God appears to Job (ch. 38), but God never gives Job a reason for his suffering, but He gives Himself. Job says, "I am unworthy-how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth... My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you, and I repent in dust and ashes." Does God owe us an apology or explanation for our suffering? Will seeing God one day be enough for us?
3. In C.S. Lewis' book, *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, an interesting conversation takes place between Lucy and Mr & Mrs Beaver. The topic is the nature of Aslan (who is the figure of Christ). Lucy asks, "Is he...quite safe? "Safe?" said Mr Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you." Discuss and reflect upon the God the bible actually presents to us, and contrast this with the sometimes false and popular notions about God.
4. Christian biblical theology teaches that humans beings are given free will by God to choose how they will live and act. Do you think it is possible for God to give humans free will without the consequence that they may choose evil, and thus suffering on themselves and others?
5. What do you think your atheist friend would give as a response to the question: "why is there suffering, and apparent evil, in this world?"
6. Read the following passage and reflect upon and discuss how this Christian vision of the future helps us deal with our present suffering: "*Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "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. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* Re 21:1-4.

7. In John 16 Jesus says that “in this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world.” How might believing in God and following Jesus help us in our own suffering, and in what ways are those who follow Jesus called to help others in their suffering?
8. Given that everyone does suffer to some degree, how might you use suffering to become a more loving, wise, humble, kind and compassionate person?

Some thoughts and biblical passages on suffering you may want to reflect upon and discuss:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. Ro 8:14–17.

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. Php 3:10–11.

During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. Heb 5:7–10.

But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

“He committed no sin,
and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” 1 Pe 2:20–24.

Quotes

“The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word “love”, and look on things as if man were the centre of them. Man is not the centre. God does not exist for the sake of man. Man does not exist for his own sake. “Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” We were made not primarily that we may love God (though we were made for that too) but that God may love us, that we may become objects in which the divine love may rest “well pleased”.” — C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

“There is no learning sympathy except by suffering. It cannot be studied from a book, it must be written on the heart. You must go through the fire if you would have sympathy with others who tread the glowing coals. You must yourself bear the cross if you would feel for those whose life is a burden to them.” C. H. Spurgeon

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.” Helen Keller