

**Christianity in the Crosshairs: Answering the 10 Objections  
Skeptics Raise Most Often**

**ANSWERS #1: If God Is Good, Why Is There  
So Much Evil and Innocent Suffering?**

**The God on Trial: A Historical Investigation into Evil, Innocent  
Suffering, Divine Sovereignty, and the Silence of Heaven**

By [Chaplain Todd DuBord \(M.Div.\)](#)



## About Chaplain Todd DuBord (M.Div.)

Raised in an atheist and agnostic liberal household in Northern California, Chaplain Todd DuBord began his early adulthood questioning whether life had a transcendent purpose. His search led him to investigate the sciences, world religions, history, and competing philosophical understandings of existence. Over more than a decade of formal and independent education and research, he became persuaded of Christianity's historical and theological claims while retaining a deep respect for sincere inquiry and people of other convictions. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Bethany University and a Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary. Todd has also recently returned from Oxford University in England, where he is considering pursuing a Ph.D. there or at other leading universities, including Ivy League institutions. His studies have included apologetics, canonicity, world religions, America's religious history, biblical and ecclesiastical languages and interpretation, historical theology, comparative religion, textual criticism and the sciences.

Since 2006, Todd has worked closely with **Chuck and Gena Norris** in research, writing, ministry, and humanitarian outreach; he has served as a research assistant and personal pastor and later as chaplain for Top Kick Productions. His extensive historical and theological research contributed to Chuck Norris's more than 2,000 syndicated columns and books, including the New York Times bestseller *Black Belt Patriotism* and *The Official Chuck Norris Fact Book*, and he co-wrote *Acts of Kindness* with Chuck's mother, Wilma Norris Knight. In 2007, during the Iraq War, Todd accompanied Chuck and his publicist—and Todd's longtime friend—Jeff on a [tour of the Middle East](#) to encourage and personally thank American military personnel serving overseas. Their journey included visits with deployed troops and wounded service members recovering in military hospitals, providing opportunities to express appreciation, offer encouragement, and personally support those bearing the sacrifices of war.

Todd has also led successful national efforts to [restore omitted religious history at prominent American historic landmarks](#), including the Washington Monument and Historic Jamestown. Through extensive examination of original historical documents, inscriptions, and public exhibits, he has challenged incomplete or misleading presentations of America's religious heritage and advocated for the restoration of historically documented facts. His investigations have received national media attention, including coverage on Fox News, and have helped bring greater public awareness to the religious convictions, biblical influences, and spiritual heritage reflected in America's founding and development. He has also conducted research and public advocacy concerning historical presentations at Independence Hall, the U.S. Capitol Visitor Center, Monticello, and the U.S. Supreme Court.

After approximately four decades of pastoral and chaplaincy ministry, including care for 1000s of families confronting illness, loss, addiction, and tragedy, he founded the non-profit educational agency CrossFireUSA ([www.CrossFireUSA.org](http://www.CrossFireUSA.org)) to equip Americans and others around the world to examine faith, religion, science, history, America's religious heritage, and the moral foundations of communities.

Todd's public work continues to include historical investigations, articles, speaking, prison and hospital ministry, and helping people critically examine Christianity's and other global religions' claims. His own journey from antagonist atheism to his Christian faith, together with decades spent walking beside suffering people, uniquely qualifies him and informs the present investigation.

For a more detailed biography of Todd, please visit: <https://crossfireusa.org/about>

# Contents

*Select a section title to jump directly to that part of the investigation.*

|                                                                                                                             |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| <a href="#"><u>The Children Who Never Came Home: Two Kinds of Horror, One Devastating Question</u></a>                      | 4  |
| <a href="#"><u>When Suffering Takes So Many Forms: Why Doesn't God Intervene?</u></a>                                       | 6  |
| <a href="#"><u>When These Questions Entered My Own Home and Life</u></a>                                                    | 8  |
| <a href="#"><u>The Question That Unsettles Believers and Unbelievers Alike</u></a>                                          | 10 |
| <a href="#"><u>What, Precisely, Is on Trial?</u></a>                                                                        | 12 |
| <a href="#"><u>The Long Historical Argument: Job, Augustine, Lisbon, and the Modern Skeptic</u></a>                         | 14 |
| <a href="#"><u>When the Righteous Suffer and Heaven Offers No Explanation: The Astonishing Lessons of Job</u></a>           | 17 |
| <a href="#"><u>Is God and Evil A Contradiction—Or Is Evil Evidence Against God?</u></a>                                     | 21 |
| <a href="#"><u>Did God Have to Give Us Freedom—And Could He Have Stopped the Worst Choices?</u></a>                         | 23 |
| <a href="#"><u>Must God Prevent Every Pain Before We Can Call Him Good?</u></a>                                             | 25 |
| <a href="#"><u>Why Does a Child Get Cancer When Nobody Chose It?</u></a>                                                    | 29 |
| <a href="#"><u>Was the World Broken at the Fall—And Whose Sin Are We Talking About?</u></a>                                 | 31 |
| <a href="#"><u>Did God Send the Storm, Allow the Storm, or Merely Watch It Happen?</u></a>                                  | 32 |
| <a href="#"><u>Should We Expect God to Rescue Us from Every Danger We Choose to Live With?</u></a>                          | 34 |
| <a href="#"><u>When Human Ingenuity Becomes Human Vulnerability: Must God Prevent Every Accident We Create?</u></a>         | 37 |
| <a href="#"><u>If One Tragedy Escapes God's Rule, What Remains of Providence?</u></a>                                       | 40 |
| <a href="#"><u>If God Knows What Will Happen, Why Create This World at All?</u></a>                                         | 41 |
| <a href="#"><u>Could Suffering Be A School for the Soul—Or Does That Insult the Victims?</u></a>                            | 45 |
| <a href="#"><u>What About Prayers for Healing That Never Receive a Yes—Or Did They in Heaven?</u></a>                       | 46 |
| <a href="#"><u>Does Saying “God Works All Things for Good” Erase Real Evil?</u></a>                                         | 49 |
| <a href="#"><u>Why Doesn't God Show Himself Clearly—And Stop People from Doubting?</u></a>                                  | 50 |
| <a href="#"><u>Does “God's Ways Are Higher” Answer Anything—Or End the Investigation?</u></a>                               | 51 |
| <a href="#"><u>If Atheism Is True, Is Evil Still Genuinely Evil?</u></a>                                                    | 53 |
| <a href="#"><u>How the World's Major Religions Understand Suffering—And Where Christianity Differs</u></a>                  | 54 |
| <a href="#"><u>The Case for Miracles—Or God's Intervention: Has Heaven Really Never Answered a Prayer?</u></a>              | 59 |
| <a href="#"><u>Part One: The Evidence for Miracles and Answered Prayer</u></a>                                              | 59 |
| <a href="#"><u>Part Two: The Greatest Claimed Divine Intervention of All—What If God Himself Entered Human History?</u></a> | 69 |
| <a href="#"><u>From Genesis to Revelation: the Long Campaign Against Evil</u></a>                                           | 76 |
| <a href="#"><u>What Can We Know About a God Who Suffers?</u></a>                                                            | 78 |
| <a href="#"><u>Would Heaven Redeem Suffering—Or Simply Make Us Forget It?</u></a>                                           | 80 |
| <a href="#"><u>When Christ Returns: Will Evil, War, and Death Finally Meet Their End?</u></a>                               | 82 |
| <a href="#"><u>If the Innocent Suffer, Does Divine Justice Still Mean Anything?</u></a>                                     | 85 |
| <a href="#"><u>What Did Suffering Teach Me—And What Must I Never Claim About Yours?</u></a>                                 | 87 |
| <a href="#"><u>Ten Questions the Skeptic Is Right to Keep Asking</u></a>                                                    | 88 |
| <a href="#"><u>The Verdict Is Not a Slogan</u></a>                                                                          | 90 |
| <a href="#"><u>When the Argument Becomes Your Own Grief: What Can You Do Now?</u></a>                                       | 92 |
| <a href="#"><u>When Cancer Became God's Servant: the Faith of Nanci Alcorn (1953–2022)</u></a>                              | 94 |



# Where Was God When the Children Died?



## The Children Who Never Came Home: Two Kinds of Horror, One Devastating Question

On October 19, 2026, Associated Press reported that a drone attack in Khartoum, Sudan, had killed three children, ages two, four, and six, amid a war that has devastated families and driven millions from their homes. That same day, Reuters reported lethal flooding in eastern Spain, where torrential rain forced evacuations and extraordinary rooftop rescues. One catastrophe arose from deliberate human warfare; the other from water, weather, geography, and the terrifying vulnerability of ordinary people. Together they force a question that neither religious slogans nor confident atheistic dismissals can dispose of easily: if an all-powerful, all-knowing, perfectly loving God exists, why do children die in a world He could govern differently? (Associated Press, [Sudan drone attacks kill three children](#), October 19, 2026; Reuters, [Residents winched from rooftops as torrential rain hits eastern Spain](#), October 19, 2026.)

One additional human story illustrates the moral dimension of the question without reducing a victim to a philosophical example. **Eli Sharabi** was abducted from Kibbutz Be’eri on October 7, 2023, and released after 491 days in captivity. His wife and daughters had been murdered. His account forces us to distinguish between responsible human cruelty and a second, far more difficult theological question: if God can intervene, why were these particular victims not rescued? Neither identifying the perpetrators nor praising remarkable endurance settles that further question. (Eli Sharabi, [Hostage: Memoirs of a Captive](#), 2025.)



Before I cite one more American example of tragedy, **Dr. Miroslav Volf** (b. 1956), distinguished professor of theology at Yale Divinity School and founder of the Yale Center for Faith & Culture, has examined how hatred and prejudice can lead ordinary people to commit terrible acts of violence. Drawing upon the ethnic conflicts and atrocities in his native former Yugoslavia, Volf explains how evil often begins when people stop seeing others as fellow human beings deserving of dignity and respect. Once an individual or group is viewed as inferior, dangerous, or less than human, discrimination can escalate into persecution, abuse, and even mass murder. Volf argues that genuine healing and reconciliation require us to confront wrongdoing honestly, hold perpetrators responsible, and restore the dignity of those who have suffered. His work reminds us that when people commit horrific acts of cruelty, we must never excuse their choices by simply claiming that everything happens according to God's plan. Human beings remain responsible for the evil they commit, even as Christians affirm that God ultimately rules over human history. (**Dr. Miroslav Volf**, [Exclusion and Embrace](#).)

For Americans, the question hit painfully close to home last year. On July 4, 2025, a flash flood struck the Guadalupe River and Camp Mystic in Texas. A subsequent state investigation found cascading failures in emergency planning and response; 25 campers and two counselors died at the camp. The natural force of floodwaters and the human responsibilities for warning, planning, and evacuation must be evaluated together, not blended into an easy statement that God simply wanted another angel. Those children were not a sermon illustration. Their deaths were losses to families and a summons to tell the truth about preventable risk. (The Texas Tribune, [State investigators issue final Camp Mystic report detailing cascading failures during July 4 flood](#), June 18, 2026.)

One of my former written responses to the Texas tragedy asked an important question: not merely what caused the river to rise, but why God would allow the result. Meteorology and theology address different dimensions of an event. A scientific explanation can show how something happened; it does not, by itself, settle whether a good Creator ought to have prevented it. Likewise, declaring an event part of a divine plan does not answer whether civil authorities or institutions failed in their duties. Both investigations matter, and compassion requires us to pursue both.

And herein lies the deeper difficulty that confronts both believers and skeptics. We can identify the human cruelty behind a murder, the meteorological forces behind a flood, or the biological processes behind a deadly disease, but identifying those causes does not resolve the question of divine permission. Why does God sometimes intervene—or appear to intervene—while at other times innocent people perish despite desperate prayers for deliverance? If Christianity is true, the answer must account not only for humanity's freedom and nature's predictable laws, but also for the goodness, justice, and

sovereign purposes of the God who governs them. That is the difficult question we must now investigate.



## **When Suffering Takes So Many Forms: Why Doesn't God Intervene?**

A flooded campground, a driver whose vehicle strikes innocent people, a parent murdered through domestic violence, and a child dying from a cancer nobody chose are not interchangeable events. Some suffering is deliberately inflicted; some is intensified by negligence or defective safeguards; some arises through disease and the regular processes of nature. Yet all leave survivors asking why God did not prevent what happened. The theological investigation must look at the whole landscape rather than choosing only the kinds of evil easiest to explain.

I know something of the gratitude and vulnerability involved in serious medical treatment. Following the discovery of three tumors in my prostate, I received extraordinary care from Dr. Peter Carroll and the medical team at UCSF. My experience also deepened a more disturbing question: What about very young children fighting devastating diseases at major children's hospitals, including St. Jude and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital, who may not survive even the most skilled treatment? A physician may explain precisely how a malignancy develops, but that medical explanation does not settle why a good God permits such suffering in the first place. ([St. Jude Children's Research Hospital](#); [UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals](#)).

The question is no less severe when adults or children suffer rape, incest, coercive control, abuse by caregivers, trafficking, or betrayal by trusted religious authorities. In these cases

human perpetrators bear moral responsibility; appeal to freedom does not excuse their actions or discharge our obligation to protect victims. In cases of cancer or congenital illness, however, the explanatory burden shifts: no human villain is needed to create the suffering. This uneven distribution of misery—and the lives cut short before they could meaningfully exercise moral choice—remains one of the strongest forms of the evidential problem of evil. ([The Problem of Evil, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)).

What makes this problem especially troubling is not simply the existence of suffering, but its apparent unpredictability, unequal distribution, and sometimes devastating indifference to the character of those who endure it. Two families may live in the same neighborhood, love their children with equal devotion, exercise similar precautions, and pray with the same sincerity, yet one may experience extraordinary tragedy while the other remains comparatively untouched. A faithful Christian may endure years of debilitating illness while a cruel and dishonest person enjoys excellent health and remarkable prosperity. One child survives a life-threatening disease after months of treatment, while another, receiving equally extraordinary care, dies despite the desperate prayers of parents, grandparents, physicians, and an entire community. If God is perfectly just and loving, why do suffering and protection appear so unevenly distributed? Why does divine intervention sometimes seem unmistakable to those who survive, while those who perish leave grieving families wondering whether Heaven heard their pleas at all?

These questions expose a crucial distinction between explaining the *possibility* of suffering and explaining its *actual distribution* throughout the world. Philosophers have long recognized this difficulty. **Dr. William L. Rowe** (1931–2015), the influential philosopher of religion at Purdue University, argued that particular instances of apparently unnecessary suffering present a formidable evidential challenge to belief in an all-powerful and perfectly good God. His argument does not require demonstrating that every tragedy is meaningless; it asks whether the suffering we actually observe provides reasonable grounds for questioning whether a sufficiently good divine purpose exists. The Christian response must therefore do more than demonstrate that human freedom, dependable natural laws, or moral development might justify the existence of some suffering. It must also confront the heartbreaking reality that innocent people sometimes endure extraordinary losses without ever discovering why they, rather than someone else, were permitted to suffer. Whatever answers Christianity ultimately offers, they must be substantial enough to address this disturbing inequality without suggesting that the afflicted are less loved by God, less deserving of protection, or somehow responsible for tragedies beyond their control. (**Dr. William L. Rowe**, [“The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism,” American Philosophical Quarterly, 1979](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “The Problem of Evil”](#)).





## When These Questions Entered My Own Home and Life

Before continuing with the arguments, I want to explain why I cannot approach suffering as an interesting intellectual puzzle alone. My childhood was not defined entirely by its worst moments: I loved growing up alongside my sister and three brothers, and there were friendships, music, laughter, guitar playing and experiences I remain grateful for. Yet by the age of nine or ten I had also been drawn into painful secrets no child should be asked to carry. Both my parents confided in me about their affairs, and I watched my father's drinking sometimes erupt into anger so intense that he punched holes in our walls. As a teenager, I also lost close friends in automobile accidents and drug overdoses. I learned early that the people we love are vulnerable, that adults can make devastating choices, and that a home can contain genuine love and serious brokenness at the same time.

Tracy and I have now shared forty-two years of marriage, and loving her has meant walking together through hardships that neither of us would have chosen. She grew up amid alcoholism and family violence and suffered sexual abuse as a child. The effects of childhood trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), have accompanied her struggles with bipolar disorder over most of her life. She's been hospitalized a few times having wanted to take her life during depressive lows and hypomania events. I tell these things with love and respect for her, not to define her by her diagnoses or childhood wounds. Our marriage has included counseling, treatment, seasons of anguish, difficult conversations, recovery, and the gradual work of rebuilding trust and stability. That is only part of our story, however. I have witnessed her humor, fun, joy, compassion, strength, devotion, and enormous determination, and our life together has been filled with love, great

memories, beloved children and grandchildren, and far more blessings that deserve to be remembered just as faithfully as the painful chapters. Tracy tells her own story in [I'll Meet You at the Dock](#), at [www.MeetYouAtTheDock.com](http://www.MeetYouAtTheDock.com).

For approximately forty years as a pastor and chaplain, I have also been called into moments when families scarcely knew how to breathe through their grief. I have cared for people after a teenage daughter died in a motor-vehicle accident and for parents facing the sudden death of a baby from sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). After a small-plane crash, I faced the agonizing responsibility of telling a young woman that the man she was preparing to marry, along with both her parents, had died. There is no graceful philosophical formula for delivering such news. When the shock arrives, the first calling is to speak truth with compassion, remain present, listen, and help a suffering person through the next hour rather than presume to explain the secrets of providence.

A pastor's years also bring him into the wider landscape of bereavement and distress: terminal cancers, suicides and overdoses, disabling injuries, dementia, miscarriage, infertility, children living with abuse, survivors of sexual assault, families unraveling under addiction, devastating betrayals, estrangement, poverty, homelessness, and the loneliness that can linger long after the funeral flowers have withered. These are realities of pastoral care that I have personally witnessed. The particulars differ, but I have repeatedly seen how readily “simple answers” become cruel when they are placed between a wounded person and the grief they are trying to express.

I have not been spared frightening medical uncertainty myself. As I mentioned, when three tumors were found in my prostate roughly seven years ago, I lived through months of testing and treatment, including biopsies, imaging, and surgery, while receiving extraordinary care at UCSF under renowned surgeon Dr. Peter Carroll. I remain grateful for that care and for those who encouraged me, including my dear friend Nanci Alcorn, who I will speak about later. Yet my own medical experience also made me think of children next door in UCSF's Children's Hospital whose parents would trade almost anything to secure a future for them.

Why does one patient recover while another dies? Why do some prayers for healing appear to be answered while others are not? I do not tell my story because it answers these questions. I tell it because I have lived long enough beside suffering to know that they must be asked with intellectual seriousness and with humility.

The atheist or agnostic who asks where God was when a child died deserves an answer that actually addresses the question. The grieving believer deserves the freedom to ask it without being shamed. And neither deserves to be told that faith requires pretending pain is small. The biblical record gives voice to lament and protest, even while promising divine compassion and a future judgment of evil ([Psalm 13](#); [Job 3](#); [John 11:33–36](#); [Romans 8:18–](#)



25). That combination—intellectual honesty, moral seriousness, and personal compassion—will guide the investigation that follows.



## The Question That Unsettles Believers and Unbelievers Alike

This first installment of *Christianity in the Crosshairs* begins where philosophical debate becomes personal. A child dies while parents pray. A devoted caregiver develops dementia. A village is buried by an earthquake. An abused child hears that God watches everything, then wonders why He did not intervene. Some people conclude that God does not exist; others that He exists but cannot intervene; still others that He is powerful but not good. For many, the wound is less a tidy conclusion than a lifelong uncertainty.

The philosopher and public intellectual **Dr. Sam Harris** (born 1967), writing after Hurricane Katrina, confronted Christians with the terrible spectacle of devout people trapped by rising floodwater and pleading for rescue. He concluded with the deliberately provocative accusation, “These poor people died talking to an imaginary friend.” This is not evidence to dismiss with indignation: it identifies the painful apparent silence of God precisely where intervention seems most urgently needed. The question is whether unanswered pleas demonstrate divine absence, or whether a Christian account of providence, human responsibility, and the present unfinished condition of creation can coherently explain that silence without diminishing the victims. ([An Atheist Manifesto](#), December 7, 2005.)

Pew Research Center asked Americans why terrible things happen through no apparent fault of the victims. In a 2021 survey, 61 percent said they had pondered large questions about



suffering and life's meaning at least some during the previous year; 35 percent described suffering as random and nearly inescapable in open-ended responses. This is not a 2026 poll and should not be presented as one. It shows, rather, that the issue has never belonged only to seminary professors. (Pew Research Center, [Views on Human Suffering and God's Role in It](#), November 23, 2021; Pew Research Center, [In Their Own Words: How Americans Explain Why Bad Things Happen](#).)

But here is a distinction that I believe both believers and skeptics must recognize: **the inability to explain every tragedy does not mean we are incapable of reaching a reasonable conclusion about God's existence or character. And to fairly ask why God doesn't intervene in every circumstance does not prove He doesn't intervene in many. I will prove that later with a lot of real evidence.** In nearly every other serious area of life—science, medicine, history, aviation, and even our most important personal relationships—we routinely make consequential decisions based upon the best available evidence without possessing complete knowledge. We board an airplane without understanding every engineering calculation behind its construction, entrust our lives to physicians without knowing every biological process occurring within our bodies, and accept historical conclusions without having personally witnessed the events. Why, then, should the question of God's existence require an impossible standard of exhaustive certainty before we are willing to follow the evidence? Certainly, Christianity must withstand rigorous examination, especially when confronting innocent suffering. But atheism must also explain why a universe supposedly governed by impersonal matter and physical processes contains rational beings who recognize genuine moral obligations, protest injustice, cherish human dignity, and long for a justice that transcends death. **The real intellectual responsibility is not to demand that Christianity answer every conceivable question before considering belief, but to determine which understanding of reality offers the strongest cumulative explanation of the evidence before us.** If Christianity provides that explanation, then intellectual honesty should lead us to consider its claims seriously, even while some mysteries remain unresolved.

My aim is not to out-argue a grieving parent or pretend the Christian position faces no deep difficulties. My purpose is to make a serious, cumulative case that Christianity offers a more comprehensive and reasonable account of evil, moral responsibility, human dignity, and final justice than its materialistic rivals. My earlier writings have repeatedly insisted that intellectual answers do not heal a broken heart. That conviction remains. Yet pain does not make honest inquiry irrelevant. A grieving person may need quiet presence today and a rigorous account of what Christianity actually claims tomorrow. The order matters; neither task cancels the other.



## What, Or Who, Precisely, Is on Trial?

The technical word theodicy comes from Greek ideas of God and justice. **Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716)** popularized the term in his 1710 work *Essays of Theodicy*, but the struggle is ancient. A theodicy attempts to explain why a perfectly good God would permit evil. A defense, by contrast, may seek only to show that God’s existence and evil are not logically incompatible; it need not identify God’s actual reasons. These distinctions matter because an argument may defeat a claim of outright contradiction without resolving the evidential or personal problem. (**Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, [The Problem of Evil](#).)

**J. L. Mackie (1917–1981)**, Australian philosopher and longtime professor at University College, Oxford, formulated the strict incompatibility challenge in his influential 1955 paper. Its importance is not that a single neat syllogism answers the matter but that it requires precision: one must distinguish the claim that God and any evil are logically incompatible from the claim that particular instances of extreme suffering count as powerful evidence against God. (**J. L. Mackie**, [“Evil and Omnipotence,”](#) *Mind*, 1955.)

The classical Christian conception joins three claims: God possesses the power to do everything logically possible, knows everything that can be known, and is perfectly good. The skeptic asks why that being does not prevent apparently needless suffering. An atheist is not required to claim that no good occurs or that religious people cannot do good. The central challenge is that the world’s mixture of beauty and horror seems deeply surprising if the universe is directed by unlimited power and love. That is a much more serious argument than the caricature that unbelievers simply dislike divine rules.

Evil also has different forms. Moral evil involves wrongful choices by responsible agents: torture, slavery, murder, betrayal, exploitation. Natural evil is a traditional philosophical label for suffering from disease, earthquakes, drought, genetic disorders, and other nonintentional processes. The label does not mean that an earthquake is morally guilty. Psychologists also recognize the distinct injury caused when survivors are told that their suffering proves defective faith. Such claims can become a further human wrong layered onto the original tragedy.

There is another important consideration in this investigation that skeptics and Christians alike should recognize: **rejecting Christianity does not eliminate the need to explain evil; it places the question within an entirely different understanding of reality.** If atheistic materialism is true, the universe has no ultimate divine purpose, no supernatural Judge, and no promised final restoration of the innocent. Human suffering may be explained through evolutionary biology, natural processes, and human behavior, but those explanations do not, by themselves, establish why innocent human lives possess intrinsic moral worth or why certain actions are objectively wrong rather than merely contrary to human preferences. Some atheist philosophers defend objective morality without God, and their arguments deserve examination. Nevertheless, identifying a natural explanation for our moral beliefs is not necessarily the same as establishing the ultimate foundation of moral obligation. **Christianity offers a fundamentally different account: evil is real because it violates the goodness and moral order of a personal Creator; human beings possess inherent dignity because they bear His image; and injustice will ultimately face the judgment of a perfectly righteous God.** The question before us, therefore, is not simply whether Christianity can explain the presence of evil, but whether it provides a more comprehensive, coherent, and reasonable account of evil, human dignity, moral responsibility, and ultimate justice than its naturalistic alternatives ([Genesis 1:26–27](#); [Romans 2:14–16](#); [Acts 17:30–31](#)).

Yet beneath these philosophical distinctions lies another question: By what standard are we judging God's actions—or apparent inaction? When we question why God permits evil, we are challenging not merely His existence but whether the world we experience is consistent with His alleged goodness. If we cannot identify a morally sufficient reason for a particular tragedy, does that necessarily mean no such reason exists? **Dr. Alvin Plantinga** (born 1932), distinguished philosopher and professor emeritus at the University of Notre Dame, has argued that the existence of evil does not logically contradict belief in an all-powerful and perfectly good God. Nevertheless, demonstrating that God and evil can logically coexist does not explain why innocent children suffer or why Heaven sometimes appears silent. Our investigation must therefore move beyond philosophical possibilities to examine whether Christianity's larger claims about creation, human freedom, divine providence, redemption, and ultimate justice provide sufficient grounds for trusting God's goodness amid suffering we cannot presently explain. (**Dr. Alvin Plantinga**, [God, Freedom, and Evil](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#), “The Problem of Evil”.)





## The Long Historical Argument: Job, Augustine, Lisbon, and the Modern Skeptic

**Randy Alcorn** (b. 1954), Christian author of more than sixty books and founder of Eternal Perspective Ministries, begins his extensive treatment of theodicy with an unusually candid concession: “No other book asks so bluntly, passionately, and frequently why God permits evil.” He means the Bible itself. It does not avoid or dodge the issues of evil and suffering but addresses them straightaway. The biblical witness includes not only the assurances of providence but the protests of Job, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, the lament psalms, and the tortured question of [Psalm 22](#) later spoken by Jesus: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (**Randy Alcorn**, [If God Is Good: Chapter Summaries](#), chapters 1–2.)

Long before philosophers developed formal arguments about the existence of evil, the Hebrew Scriptures recorded humanity's struggle to understand suffering, injustice, and the apparent silence of God. The biblical book of Job confronts the unsettling reality that righteous people can endure extraordinary suffering without knowing why, while the Psalms preserve the anguished prayers of believers who feel abandoned despite their faithfulness. The prophets Jeremiah and Habakkuk openly questioned why wickedness prospers and innocent people suffer, while Ecclesiastes wrestles with the troubling inequalities of life, including the apparent prosperity of the wicked and the hardships endured by the righteous. Far from suppressing these questions, Scripture preserves them as part of humanity's continuing search to understand God's justice, goodness, and sovereignty. Indeed, the remarkable candor of these ancient writings demonstrates that the problem of evil did not originate with modern atheism or Enlightenment philosophy; it has confronted believers and

skeptics for thousands of years ([Job 1–3](#); [Psalm 13](#); [Jeremiah 12:1–4](#); [Habakkuk 1:2–4](#); [Ecclesiastes 8:14](#)).

Yet there is another side to the familiar question, “Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?” We might just as reasonably ask, “**Why does God allow good things to happen to bad people?**” Why do dishonest businessmen sometimes accumulate fortunes, ruthless dictators enjoy decades of power, and cruel individuals experience health, prosperity, and long lives while generous, faithful people struggle with poverty, disease, and loss? This apparent reversal of moral expectations troubled the biblical writers themselves. The psalmist Asaph confessed his bewilderment over the prosperity of the wicked, while the prophet Jeremiah asked why treacherous people seemed to flourish.

Centuries later, **Augustine of Hippo** (354–430) observed that earthly blessings and misfortunes are shared by the righteous and unrighteous alike. Jesus likewise taught that God provides sunshine and rain for both the evil and the good. These observations challenge the assumption that earthly circumstances are reliable indicators of God's approval or disapproval. If we question God's goodness because righteous people suffer, intellectual consistency also requires us to consider why the unrighteous sometimes prosper. Both questions reveal a world in which divine justice cannot be measured simply by present circumstances, raising the further Christian claim that ultimate justice awaits a judgment beyond this life. ([Psalm 73:1–17](#); [Jeremiah 12:1–4](#); [Matthew 5:45](#); Augustine, [The City of God, Book I, Chapter 8](#).)

**Augustine also** argued that evil is not a created substance competing with God but a privation—a corruption or lack of a good that ought to be present. Blindness, betrayal, and moral disorder can be understood as failures within beings and capacities that are good in themselves. This protects the claim that God created a fundamentally good order, but it is not a complete answer to someone experiencing unbearable pain. Calling evil a privation describes its metaphysical character; it does not make a burned child suffer less. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, The Problem of Evil.) (Augustine, [Enchiridion](#).)

Another important development in this centuries-long debate emerged as early Christian theologians sought to reconcile God's goodness with the extraordinary suffering of Jesus Christ Himself. If suffering necessarily indicated divine rejection or personal wrongdoing, how could Christianity explain the torture and Crucifixion of the One it proclaimed sinless? **Irenaeus of Lyons** (c. 130–c. 202), an influential early Christian bishop and theologian, emphasized that humanity was created for a relationship with God that involved growth toward spiritual maturity. Centuries later, this aspect of his thought would influence what I wrote about earlier: the *soul-making* approach to suffering, particularly through the work of **Dr. John Hick** (1922–2012), British philosopher of religion and longtime professor at the University of Birmingham, who argued that certain virtues—including courage, perseverance, and compassion—develop meaningfully in a world where genuine difficulties

exist. Yet this explanation raises a formidable objection: even if some suffering can contribute to moral development, does that justify the devastating suffering of infants, the prolonged agony of innocent victims, or tragedies that appear to destroy rather than strengthen human lives? The historical

significance of these arguments is that Christianity's most thoughtful defenders have long recognized that suffering cannot be explained adequately by a single principle. Whether the Cross, human freedom, moral development, and divine providence together offer a satisfactory answer remains a question demanding further investigation. ([Irenaeus, \*Against Heresies\*, Book IV](#); [Dr. John Hick, \*Evil and the God of Love\*](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "The Problem of Evil"](#)).

**Thomas Aquinas** (c. 1225–1274) developed providence, secondary causes, and the possibility that God permits defects within a larger ordered creation. Centuries later, Leibniz argued that God chooses the best among possible worlds, a position later caricatured by **Voltaire** (1694–1778). The Lisbon earthquake of 1755, which devastated a city and killed thousands, intensified European controversy about how cosmic optimism survives indiscriminate catastrophe. **Voltaire's** literary response made an enduring point: the assertion that all events serve the best plan can sound cruel when offered over freshly buried victims.

The Lisbon catastrophe also marked a significant turning point in European intellectual history. In earlier centuries, devastating events were frequently interpreted through the language of divine judgment, providence, or spiritual testing. Increasingly, however, Enlightenment thinkers questioned whether such explanations adequately accounted for the indiscriminate destruction of human life. The earthquake struck on All Saints' Day, devastating churches as worshippers gathered, a circumstance that made conventional assurances of divine protection particularly difficult to reconcile with the suffering of the faithful. The controversy therefore extended beyond the causes of earthquakes to a more disturbing question: If religious devotion offers no apparent exemption from catastrophe, what does that reveal about God's relationship to the world? This growing tension between traditional explanations and observable suffering helped shape the intellectual climate in which modern arguments against divine benevolence would become increasingly influential. ([Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "The Problem of Evil"](#); [Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Lisbon Earthquake of 1755"](#)).

**David Hume** (1711–1776), in [Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion](#) (published posthumously in 1779), pressed the problem of inferring a perfectly benevolent designer from a world filled with both order and suffering. In the twentieth century, **J. L. Mackie** sharpened the logical problem; **Dr. Alvin Plantinga** challenged the alleged contradiction with his free-will defense. **Dr. William L. Rowe** and **Dr. Paul Draper** (born 1957) then developed powerful evidential forms of the objection. The discussion has not



ended because the strongest contemporary challenge is rarely just one logical syllogism. ([Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Logical Problem of Evil”](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “The Problem of Evil”](#)).



## When the Righteous Suffer and Heaven Offers No Explanation: The Astonishing Lessons of Job

The biblical book of Job introduces us to a prosperous and deeply religious man who lived in the land of Uz, an ancient region whose precise location remains uncertain, probably somewhere east or southeast of Israel. Job was a husband, the father of seven sons and three daughters, and a respected man of considerable wealth, known for his integrity, generosity, and devotion to God. Although scholars debate precisely when the book was written and whether its narrative reflects an earlier patriarchal setting, its central question remains remarkably relevant: Why would a righteous man who honors God suddenly lose nearly everything he holds dear? Job's story, told across forty-two chapters of the Old Testament, becomes one of Scripture's most penetrating examinations of innocent suffering, the limitations of human understanding, and the possibility of trusting God when life seems unbearably unjust ([Job 1:1–5](#); [Job 29:11–17](#)).

What makes Job's story especially remarkable is that Scripture deliberately introduces him as an upright and God-fearing man before describing the devastating tragedies that overwhelm his life. In rapid succession, Job loses his children, possessions, livelihood, health, and nearly every earthly source of security. Yet the biblical account makes clear that these calamities are not punishments for extraordinary personal wickedness. Indeed, God Himself commends Job's righteousness, making his suffering all the more perplexing.

Eventually, Job's anguish becomes so overwhelming that he wishes he had never been born. His experience therefore confronts one of the most difficult questions in all of theology: **If God is perfectly good and sovereign over creation, why would He permit a genuinely righteous person to suffer so terribly without revealing the reasons?** ([Job 1:1–22](#); [Job 2:1–10](#); [Job 3](#)).

In the opening scenes, readers witness an exchange in heaven that Job himself is never permitted to hear. The accuser challenges the sincerity of Job's devotion, suggesting that he honors God only because his life has been blessed and protected. The Lord permits testing while setting limits on the accuser's actions. This raises difficult questions about divine sovereignty, evil agency, and God's permission of suffering, but one feature is particularly important: the reader sees a larger drama of which the sufferer knows nothing. Job is left to experience the tragedy without the explanatory information supplied to the audience ([Job 1:6–12](#); [Job 2:1–6](#)).

**Dr. John H. Walton**, Old Testament scholar and professor emeritus at Wheaton College, explains that Job's purpose is not to give a direct explanation for each instance of suffering but to redirect readers toward the character and wisdom of God. The opening heavenly scenes do not give Job a formula by which to decode his circumstances. His life becomes an examination of whether genuine faith is grounded in God Himself or dependent upon the rewards and security that believers hope to receive. (Dr. John H. Walton, [“What Is the Purpose of the Book of Job?”](#), Zondervan Academic; with Dr. Tremper Longman III, [How to Read Job\\*](#), IVP Academic.)

The debate between Job and his friends exposes the danger of a theology that assumes suffering must disclose hidden guilt. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar reason that if God rewards the righteous and judges the wicked, Job's losses must reflect a serious wrong in his life. Their explanations sound confident and religious, but the reader already knows they are mistaken. Their certainty adds a second burden to Job's grief: he must defend his integrity against those who have come ostensibly to comfort him. God eventually rebukes the friends for speaking wrongly about Him ([Job 4–5](#); [Job 8](#); [Job 11](#); [Job 42:7–9](#)).

Biblical commentator Christopher Ash, former pastor and writer in residence at Tyndale House, Cambridge, argues that Job's friends have confused general truths about divine justice with a supposed ability to identify the cause of one individual's suffering. They can describe consequences of wickedness in general, but they cannot legitimately infer that this sufferer must be guilty. Their error remains common whenever someone tells a grieving parent, an injured worker, or a cancer patient that the tragedy must reflect a hidden offense or insufficient faith. (Christopher Ash, [Job: The Wisdom of the Cross\\*](#))

This ancient mistake reappears in the disciples' question concerning a man blind from birth. They ask Jesus whether the man or his parents sinned, assuming the blindness must

correspond to a particular moral offense. Jesus refuses their proposed assignment of blame and directs attention toward God's work in the situation. Likewise, when a tower collapses at Siloam and kills eighteen people, Jesus rejects the presumption that the victims were greater sinners than their neighbors. These accounts do not explain

every disease or accident, but they explicitly warn against turning another person's suffering into evidence of personal guilt ([John 9:1–7](#); [Luke 13:1–5](#)).

Job also demonstrates that genuine faith can include anguished questions. He laments the day of his birth, protests his situation, pleads for a hearing, and insists that the usual religious explanations do not account for what happened. His expressions are sometimes extreme, and the book does not endorse every judgment he utters. Yet the Bible preserves his speeches rather than censoring the anguish of a man who loves God and cannot understand what God has permitted. The reader is therefore not asked to confuse trust with emotional denial ([Job 3](#); [Job 7](#); [Job 23](#)).

When God finally speaks from the whirlwind, His response is remarkable for what it does not include. God does not reveal the opening heavenly conversation or explain why a particular child died. Instead, He questions Job about the foundations of the world, the wonders of the heavens, the untamed creatures, and the complexity of a creation whose workings exceed Job's understanding. Divine wisdom is larger than Job's ability to survey it. A skeptic can fairly reply that an appeal to hidden reasons does not establish that every evil is justified, and Job does not pretend to supply that philosophical proof. It does, however, challenge our assumption that a finite observer can always perceive the whole meaning of a particular event ([Job 38–41](#); Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "[Skeptical Theism](#)").

Job's last chapter records restored circumstances, additional children, and many years of life. But the most important conclusion should not be reduced to a material prosperity story, as though God rewarded Job's endurance by multiplying possessions. Job's first children remain irreplaceable; his restored household does not cancel what he suffered. Indeed, many righteous people die without recovering health, property, or loved ones in this lifetime. The book is no guarantee of earthly wealth or a promise that endurance will produce a materially richer future ([Job 42:10–17](#)).

The deeper climax is Job's transformed understanding of God—and of himself before God. At first, Job wanted a hearing in which he could demand an accounting for his suffering. After encountering the Lord, he confesses that he had spoken of realities beyond his understanding: "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you" ([Job 42:1–6](#)). His transformation is not that he suddenly learns why every calamity occurred. He comes to know more deeply the majesty, wisdom, and reality of the Creator, while recognizing that his knowledge—even his knowledge of his own circumstances—is finite. His life is not a



bargain by which moral obedience guarantees exemption from hardship; he is a creature whose relationship with God endures beyond his ability to explain God's providence.

This change should not be misunderstood as a call to despise oneself, suppress grief, or regard victims as spiritually deficient. Job learns humility, not worthlessness; he discovers the limits of his perspective, not the insignificance of his anguish. He also discovers that suffering need not be the final measure of his relationship with God. **As Dr. Tremper Longman III**, a prominent Old Testament scholar, explains in his work on Job, the book confronts simplistic expectations that obedience necessarily brings prosperity and disobedience necessarily brings disaster. What matters is wisdom rooted in God rather than a mechanical formula for managing Him. (Dr. Tremper Longman III, [Job\\*](#), Baker Academic.)

This helps explain why the New Testament points beyond present circumstances to Jesus Christ. Job is an upright though imperfect sufferer; Jesus is presented as sinless, yet He is falsely accused, tortured, and executed. His Crucifixion makes it impossible to argue that every instance of suffering proves divine displeasure with the sufferer. The Christian message further claims that God worked redemption through this terrible injustice without excusing those who committed it. The Resurrection promises a final outcome beyond what Job's earthly restoration could ever provide: death itself will be defeated ([Hebrews 4:15](#); [Acts 2:22–24](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#)).

After four decades of ministering among grieving families, I have learned that Job's friends are still with us whenever we presume to know why a righteous person suffers. Job calls us instead to compassion, honest lament, humility about the explanations we cannot supply, and confidence that unanswered questions need not extinguish our relationship with God. Some readers will receive no restoration like Job's in this life; their hope rests in the promised restoration of all things in Christ. Job therefore ends not with the triumph of wealth, but with a deeper encounter with the living God—and points forward to a hope that neither poverty, cancer, grief, nor death can finally defeat ([Romans 8:18–25](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#)).

One last helpful memory here. I recall a particularly unforgettable conversation while helping Chuck Norris's mother, **Wilma Norris Knight**, write her autobiography, [Acts of Kindness: My Story](#). She was approximately ninety years old as we reflected upon a lifetime marked by extraordinary adversity. At eight, she battled a life-threatening illness; during the Great Depression, her family moved repeatedly while working in cotton and cornfields just to survive. She later endured multiple battles with cancer, more than thirty operations, abandonment by her first husband, who was a philandering alcoholic, and the responsibility of raising three sons on her own and in abject poverty. Her middle son Wieland was killed in Vietnam in 1970. She buried two husbands, and eventually outlived all eleven members of her immediate family. After listening to this remarkable history, I finally asked her,

“Have you ever complained to God? Have you ever told Him that He was unfair?” Her response has stayed with me ever since: **“Absolutely not! The way I see it, Todd, bad things happen to good people, but good people can survive bad things with God's help.”** She was not offering a philosophical explanation for every tragedy she had experienced. She was sharing something forged through decades of suffering: the conviction that God's faithfulness could sustain her even when life offered no explanation for its deepest sorrows. And He did, until she left to Heaven at 103 years young.



## Is God and Evil a Contradiction—Or Is Evil Evidence Against God?

The logical problem of evil claims that the existence of even one evil is incompatible with a God of unlimited power, knowledge, and goodness. Plantinga's response is that it is at least possible that God has morally sufficient reasons to permit free creatures to act wrongly. If that possibility is coherent, the claim of a strict contradiction fails. This is a significant philosophical achievement, but it should not be reported as proving God's existence, proving that free will causes every evil, or explaining the particular atrocities before us. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [Logical Problem of Evil](#).)

**Dr. Alvin Plantinga** distinguishes a “defense” from a complete theodicy. A defense need only establish a possible morally adequate reason for divine permission, not prove that this is the reason a child died. **Dr. William L. Rowe** pressed the stronger evidential issue of apparently pointless suffering. The philosophical debate therefore does not end with a successful reply to the strict logical contradiction. (**Dr. Alvin Plantinga**, [God, Freedom, and Evil](#), 1974; **Dr. William L. Rowe**, [“The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism”](#), *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 1979, pp. 335–341.)

The evidential problem of evil is harder to dispatch. Rowe's famous example involved a fawn suffering horribly in a forest fire with no apparent benefit to another creature. His challenge was not that we can logically prove no divine reason could exist, but that some suffering looks utterly pointless. Draper's comparative argument asks whether the distribution of pain and pleasure is more expected under a hypothesis indifferent to living creatures than under a perfectly good deity. A person may consider this evidence powerful without claiming mathematical certainty that God does not exist. Christians should respond to that actual challenge rather than to a weaker one. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [The Evidential Problem of Evil](#).)

But a crucial question remains: **Even if evil presents serious evidence against the existence of God, does atheistic materialism provide a more reasonable explanation of the world we actually inhabit?** The atheist may argue that suffering is precisely what we should expect in a universe governed by indifferent physical processes, evolutionary competition, disease, and chance. Yet explaining why suffering occurs is not the same as explaining the moral significance of suffering, the objective wrongness of cruelty, or the extraordinary worth we attribute to innocent human lives. A universe without God may contain creatures who experience pain and condemn injustice, but what ultimately grounds their conviction that human beings possess rights and dignity that no individual or society has the moral authority to violate? Christianity offers an integrated explanation in which human beings possess inherent worth as creatures made in God's image, moral evil represents a genuine corruption of what ought to be, and the present disorder of creation is neither its original ideal nor its final destiny. Moreover, the Christian proclamation of Christ's Crucifixion, Resurrection, and promised judgment offers grounds for believing that injustice and death will not have the final word. **The skeptic is therefore entitled to press Christianity with the problem of evil, but is not entitled to exempt materialistic atheism from the same rigorous comparison of explanatory power.** The relevant intellectual question is not whether Christianity can answer every mystery, but whether its account of reality explains more of what we know—including moral obligation, human dignity, suffering, reason, and the hope of ultimate justice—than its strongest competitors ([Genesis 1:26–27](#); [Romans 8:18–25](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#)).

Horrendous evil, a category developed in important work by philosopher **Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams** (1943–2017), raises a further problem. Some events can appear to make a participant's life not worth living when considered in isolation. Ordinary talk about moral growth is profoundly inadequate to genocide, rape, the torture of children, and the destruction of an entire family. Any Christian account of redemption must take seriously the particular person harmed, not merely the benefits that others receive from observing that person's tragedy. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [The Problem of Evil](#).)





## Did God Have to Give Us Freedom—And Could He Have Stopped the Worst Choices?

My earlier apologetic writings have often used an image of humanity as more than programmed robots. It remains a valuable beginning. Relationships require agency, and our actions can be genuinely loving or genuinely cruel. Plantinga’s defense holds that a world including significant creaturely freedom may contain goods unavailable in a world whose inhabitants cannot choose otherwise. But it is critical to distinguish libertarian freedom, under which agents could have chosen differently in the same circumstances, from compatibilist freedom, under which choices can be free and morally significant even if they occur within a causally determined order. Christians disagree on this point, particularly across Reformed and Arminian traditions. (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [Logical Problem of Evil](#).)

**Dr. Richard Swinburne** (b. 1934), emeritus professor of philosophy of religion at the University of Oxford, argues that significant responsibility for other people requires the possibility of serious harm. That account explains why moral agency might possess a high value, but it leaves a formidable proportionality question: why would meaningful liberty require “this much” horrendous damage, rather than less? The Christian should acknowledge that moral freedom alone has not established a complete answer. (**Dr. Richard Swinburne**, [Providence and the Problem of Evil](#).)

Here the skeptic has pressing questions. Why could God not stop a murderer by making a weapon fail while leaving the murderer’s desire and responsibility intact? Why not prevent an attack on a child without preventing all meaningful freedom? Why does freedom appear

to justify consequences so unevenly distributed—one person’s momentary cruelty becoming another person’s lifelong injury? Plantinga’s model shows how freedom can provide a conceivable reason for some moral evil. It does not demonstrate that every intervention would destroy agency, nor does it follow that the full amount of evil we observe was necessary.

Scripture itself presents occasions when God intervenes in human affairs without eliminating human freedom altogether. God restrains Abimelech from committing adultery with Sarah, frustrates the plans of those building the tower of Babel, and intervenes dramatically in Saul's journey to Damascus. These accounts suggest that divine intervention and meaningful human responsibility are not necessarily incompatible. They also sharpen the question of why God sometimes restrains wrongdoing while permitting other acts with devastating consequences. Christianity affirms that God remains sovereign over human history, but these biblical examples do not establish why He intervenes in one circumstance and appears silent in another. That distinction remains essential when considering both the possibilities and limitations of the free-will defense ([Genesis 20:1–7](#); [Genesis 11:1–9](#); [Acts 9:1–9](#)).

Yet we should also consider what kind of world would exist if God continually prevented the consequences of every destructive human decision. Imagine a society in which every attempted murder was miraculously thwarted, every act of dishonesty automatically exposed, every reckless decision rendered harmless, and every betrayal prevented from injuring another person. Such a world might preserve the outward ability to choose wrongly, but would it preserve the meaningful responsibility that makes our choices morally consequential? Parents understand that genuine maturity requires allowing children increasing responsibility, even when their decisions carry risks, although loving parents also intervene when dangers become sufficiently serious. Similarly, Christianity maintains that God created human beings capable of exercising real responsibility within an ordered world where actions have consequences. Scripture repeatedly connects moral choices with accountability, warning that human beings reap what they sow while affirming that God calls them to choose what is good. **The difficulty, therefore, is not whether God has any reason to permit meaningful consequences, but where divine wisdom draws the boundary between permitting human responsibility and intervening to restrain evil.** We may not understand every instance of that boundary, but our inability to identify it does not establish that no morally sufficient distinction exists ([Galatians 6:7–10](#); [Deuteronomy 30:19–20](#)).

The Christian doctrine of heaven sharpens the challenge. If the redeemed will no longer sin and yet remain fully personal, why was a world with terrible evils needed first? Responses appeal to freely confirmed character, a history of redemption, perfected desires, or forms of freedom distinct from libertarian alternatives. Each deserves discussion, but no response



automatically proves that this world's atrocities are indispensable to heaven. A rigorous investigation can acknowledge a plausible defense without promoting it into a demonstrated explanation.



## **Must God Prevent Every Pain Before We Can Call Him Good?**

Some objections to Christianity seem to assume that the only God worthy of our belief would be one who immediately prevents every act of cruelty, arrests every disease, averts every natural disaster, suspends every fatal accident, and explains every decision before human beings are permitted to suffer. If a child develops cancer, God must prevent it. If a murderer raises a weapon, God must stop him. If an earthquake threatens a community, God must intervene before a single life is lost. Otherwise, the argument goes, how can such a Being be called all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good? These questions are understandable, especially when they arise from terrible personal loss. Yet they invite us to examine not merely the existence of suffering, but the expectations we have placed upon the Creator.

We must distinguish between two very different objections. Not every atheist or skeptic insists that God must prevent absolutely every instance of suffering. Some raise the more difficult question of why God permits suffering that appears to accomplish no necessary good, particularly the prolonged agony of innocent children. That is the evidential problem of evil, and it deserves serious examination. Nevertheless, when the argument becomes a



demand that God must eliminate every possibility of evil, prevent every painful consequence, and govern the universe according to our individual understanding of what should happen, another philosophical question emerges: What kind of God are we actually willing to acknowledge? Are we investigating whether the Creator exists, or have we already decided that no Creator deserves our allegiance unless He manages the universe according to our expectations? (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [“The Problem of Evil”](#).)

This distinction becomes especially significant when we consider the freedom, responsibility, and predictable natural laws upon which human civilization depends. We expect to make genuine choices, build societies, develop technologies, pursue ambitions, and experience the consequences of our actions. Yet we may also expect God to intervene whenever those choices or physical processes threaten to produce suffering. If every attempted murder were miraculously prevented, every reckless decision reversed, every dangerous machine rendered harmless, and every destructive natural force restrained before anyone could be injured, human life would operate under radically different conditions. **Dr. Alvin Plantinga**, the distinguished philosopher of religion and John A. O'Brien Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame, developed his influential free-will defense to show how significant moral freedom might provide a reason for God to permit the possibility of wrongdoing. His argument does not explain every particular evil, but it challenges the assumption that an all-powerful God must prevent every misuse of created freedom to remain good. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [“Theodicies,” Section 6: Free Will Theodicy](#).)

But here the biblical narrative introduces something extraordinary that is easily overlooked in contemporary debates about theodicy. **The world without evil, suffering, injustice, and death that so many people desire is remarkably similar to the world Scripture presents at the beginning of creation and promises at the end of human history.** The opening chapters of Genesis describe a creation declared good, humanity living in fellowship with its Creator, and a garden containing the tree of life ([Genesis 1:26–31](#); [Genesis 2:8–17](#)). In the biblical account, human rebellion introduces alienation, judgment, painful toil, and mortality into humanity's experience ([Genesis 3:1–24](#)). Scripture does not teach that God regards cruelty, disease, injustice, and death as the ultimate purposes of His creation. Rather, it presents humanity's present condition as a tragic departure from the goodness for which we were created.

We should recognize that the precise relationship between the Fall, animal suffering, geological history, and physical death before human beings remains a subject of theological debate. Genesis does not provide a comprehensive scientific explanation of every natural process or disease. Nevertheless, its theological message is unmistakable: evil is not celebrated as God's final intention for humanity, and human life was not created merely to

remain forever imprisoned within suffering and death. The same Scriptures that confront us with human rebellion also begin revealing God's purpose to overcome its consequences. The promise concerning the woman's offspring in Genesis 3:15 anticipates a conflict in which evil will ultimately be defeated, while the unfolding history of redemption moves toward the coming of Jesus Christ, whom the New Testament presents as the One who confronts sin, suffering, and death ([Genesis 3:15](#); [Romans 5:12–21](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#)).

The closing chapters of Revelation then bring the biblical narrative to its breathtaking conclusion. The Apostle John describes a new heaven and a new earth, the restoration of God's dwelling with humanity, and the removal of the curse that has marked the present world ([Revelation 21:1–3](#); [Revelation 22:1–5](#)). Most strikingly, Revelation 21:4 promises that God will wipe away every tear and that death, mourning, crying, and pain will cease. This is not merely a promise that people will eventually become better at enduring suffering. It is the announcement that the very conditions responsible for humanity's deepest griefs will be abolished. The biblical story thus moves from creation's original goodness, through humanity's rebellion and God's work of redemption, toward a restored creation in which evil and death no longer have a place.

Christian author and theologian **Randy Alcorn**, author of *Heaven* and *If God Is Good*, has devoted considerable attention to this relationship between Eden and the New Earth. In a chapter of *Heaven*, he observes that Genesis begins with the creation of heaven and earth while Revelation concludes with their renewal. His understanding of eternity emphasizes that God's ultimate purpose is not to abandon the physical creation but to redeem and restore it. Alcorn writes, “All that was lost at the beginning will be restored at the end.” In this understanding, the New Earth is not an inferior substitute for God's original creation, nor is it merely an escape from physical existence. It represents the permanent fulfillment of God's purposes, where redeemed humanity lives in fellowship with Him, free from sin, suffering, and death. (Randy Alcorn, [Heaven, Chapter 12, “Why Does the Earth’s Redemption Matter?”](#); [“New Earth: Where God's People Will Dwell Forever”](#), Eternal Perspective Ministries.)

This raises a particularly revealing question for the skeptic. If the only conceivable world consistent with divine goodness is one without evil, disease, suffering, and death, Christianity does not dismiss that longing. Indeed, it claims that such a world is precisely where God's redemptive purposes are ultimately leading. The difference is that Scripture does not present that final condition as something humanity can demand immediately while simultaneously retaining every feature of our present fallen existence. The Christian account involves a historical process of creation, rebellion, redemption, judgment, resurrection, and restoration. We are presently living within that unfolding story, not at its conclusion. Whether this account is true must be assessed on its own evidence, especially the historical claims concerning Jesus Christ and His Resurrection. But the existence of present suffering

does not mean Christianity lacks a coherent vision of a world from which suffering has been permanently removed.

Yet another difficult question follows: **If God can ultimately create a world in which redeemed people live without sin and suffering, why did He not create that final world from the beginning?** This is one of the strongest objections to the free-will defense, and it should not be dismissed. Christian thinkers have proposed different explanations involving genuine freedom, moral development, redemption, and the particular goods made possible through God's historical relationship with humanity. None of those proposals establishes that we know precisely why God chose to govern creation through the history described in Scripture. The Christian claim, however, is not that God lacks the power to establish a world without evil. It is that He has promised to do exactly that through the completion of His redemptive purposes. The question is therefore not simply whether God can abolish suffering, but why His wisdom has permitted a temporary history in which evil can occur before its final defeat. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [“Theodicies”](#); Randy Alcorn, [“Will There Still Be a Separate Heaven When God Creates the New Earth?”](#), Eternal Perspective Ministries.)

There is also a profound question beneath our expectations of God: **If the only God we will acknowledge is one who governs according to our own reasoning, fulfills our personal expectations, prevents every tragedy we believe should be prevented, and explains every decision to our satisfaction, then who is ultimately determining what God must be?** Certainly, questioning God's alleged goodness is not itself arrogance. The biblical writers repeatedly questioned His actions, lamented apparent injustice, and pleaded for understanding. But there is an important distinction between honestly examining God's character and assuming that our finite understanding must be capable of comprehending every purpose of an infinite Mind. Job, who had suffered extraordinary losses without understanding their cause, was confronted with the immense complexity of creation and the limitations of his own knowledge ([Job 38–42](#)). The Apostle Paul likewise reflected upon the depth of God's wisdom and the limits of human understanding ([Romans 11:33–36](#)).

The Christian understanding of God, then, does not rest upon the claim that we can presently explain every tragedy or understand every decision of divine providence. It rests upon the larger biblical claim that the Creator is neither indifferent to evil nor content to leave His creation permanently disfigured by it. From the promise of redemption in Genesis, through the prophets' vision of justice, to the ministry, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Scripture presents God as actively confronting the powers of sin and death. The culmination is found in Revelation's promise of a restored creation where the curse is removed and God dwells forever with His people. The very world without suffering that critics rightly long for is not foreign to Christianity; **it is the world Christianity proclaims God will ultimately establish.** And until that day, the central question is whether we have



sufficient reason to trust the goodness and wisdom of the God revealed in Jesus Christ, even when the reasons for particular sufferings remain beyond our present understanding.



## Why Does a Child Get Cancer When Nobody Chose It?

Natural suffering exposes the limits of explanations centered on human wrongdoing. Infectious organisms, cancer-causing mutations, earthquakes, hurricanes, miscarriages, congenital disease, and the breakdown of aging bodies do not always originate in a human decision. Some harms are intensified by negligence, poverty, infrastructure failures, warfare, or environmental degradation, but many are not. A Christian account must meet this distinction explicitly. If every disaster is treated as just another instance of free will, the most difficult part of the original question has been avoided.

The atheist essayist and literary critic **Christopher Hitchens** (1949–2011), writing during his own treatment for esophageal cancer, challenged claims that illness is a targeted divine punishment by asking why such claims do not also account for “the numbers of infants who contract leukemia.” His challenge lands especially hard when someone credits God for one patient’s survival while treating another patient’s death as a deserved outcome. Christian theology need not concede that every disease is a punishment; indeed, Jesus explicitly rejected the assumption that an individual’s suffering always discloses an individual’s sin. Yet Hitchens rightly forces the question of why vulnerable children suffer diseases they did nothing to cause. ([Unanswerable Prayers](#), Vanity Fair, 2010; [John 9:1–3](#).)

Consider what modern medicine has revealed about childhood cancer. Unlike many adult cancers, which may develop partly through decades of exposure to tobacco, environmental

hazards, or other accumulated risks, numerous childhood cancers arise from genetic alterations that occur during early development, often without any identifiable preventable cause. A newborn can enter the world carrying biological changes that will later threaten life, despite having made no choices and committed no wrongdoing. These discoveries deepen the theological question rather than resolve it. If God designed a creation capable of sustaining extraordinarily complex life, why does that same biological complexity sometimes produce devastating disease in its youngest and most vulnerable members? Nor can we adequately answer by celebrating the remarkable advances of pediatric oncology, important as they are. Medical progress demonstrates humanity's growing ability to confront suffering, but it does not explain why such suffering was possible in the first place. For Christian theology, the challenge is to affirm both the goodness of creation and the profound tragedy of its present vulnerability without suggesting that a child's illness reflects divine displeasure. ([National Cancer Institute, "Cancer in Children and Adolescents"; National Cancer Institute, "Childhood Cancers"](#)).

**Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams**, philosopher and Anglican priest who served as Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, called attention to "horrendous evils," suffering so destructive that it appears to make a person's life, considered as a whole, a terrible thing for that person. Her focus prevents facile answers that justify a child's agony by pointing to benefits enjoyed by others. If redemption is possible, it must somehow take the victim's own good and dignity seriously. (**Dr. Marilyn McCord Adams**, [Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God](#).)

Stable natural laws give us a world where science, agriculture, medicine, responsibility, and planning are possible. Fire warms and destroys; gravity lets us walk but also allows lethal falls; rainfall nourishes fields and floods valleys. Plate tectonics shapes the planet and can produce devastating earthquakes and eruptions. The same patterned world that supports embodied life permits hazards. Yet these are considerations in favor of an orderly creation, not proof that a child must die in a flood or that no gentler regular world was possible. (U.S. Geological Survey, [This Dynamic Earth: The Story of Plate Tectonics](#).)

There is a much older difficulty: animal suffering and death predate humanity in the mainstream scientific account of Earth's history. Predation, disease, injury, and extinction appear throughout the fossil record. Thus, a claim that every instance of animal pain and geological violence began only after the first human sin is not a scientific conclusion. Christians differ over the chronology and interpretation of Genesis, the historical Fall, death before Adam, and the relationship between creation and natural history. Theological claims may be defended, but they must be identified as interpretations rather than presented as settled geology or paleontology.





## Was the World Broken at the Fall—And Whose Sin Are We Talking About?

[Genesis 1–3](#) presents creation as good, humanity as morally accountable, and rebellion as tragically consequential. [Romans 5](#) connects sin and death, while [Romans 8](#) describes creation as subjected to frustration and awaiting liberation. Within Christian theology, the Fall is indispensable to many accounts of why the world is not as it ought to be. But important interpretive questions remain: Does [Romans 5](#) principally concern human mortality? Does [Romans 8](#) describe cosmic disorder originating in a particular historical event, or the creation’s present subjection to decay? How should these passages be related to long natural histories? Distinct Christian traditions answer differently ([Genesis 1–3](#); [Romans 5:12–21](#); 8:18–25).

**John Walton** (b. 1952), Old Testament scholar and professor emeritus at Wheaton College, has emphasized that Genesis must first be read in its ancient Near Eastern literary and theological setting. His work challenges modern readers not to force every biblical statement about disorder, mortality, and creation into the mold of a geological mechanism. [Romans 8](#)’s picture of creation groaning belongs in the investigation, but whether every prehistoric disease or extinction event is an effect of Adam’s sin remains disputed among Christians. (John H. Walton, [The Lost World of Adam and Eve](#).)

Scripture does not authorize us to infer that an individual family’s tragedy resulted from a particular sin. In [John 9](#), Jesus rejects the disciples’ attempt to explain a man’s blindness by assigning blame to him or his parents. In [Luke 13](#), Jesus refuses the idea that the eighteen killed by the falling tower of Siloam were greater sinners than their neighbors. Whatever



broader teaching those passages contain about repentance, they overturn the reflex to identify a victim's particular guilt as the explanation for calamity. My early sermon notes correctly called attention to both passages, and their force should be heard repeatedly in this debate.

The doctrine of inherited sin also raises a moral objection: why should children inherit vulnerability from choices they did not make? Classical Christian responses invoke human solidarity, a shared damaged condition, and the claim that no individual is wholly isolated from the human family. Yet one must distinguish inheriting a damaged condition from being personally culpable for an infant's illness. Any explanation that collapses this distinction turns theology into an accusation against victims. Christianity's account of corporate fallenness must not be used to erase individual innocence with respect to particular calamities.



## **Did God Send the Storm, Allow the Storm, or Merely Watch It Happen?**

This is where my earlier correspondence on [Isaiah 45:7](#) and [Amos 3:6](#) is especially important. Isaiah speaks of the Lord creating *ra'*, a Hebrew word that can refer to calamity, adversity, or moral evil depending on context. In [Isaiah 45](#), the contrast is with peace or well-being in a declaration of the Lord's sovereignty over historical events; translating the word as calamity is often contextually appropriate. The passage must not be silently rephrased to say that God commits wickedness. [Amos 3:6](#) speaks similarly of disaster coming upon a city in the prophetic setting of divine judgment. These are difficult texts, not a license to identify each contemporary catastrophe as a divine sentence ([Isaiah 45:5–7](#); [Amos 3:1–8](#)).

**Thomas Aquinas** (c. 1225–1274), Dominican theologian and one of Christianity’s most influential systematic thinkers, distinguished divine primary causality from genuine created causes. Whatever one concludes about particular providential judgments, there is a difference between affirming that nature remains under divine governance and possessing knowledge that a specific flood was deliberately sent as punishment. [Isaiah 45:7](#) uses a Hebrew word with a range including adversity and calamity; it does not license an automatic inference that each human sin or each tragic death was directly willed as a moral wrong by God. (**Thomas Aquinas**, [Summa Theologiae, First Part, Question 22.](#))

The Bible repeatedly distinguishes God’s rule from human intentions. Joseph tells his brothers that they intended harm while God intended good through the same sequence of events ([Genesis 50:20](#)). In Acts, the crucifixion takes place within God’s foreknowledge and purpose while those who carried it out remain responsible ([Acts 2:23](#)). Job’s opening chapters describe satanic agency bounded by divine permission, yet the book gives no permission for an observer to blame Satan for a particular modern flood. God can govern an event without morally approving the wickedness within it; what that concurrence means is contested among philosophical and theological traditions.

One of the greatest dangers in discussing divine providence is confusing our belief that God governs history with the assumption that we possess privileged knowledge of His intentions in particular events. When a hurricane destroys one neighborhood while sparing another, can we legitimately conclude that God judged the first and favored the second? When one family survives a flood while another loses everything, does the difference reveal whose prayers God valued more? Scripture itself warns against such conclusions. Jesus declared that God sends rain upon both the righteous and the unrighteous, while the book of Ecclesiastes observes that the same unpredictable circumstances can overtake people regardless of their moral standing. Divine sovereignty, therefore, should not be confused with human certainty about divine motives. Christians may affirm that nothing ultimately escapes God's knowledge or governance while humbly acknowledging that we cannot identify His specific purposes in every storm, earthquake, illness, or tragedy ([Matthew 5:45](#); [Ecclesiastes 9:11–12](#)).

The Reformed account typically stresses meticulous providence and primary and secondary causes, while denying that God is the author of sin. Arminian approaches commonly emphasize resistible grace and meaningful creaturely choices. Open theism argues that some future free choices are not settled facts to be known in advance; classical theists frequently disagree. Process theology conceives God’s power more in terms of influence than unilateral control, but it departs substantially from historic Christian assertions of omnipotence. Such distinctions show that even those who affirm the Christian God disagree about how divine sovereignty relates to contingent evils. None should be falsely passed off as Christianity’s one uncontested model.





## Should We Expect God to Rescue Us from Every Danger We Choose to Live With?

There is another dimension of the problem of suffering that deserves serious consideration: human responsibility. Throughout this investigation, we have examined the legitimate questions raised when earthquakes destroy communities, hurricanes devastate coastlines, tornadoes tear through neighborhoods, and floods sweep away innocent people. Yet alongside our questions about divine intervention, should we not also consider the responsibility human beings bear for where we choose to build, how we prepare for foreseeable dangers, and whether we heed the warnings already available to us? We establish communities near active volcanoes, build homes along flood-prone rivers, construct neighborhoods in earthquake zones, and settle in regions regularly exposed to devastating storms. In some instances, we ignore known hazards, disregard evacuation warnings, permit unsafe construction, or allow inadequate infrastructure to remain in place. When tragedy follows, does the existence of a loving God necessarily require Him to supernaturally intervene whenever human beings have failed to exercise reasonable precautions?

Consider the distinction between a natural event and a preventable human catastrophe. An earthquake is a geological occurrence, but whether a building collapses upon its occupants may depend substantially upon engineering, construction quality, building codes, and their enforcement. The catastrophic 2010 earthquake in Haiti exposed the devastating consequences of vulnerable infrastructure, poor construction practices, and widespread poverty. By contrast, earthquake-resistant design and sound engineering can dramatically



reduce casualties, even though they cannot eliminate every danger. Likewise, floods may result from natural atmospheric and geographical conditions, but their consequences can be intensified by development in known floodplains, inadequate drainage, poorly maintained infrastructure, and failures to implement emergency warnings or evacuation plans. These realities raise an uncomfortable question: When a natural disaster becomes especially deadly because of foreseeable human vulnerabilities, how much responsibility belongs to the physical event itself, and how much belongs to the individuals and institutions entrusted with protecting human life? (U.S. Geological Survey, [“Earthquake Hazards Program”](#); Federal Emergency Management Agency, [Mitigation Ideas: A Resource for Reducing Risk to Natural Hazards](#).)

The theological implications are significant. Dr. Richard Swinburne, argues that a world governed by dependable natural laws provides the conditions under which human beings can acquire knowledge, exercise meaningful responsibility, and make consequential decisions. The same predictable properties of fire that make it useful for warmth and cooking also make it capable of destroying a home. The same gravity that enables us to walk, build, and navigate the physical world can make a fall deadly. Rivers sustain agriculture, transportation, commerce, and human communities, yet those same rivers can overflow their banks. We depend upon the regularity of nature for nearly everything we accomplish, but sometimes expect God to suspend that very regularity whenever its consequences become painful. Swinburne's argument does not demonstrate why every degree of suffering must be permitted, but it challenges the assumption that a good creation must necessarily be one without physical hazards or genuine consequences. ( Dr. Richard Swinburne , *Providence and the Problem of Evil* , Oxford University Press, 1998.)

We should also consider the remarkable extent to which modern science has equipped humanity to anticipate many natural dangers. Meteorologists can track hurricanes, identify atmospheric conditions favorable to tornadoes, and issue flood warnings. Geologists can identify earthquake faults, monitor volcanic activity, and evaluate landslide hazards. Engineers can develop stronger buildings, safer bridges, protective levees, and infrastructure designed to withstand considerable natural forces. These abilities do not make us omniscient, and disasters can still occur with little warning. Nevertheless, they raise another question worth asking: If God has endowed human beings with the intellectual capacity to understand significant features of His creation, should we expect Him to perform miracles where prudent preparation, scientific knowledge, and responsible public policy could already save lives?

Scripture repeatedly connects wisdom with recognizing foreseeable danger and taking appropriate precautions. Proverbs describes the prudent person as one who recognizes danger and takes refuge rather than continuing forward carelessly ([Proverbs 22:3](#)). The Mosaic law required homeowners to construct protective parapets around accessible

rooftops to prevent people from falling and being injured or killed ([Deuteronomy 22:8](#)). This ancient command is particularly revealing because it demonstrates that responsibility for preventing foreseeable accidents was embedded in biblical moral instruction long before modern building codes and safety regulations. When Jesus was tempted to throw Himself from the Temple in expectation of supernatural protection, He rejected the presumption that God's promises justified deliberately courting danger ([Matthew 4:5–7](#)). These passages suggest that faith in God's providence should encourage wisdom, preparation, and responsible action rather than become an excuse for neglecting them.

Of course, we must distinguish freely accepted risks from unavoidable vulnerability. Children do not choose the locations of their schools, homes, or summer camps. Impoverished families may lack the financial resources to move away from dangerous areas, and many communities were established long before modern scientific warnings or building standards existed. Others inherit unsafe buildings or are placed at risk by decisions made by developers, employers, public officials, or negligent property owners. Consequently, identifying human responsibility should never become an excuse for blaming victims. Rather, it should expand our understanding of moral responsibility to include those whose decisions expose others to preventable harm. The biblical command to love our neighbors demands more than sympathy after a catastrophe; it also calls us to protect human lives beforehand ([Luke 10:25–37](#); [Philippians 2:4](#)).

The thoughtful skeptic may still ask why an omnipotent God would not prevent even those disasters made worse by human negligence. That objection deserves consideration. God could presumably intervene in a particular catastrophe without abolishing natural laws altogether, and the existence of foreseeable hazards does not fully explain the suffering of innocent children or people who could not protect themselves. Nevertheless, it changes the investigation by reminding us that some suffering is intensified not because humanity lacks sufficient information, but because we fail to apply the information already available. The question, then, cannot be confined to what God should have done. It must also include what we could have done, what we failed to do, and what we are morally obligated to do differently. Perhaps one of the most practical implications of divine providence is that God's care for human life may operate, in part, through the intelligence, foresight, compassion, and responsible action of the very people He has created.

Yet our responsibility does not end with the places we choose to inhabit or the precautions we take against nature's hazards. Human ingenuity has introduced an entirely different category of risks into our world. We have invented extraordinary machines, transportation systems, and technologies that have transformed civilization, but we have also created new opportunities for accidents, mechanical failures, and catastrophic loss. If we question why God does not always protect us from the dangers of nature, should we not also examine our

expectation that He must continually rescue us from the potential dangers of our own inventions?



## **When Human Ingenuity Becomes Human Vulnerability: Must God Prevent Every Accident We Create?**

Throughout history, human beings have invented extraordinary technologies that have transformed civilization, increased prosperity, improved medical treatment, and made possible accomplishments our ancestors could scarcely have imagined. Yet many of these same inventions introduce dangers that would not otherwise exist. We manufacture powerful chainsaws capable of cutting through enormous trees in seconds, knowing that the same rapidly spinning blades can inflict catastrophic injuries. We design automobiles propelled by internal combustion engines, traveling at highway speeds while carrying families inside structures of metal, glass, and thousands of mechanical components. We construct mountain highways alongside steep cliffs and across regions where snow, ice, rockslides, and avalanches create predictable hazards. We also manufacture enormous aircraft that carry millions of passengers through the skies every year, depending upon sophisticated engineering, maintenance, navigation, weather forecasting, and human judgment. These are remarkable achievements of human intelligence, but they also demonstrate that nearly every advancement brings some measure of vulnerability.

This raises an important question seldom considered when discussing divine providence: **Does belief in an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly loving God mean that He is morally obligated to intervene supernaturally whenever one of our inventions fails, an operator makes a mistake, or the ordinary laws of physics produce tragic**



**consequences?** If a chainsaw operator loses control of a spinning blade, must God instantly suspend its motion? If a motorist approaches an icy mountain curve too quickly, must God miraculously restore traction or redirect the vehicle away from a precipice? If an aircraft suffers catastrophic mechanical failure, must divine intervention override the physical forces governing flight? Christians certainly affirm that God has the power to intervene, and many sincerely pray for His protection. But does God's goodness require Him to prevent every accident involving the extraordinary machines, transportation systems, and technologies humanity has chosen to create? If that is our expectation, are we not ultimately demanding a world in which physical laws and human choices have genuine consequences only when those consequences are favorable?

This relationship between divine providence and the physical world was examined extensively by **Dr. John Polkinghorne** (1930–2021), the distinguished Cambridge mathematical physicist, former Professor of Mathematical Physics, Anglican priest, and internationally respected scholar of science and religion. Polkinghorne developed what he called the *free-process defense*, an extension of the familiar philosophical argument concerning human free will. His proposal was that God has created a real physical world permitted to operate through dependable natural processes rather than a universe in which every event is continuously manipulated to prevent undesirable consequences. He famously contrasted a creation allowed genuine development with a world functioning like the puppet theater of an all-controlling cosmic ruler. His point was not that God lacks the power to intervene, nor that every tragedy serves an identifiable purpose, but that a meaningful creation includes physical regularities, genuine relationships between causes and effects, and natural processes whose consequences are not always beneficial to human beings. The same laws of motion that make aircraft, automobiles, and advanced machinery possible remain operative when those inventions malfunction or are misused. (**Dr. John Polkinghorne**, ["Belief in God in an Age of Science"](#), BioLogos.)

A related argument was advanced by **Dr. Peter van Inwagen** (born 1942), the distinguished philosopher and John Cardinal O'Hara Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of Notre Dame. In his book *The Problem of Evil*, van Inwagen develops a *regularity-of-nature defense*, considering the significance of a physical world governed by relatively stable natural processes. Such regularity makes scientific knowledge, practical planning, and meaningful human action possible, but it also creates conditions in which physical suffering can occur. His discussion extends beyond accidents involving human technology to the suffering of animals, including those that existed before humanity appeared. He therefore recognizes that human wrongdoing alone cannot explain all the suffering found in creation. Together, these arguments challenge the assumption that a loving Creator must continuously suspend the ordinary workings of nature to prevent every undesirable consequence, although neither argument demonstrates why every particular tragedy must be permitted. (**Dr. Peter**

**van Inwagen**, [The Problem of Evil](#), Oxford University Press, 2006, especially Lecture 7, “The Sufferings of Beasts.”)

Of course, we must be careful not to confuse the existence of risk with personal culpability. A conscientious pilot may encounter circumstances beyond his ability to control. A responsible driver may be struck by a reckless motorist, and a child riding in the back seat of an automobile has made no decision about the speed, maintenance, or operation of that vehicle. Industrial accidents can result from defective equipment, inadequate safety precautions, corporate negligence, or events that competent investigators could not reasonably anticipate. Victims do not become morally responsible for their suffering simply because human technology contributed to the circumstances. Nevertheless, these distinctions remind us that responsibility for preventable tragedy may rest with engineers, manufacturers, employers, government officials, or others whose decisions affect human safety. A serious Christian understanding of human responsibility should encourage the prevention of needless suffering, not provide theological excuses for it.

Scripture itself repeatedly emphasizes that trust in God does not eliminate the responsibility to exercise wisdom and take appropriate precautions. As we have already observed, the biblical requirement for protective rooftop parapets demonstrates the moral responsibility to anticipate and prevent avoidable injuries ([Deuteronomy 22:8](#)). The book of Proverbs likewise praises the wisdom of recognizing danger before it becomes a catastrophe ([Proverbs 27:12](#)). Even the Apostle Paul, whose confidence in divine providence was unmistakable, did not always disregard practical means of protection. When warned of a plot against his life, he accepted the assistance of Roman soldiers rather than insisting that God must preserve him through an extraordinary miracle ([Acts 23:12–24](#)). Biblical faith, therefore, is not an invitation to disregard physical realities while demanding that God rescue us from their consequences.

The thoughtful skeptic, however, may respond that this still leaves the most difficult question unanswered: Even if God is not obligated to prevent every accident, why would He not intervene in some of the most devastating ones? Why permit an aircraft carrying innocent families to crash, a school bus to plunge from an icy highway, or a mechanical failure to take the life of a young father whose children desperately need him? Why could God not prevent at least some catastrophes without undermining the dependability of the physical universe? These are legitimate questions, and neither Polkinghorne's free-process defense nor van Inwagen's regularity-of-nature defense can establish that every actual tragedy is necessary. Indeed, the philosophical problem remains especially difficult when the suffering appears extraordinary, the victims are innocent, and the potential for divine rescue seems entirely compatible with ordinary human freedom.

Nevertheless, these considerations introduce an important dimension into our investigation. If we expect God to prevent every accident associated with the technologies we

manufacture, the transportation systems we operate, and the dangers we knowingly encounter, we must ask what kind of physical world we are actually demanding. Would it be one in which gravity sometimes ceases to operate, machinery loses its capacity to injure at the decisive moment, and the consequences of human decisions are continually reversed? Would such a world remain sufficiently predictable for meaningful scientific discovery, responsible action, and technological development? The Christian understanding of divine providence does not deny that God can perform miracles, but neither does it establish that He is obligated to perform them whenever the natural consequences of human activity threaten our well-being. Perhaps, then, part of the responsibility entrusted to humanity is not merely to ask God for protection, but to employ the intelligence, foresight, scientific knowledge, and moral judgment with which we have been endowed to protect one another. The question of why God allows suffering remains profound, but our examination must also consider what God expects us to do about the dangers we ourselves have helped introduce into His creation.



## **If One Tragedy Escapes God's Rule, What Remains of Providence?**

I have often reflected that the Christian claim of divine sovereignty cannot be defended by pointing only to the tragedies for which a plausible benefit is visible. If a single event really occurred wholly outside God's knowledge and governing providence, the classical Christian doctrine of an all-knowing and all-powerful Creator would have to be reconsidered. But a hidden purpose is not the same thing as an uncontrolled event. Equally important, the fact that God can govern events does not imply that God approves their evil features or that the people who commit atrocities are innocent. Those claims concern different questions: power, foreknowledge, permission, moral intention, and accountability.



The skeptical philosopher is entitled to press harder: why would a good God permit even one appalling tragedy if prevention lay within His power? The Christian is entitled to ask in return whether our inability to identify a justifying reason demonstrates that no such reason could exist. Neither question can be answered simply by declaring victory. Dr. William L. Rowe, a philosopher whose influential work formulated the evidential argument from apparently gratuitous suffering, pressed the probability question; Dr. Michael Bergmann, a philosopher associated with skeptical theism, argues that our limited grasp of possible divine reasons may weaken certain inferences from appearances. Their disagreement shows why the issue is more demanding than either a single unexplained death or an easy appeal to mystery. ([The Problem of Evil, Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#); [Skeptical Theism, Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#)).



## If God Knows What Will Happen, Why Create This World at All?

Foreknowledge presses beyond permission. If God knew that creating this world would include war, trafficking, pandemics, and children dying in terror, why actualize it? One classical answer holds that existence and the possibility of redeemed fellowship are profound goods that justify allowing a history involving evil. Another uses middle knowledge, associated with **Luis de Molina (1535–1600)**, to suggest that God knows what free creatures would do in any possible circumstance and orders providence accordingly. Critics argue that such counterfactual truths are difficult to ground and do not explain why this exact world, rather than a less tragic one, was selected.

Luis de Molina, Spanish Jesuit theologian, proposed a doctrine now known as “middle knowledge”: God knows what every free creature would choose in any possible situation.

Modern Molinist philosophers develop this as one way of coordinating divine foreknowledge with human responsibility. Calvinist and other theologians dispute the account; it should therefore be offered as a serious option, not the settled biblical answer. (Thomas P. Flint, [Divine Providence: The Molinist Account](#).)

Leibniz's assertion that God chooses the best possible world encounters another problem: is there even one uniquely best possible world? Perhaps one could always imagine an additional redeemed person or a slightly less painful history. The Christian need not affirm Leibniz's full theory to believe that God is good, but neither can the difficulty be made to disappear by announcing that this must be the best world. The honest question concerns whether God has morally sufficient reasons for permitting this history, not whether we can confidently rank every conceivable universe.

But perhaps the most important consideration is whether we are evaluating God's decision to create humanity solely by the suffering experienced during our relatively brief earthly existence, rather than by the eternal good He ultimately intends to accomplish. Human beings routinely endure considerable hardships because we recognize that the anticipated good can outweigh the temporary suffering involved. A patient undergoes painful surgery in anticipation of restored health; an athlete endures exhausting discipline to achieve a greater goal; parents willingly sacrifice comfort, sleep, and personal ambitions for the privilege of raising children they love. We do not ordinarily conclude that the suffering makes these worthwhile endeavors inherently unjustifiable. Might God's purposes, extending beyond the limitations of our present existence, involve goods so magnificent that their ultimate fulfillment outweighs the suffering permitted along the way?

In the end, God will have a redeemed people who have responded to Him not because they were compelled by exhaustive proof that eliminated every possibility of doubt, but because they encountered sufficient reasons to trust Him and freely embraced His offer of redemption. In a world where suffering challenges our confidence in divine goodness, faith is called upon to trust beyond what sight can presently establish. Without such uncertainty and adversity, some of faith's most demanding expressions—perseverance, courageous trust, and hope against appearances—would never be exercised in the same way. Yet the goal is not suffering itself, but an eternal relationship with God in which faith's present struggles give way to the fulfillment of His promises ([Hebrews 11:1–6](#); [2 Corinthians 5:7](#); [1 Peter 1:6–9](#)).

And what an extraordinary outcome Scripture promises! **Paradise lost becomes Paradise restored**, as Revelation describes a new heaven and earth where God Himself dwells among His redeemed people, wiping away every tear, abolishing death, and bringing mourning, crying, and pain to an everlasting end ([Revelation 21:1–4](#); [Revelation 22:1–5](#)). The psalmist describes God's presence as containing “**fullness of joy**” and “**pleasures forevermore**” ([Psalm 16:11](#)). Against that eternal horizon, consider the astonishing declaration of the

Apostle Paul, who described his earthly suffering as “**light and momentary troubles**” in comparison with the eternal glory awaiting believers ([2 Corinthians 4:17–18](#)).

*Light and momentary?* This was a man who had endured repeated imprisonments, severe beatings, five occasions of receiving thirty-nine lashes, three beatings with rods, stoning, three shipwrecks, a night and day adrift at sea, dangerous rivers, bandits, betrayal, hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, exposure to cold, and the relentless burden of concern for the churches ([2 Corinthians 11:23–28](#)). Paul was hardly minimizing suffering; he knew its crushing reality firsthand. Yet he insisted that “**our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us**” ([Romans 8:18](#)). His confidence rested not upon an explanation for every tragedy, but upon the Resurrection of Christ and the certainty of eternal redemption. This does not establish that every evil was necessary or that suffering victims should simply endure injustice without protest. Rather, it introduces a consideration of extraordinary magnitude: **If the Christian promise is true, then the deepest sufferings of this temporary existence will ultimately be overwhelmed—not merely balanced—by an eternity of perfect goodness, justice, love, and joy in the presence of God Himself.**

Perhaps few expressions capture this extraordinary Christian hope more beautifully than the opening lines of the beloved memorial poem “*Let Me Go*,” traditionally attributed to the nineteenth-century English poet **Christina Georgina Rossetti** (1830–1894), although its authorship remains uncertain.

*“When I come to the end of the road*

*And the sun has set for me I want no rites in a gloom-filled room*

*Why cry for a soul set free?”*

(See [“Let Me Go,” Poem Analysis](#).)

Those sentiments remind me of another remarkable expression of Christian hope, the classic hymn “**Light After Darkness**,” written by the English Christian poet and hymnwriter **Frances Ridley Havergal** (1836–1879) and published in 1879. Its extraordinary beauty lies in the way Havergal places the temporary hardships of our earthly existence alongside the everlasting blessings promised to God's redeemed people.

Consider how wonderfully her words echo the Apostle Paul's conviction that present suffering cannot compare with the glory awaiting us:

*Light after darkness, gain after loss, Strength after weakness, crown after cross;*

*Sweet after bitter, hope after fears, Home after wandering, praise after tears.*

*Sheaves after sowing, sun after rain, Sight after mystery, peace after pain;*



*Joy after sorrow, calm after blast, Rest after weariness, sweet rest at last.*

*Near after distant, gleam after gloom,*

*Love after loneliness, life after tomb;*

*After long agony rapture of bliss—Right was the pathway leading to this.*

(Frances Ridley Havergal, [“Light After Darkness,” Hymnary.org; Crown After Cross, Timeless Truths](#), original text published in *Life Mosaic*, 1879.)

There is, however, an essential distinction between believing that the ultimate good will outweigh the suffering of this life and claiming that every painful experience was necessary to achieve that good. Christianity does not require us to celebrate evil as though cruelty, disease, and death were blessings in disguise, though at times it certainly is. Rather, its extraordinary promise is that God possesses the power to redeem what evil has damaged and bring His people into an eternal existence whose goodness surpasses anything this fallen world can offer. **The ultimate triumph of God's providence is not that suffering was good, but that suffering will not have the final word.** As the Apostle Paul declared, “Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” ([1 Corinthians 15:54–57](#)).

What a remarkable perspective these words offer on the question that has occupied this entire investigation! Neither the poet nor the hymnwriter denies the reality of suffering, grief, loneliness, weakness, or death. Rather, they direct our attention beyond these temporary realities to the ultimate fulfillment of God's redemptive promises. Christianity does not proclaim that this present world is free from tragedy, nor that we will understand every painful experience before leaving it. It proclaims something infinitely greater: **that sorrow will give way to everlasting joy, death to resurrection, and the brokenness of this present creation to the glorious restoration of all things. Paradise lost will become Paradise restored.** And perhaps only when we stand within that eternal reality will we begin to comprehend the full significance of Paul's astonishing declaration that the sufferings of this present time cannot compare with the glory that awaits us ([Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; Revelation 21:1–4](#)).



## Could Suffering Be A School for the Soul—Or Does That Insult the Victims?

I have often preached about hard answers, head answers, and heart answers, borrowing a useful teaching framework from **Hal Seed**'s material and developing it in my own teachings. One familiar head answer is that hardship can develop perseverance, compassion, courage, patience, and dependence on God ([Romans 5:3–5](#); [James 1:2–4](#)). The idea belongs to a long Christian history and receives sophisticated expression in **Dr. John Hick**'s soul-making theodicy, which portrays earthly life as a setting in which immature persons may grow toward moral and spiritual maturity (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "[John Hick](#)", especially the section "Irenaean 'Soul-Making' Theodicy.")

**Dr. Hick** developed a modern "soul-making" theodicy: a world involving challenge and danger could permit virtues that cannot arise in a frictionless paradise. The objection is especially potent when the suffering crushes a person rather than strengthening them, or when a vulnerable child receives no opportunity to grow from it. A proposed greater good must never become a claim that another person's abuse was deserved or necessary. (**Dr. John Hick**, [Evil and the God of Love](#).)

The objection is immediate: what about the infant who dies before such growth is possible, the person whose suffering destroys rather than improves capacity, or the atrocity that seems to teach its victims only terror? A mother's cancer must not be justified by the compassion it happens to awaken in spectators. A coherent Christian response may say that some suffering can be redeemed and character can form in the midst of it. That is different from claiming that every evil was deliberately administered as a lesson, that all sufferers emerge stronger,

or that the benefits to others always morally outweigh the injuries inflicted on a particular person.

There is a distinct biblical category of discipline, but [Hebrews 12](#) should be handled with restraint. Scripture sometimes interprets suffering within God's training of His people, yet it does not provide outsiders a method for diagnosing the reason for another person's illness. To say to a bereaved mother that God killed her child to improve her character is not theological rigor. It is an unsupported assertion that risks compounding injury. If we do not know the purpose of an event, we should not manufacture one to spare ourselves the discomfort of uncertainty.



## **What About Prayers for Healing That Never Receive a Yes—Or Did They in Heaven?**

The problem of unanswered prayer brings theology to the bedside. Christians believe God can heal, rescue, and intervene. Scripture portrays extraordinary deliverances but also righteous people who suffer and die. The Apostle Paul asks repeatedly for the removal of a thorn and is not granted the requested relief; Jesus prays in Gethsemane while facing the Cross ([2 Corinthians 12:7–10](#); [Luke 22:39–46](#)). These passages challenge the claim that an unanswered prayer necessarily reveals defective faith.

**Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff** (b. 1932), philosopher and Noah Porter Professor Emeritus at Yale University, wrote “Lament for a Son” after the death of his twenty-five-year-old son Eric. He does not treat enduring faith as an exemption from grief; his book shows how a believing father can mourn irreparable loss without converting grief into an argument that



the loss was good. That is particularly relevant to promises mistakenly made on behalf of God about healing, safety, or guaranteed deliverance. (Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff, [Lament for a Son](#), 1987.)

Some skeptics ask whether reported miracles are sufficient to offset the far greater number of apparently unanswered pleas. That question requires evidence, not merely stories selected because they ended well. Reports of unexpected recovery should be examined with medical care and humility; the absence of a cure is not proof that parents, patients, or congregations failed to believe. Prayer, from a classical Christian perspective, is neither mechanical control over God nor meaningless decoration. It is an appeal to a personal God whose wisdom believers trust without claiming to predict His every response.

Yet an important distinction must remain before us: **the fact that God does not intervene in every circumstance does not establish that He never intervenes in any.** The difficult question of unanswered prayer must not be confused with the separate historical and evidential question of whether God has ever answered prayer through extraordinary intervention. Later in this investigation, we will examine that second question directly, considering the philosophical arguments of C. S. Lewis, the investigations of Lee Strobel and Dr. Craig Keener, medically documented recoveries, clinical research, and ultimately Christianity's extraordinary historical claims concerning Jesus Christ. For now, our responsibility is to acknowledge the suffering of those whose prayers were not answered as they hoped, without assuming that their experience settles every question about divine intervention.

There is also a moral difficulty of selective rescue. If one child survives a catastrophe while another dies, praising God for the first child's rescue can sound as though God valued the other child less. Christians can give thanks for survival while refusing to claim privileged knowledge of why another family was not spared. A genuine providence theology has room both for gratitude and for lament, without imagining either emotion explains the distribution of suffering.

There is another dimension of unanswered prayer that deserves consideration: sometimes the circumstances we plead with God to change remain unchanged, yet Scripture describes His presence and sustaining grace as profoundly real in the midst of them. The prophet Daniel's three companions, facing execution in a blazing furnace, declared that God was able to deliver them but that their faithfulness would remain even if He did not. Centuries later, the Apostle Paul and Silas prayed and sang hymns while imprisoned, demonstrating a faith that did not depend upon immediate relief from suffering. Neither account promises that every believer will experience a miraculous rescue or an extraordinary sense of peace. Rather, they reveal a distinction between trusting God because He grants the outcome we desire and trusting Him because of who we believe Him to be. **I have often reminded people that God's answers to prayer may be understood in three familiar ways: "Yes,"**

**“No,” or “I have something different in mind.”** The third possibility reminds us that an answer different from our request is not necessarily evidence that God has ignored us, although we should never presume to know precisely what His alternative purpose may be. Perhaps one of faith's greatest tests is whether we can continue to love and trust God when the answer to our most desperate prayers remains something other than the deliverance we sought ([Daniel 3:16–18](#); [Acts 16:22–25](#); [Philippians 4:6–7](#)).

But might there be another dimension to a prayer that seems unanswered? Christians sometimes speak of “heavenly healing”—the conviction that a believer who dies in Christ is not abandoned to disease but ultimately restored through resurrection. In that sense, heavenly healing is not an inferior cure; it is the promised end of sickness, decay, and death themselves. Even Lazarus, whom Jesus raised, would eventually face physical death again. By contrast, Paul describes the resurrection body as imperishable, and Revelation pictures a renewed creation in which mourning and pain are no more ([1 Corinthians 15:42–54](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#)). Yet we must speak carefully: if a mother prayed for her child to survive chemotherapy and the child died, it would be insensitive to insist that her specific prayer was simply answered “yes” in a different location. She asked for more years together on earth, and that loss remains real. The Christian hope is more demanding and more substantial than a comforting change of terminology: death is still an enemy, not a disguised blessing, and the resurrection of Jesus is presented as God’s pledge that this enemy will finally be defeated ([1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#)). We may therefore hold two truths together without contradiction: the earthly healing we pleaded for did not come, and we still have reason, within the Christian faith, to trust that death will not have the final word. This is not an explanation of why that particular person died, but it is the astonishing horizon against which Christianity understands both unanswered prayer and eternal restoration.

**Randy Alcorn** writes from his experience of living with insulin-dependent diabetes: “Resurrection healing will be permanent.” His observation distinguishes a temporary reprieve from the final resurrection promised in Christian Scripture. Even the person restored to health today remains vulnerable to disease, age, and death; the resurrection hope promises not another interval of fragile health but life no longer subject to bodily decay. As Paul explains, the mortal will put on immortality, and Christ will transform His people in the fulfillment of His victory over death ([1 Corinthians 15:42–57](#); [Philippians 3:20–21](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#)). (**Randy Alcorn**, [“If I Have Enough Faith, Will God Heal Me?”](#), Eternal Perspective Ministries, May 19, 2017.)

Yet the promise of resurrection must never become an excuse to minimize what a family actually prayed for. When parents beg God to spare their child’s life, they are praying for more years with that child here, not merely a future reunion. If death comes, that earthly request was not granted as they sought it. Their grief cannot be corrected away by declaring that the child was “healed in Heaven.” **Alcorn**, considering the death of an eighteen-month-

old child, writes, “I can’t explain His purposes, and no explanation can or should remove a parent’s grief.” That is the pastoral balance Scripture itself demands: confidence that Christ has defeated death while allowing mourners to weep, question, and remember. The present comfort of believers who die in Christ and the future resurrection of the body are related but distinct Christian hopes ([2 Corinthians 5:6–8](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#)). **Eternal healing is no inferior healing; it is the ultimate promised healing, but it does not mean that every request for healing in this life received the answer the family pleaded to receive.** (Randy Alcorn, [“Why Does God Take Some People to Heaven So Young?”](#), Eternal Perspective Ministries, August 12, 2009.)



## Does Saying “God Works All Things for Good” Erase Real Evil?

[Romans 8:28](#) is among Christianity’s most quoted promises and one of the most easily mishandled. Paul does not say that all things are good; he speaks of God working in all things for good for those who love Him, in a chapter filled with groaning, weakness, and hope for future redemption. The difference is substantial. Betrayal remains betrayal. Cancer remains disease. A child’s death remains a death that ought to provoke grief rather than celebration ([Romans 8:18–39](#)).

Randy Alcorn’s careful emphasis on the relationship between sovereignty and meaningful choice is useful here. In his discussion of divine glory he writes of “the suffering he allows or brings,” explaining that Scripture uses both categories. Those alternatives deserve examination rather than the claim that their moral implications are identical; God’s capacity to redeem an evil action does not make that action good or dissolve the perpetrator’s



responsibility. (**Randy Alcorn**, [“How God Uses Suffering for His Glory and Our Good”](#), 2017.)

As I will reflect upon later in this investigation, my dear friend **Nanci Alcorn**'s extraordinary conviction that “cancer is God's servant,” also explored in Randy's writings, expresses her confidence that suffering lies outside neither God's sovereign knowledge nor His redemptive purposes. That can be deeply sustaining when spoken by someone interpreting their own illness. Nanci's absolute conviction was not that cancer is desirable but that cancer does not possess the final authority over God's purposes. (**Randy Alcorn**, [Can Cancer Be God's Servant? What I Saw in My Wife's Last Four Years](#), December 19, 2022.)

In the Old Testament, Joseph's words to his brothers offer a similarly important distinction: their act was genuinely intended for evil; God's ability to bring good from it did not transform their cruelty into virtue. Christian hope is strongest when it refuses to rename evil. The Cross itself would make little sense if betrayal, wrongful conviction, torture, and execution were not actually wrong ([Genesis 50:20](#); [Acts 2:23](#)).



## Why Doesn't God Show Himself Clearly—And Stop People from Doubting?

The problem of divine hiddenness overlaps with suffering but deserves its own treatment in a later installment of this series. Suffice here to say: **J. L. Schellenberg (born 1959)**, Canadian philosopher best known for the modern divine-hiddenness argument, argues that a perfectly loving God would not permit nonresistant persons who are sincerely open to

relationship with Him to remain in unbelief. Suffering intensifies this objection: when a parent cries out for help and receives no recognizable response, divine silence can appear not merely mysterious but relationally devastating. (J. L. Schellenberg, [Divine Hiddenness and Human Reason](#).)

Some Christians respond that overwhelming displays of divine power would jeopardize freedom or replace love with coercion. Yet knowing someone exists does not force us to love that person. The biblical narratives themselves depict individuals who recognize God's power and still resist Him. Accordingly, the claim that God must remain sufficiently hidden to preserve free choice needs a more careful argument than the assertion that full evidence would turn humans into robots. Faith may involve trust beyond exhaustive understanding without requiring belief against evidence ([John 20:24–31](#); [Hebrews 11:1](#)).



## Does “God’s Ways Are Higher” Answer Anything—Or End the Investigation?

[Isaiah 55:8–9](#) reminds believers that God’s thoughts exceed human thoughts, and [Deuteronomy 29:29](#) distinguishes hidden things from revealed obligations. Philosophers call one related contemporary approach skeptical theism: our inability to detect a morally sufficient divine reason for suffering does not establish that none exists. It cautions against moving too quickly from I cannot see a reason to there can be no reason. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Skeptical Theism.)

**Michael Bergmann (b. 1964)**, professor of philosophy at Purdue University and a leading contributor to skeptical theism, notes that our failure to discern a justifying reason need not

show that such a reason does not exist. Yet the view has a cost: if appealed to without limits, ignorance of God's purposes can be made to excuse almost anything. Epistemic humility is a constraint on our confidence, not a permission to stop investigating or comforting the injured. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [“Skeptical Theism”](#), discussion of Bergmann and objections.)

The skeptic's response is formidable. If our moral understanding is too weak to question God's apparent failure to stop atrocities, how could we confidently say that any perceived revelation or act is genuinely good? Skeptical theism can threaten ordinary moral judgment when overstretched. It should temper arrogant conclusions, not become an all-purpose device for silencing victims or protecting every theological claim from scrutiny. The Christian should admit both that our knowledge is finite and that the moral wrongness of torturing a child is not an illusion created by our limited perspective.

Throughout my years of studying Scripture and ministering to people facing extraordinary difficulties, I have often observed a curious contradiction in our understanding of divine sovereignty. **Many Christians confidently proclaim that God's ways are higher than our ways—until His ways contradict our ways, and suddenly our response becomes, “No way!”** We readily affirm His infinite wisdom when circumstances unfold according to our expectations, when prayers receive the answers we desire, and when life appears reasonably fair. But what happens when the diagnosis is devastating, when we don't get our way, the marriage collapses, the innocent suffer, or the prayers we have offered for years seem to go unanswered? Do we still believe God's understanding exceeds our own, or have we unconsciously made our willingness to trust Him conditional upon His agreement with us? Will we trust Him?

Perhaps the greatest biblical example is Jesus Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane. Facing the suffering of the Cross, He prayed that the cup might pass from Him, yet concluded, “Not as I will, but as you will.” His anguish did not diminish His trust in the Father's wisdom. Rather, it demonstrated that genuine faith can include sorrow, difficult questions, and a desire for a different outcome while still yielding to God's will. **If even Jesus expressed such anguish while trusting His Father, should we expect our own faith never to struggle with God's ways?** ([Matthew 26:36–39](#); [Hebrews 5:7–9](#)).

The prophet Isaiah's declaration that God's thoughts and ways are higher than ours was not intended to discourage thoughtful inquiry, excuse wrongdoing, or require us to pretend that suffering is good. Rather, it challenges the assumption that our finite understanding must be capable of comprehending every dimension of divine providence before trust becomes reasonable. The biblical call is not to abandon reason but to recognize its limitations, continuing to examine the evidence, confront injustice, and seek understanding while acknowledging that the Creator may possess knowledge and purposes beyond our present comprehension. **Perhaps the real test of whether we believe God's ways are higher than**



ours comes precisely when His ways are not the ways we would have chosen. ([Isaiah 55:8–9](#); [Proverbs 3:5–6](#); [Romans 11:33–36](#)).



## If Atheism Is True, Is Evil Still Genuinely Evil?

Some Christian arguments say that the experience of objective evil points beyond human preference to a transcendent moral standard. That argument deserves serious exploration, but it must be stated accurately. Atheists can and do defend robust accounts of objective morality grounded in moral realism, human flourishing, rational consistency, duties, or facts about conscious beings. The absence of belief in God does not make someone unable to recognize injustice or care sacrificially for victims. Nor does a reference to God, without further argument, solve every philosophical question about what makes an action right.

The evolutionary biologist and outspoken atheist **Dr. Richard Dawkins** (born 1941) described his interpretation of the natural world in striking terms: “nothing but blind, pitiless indifference.” In his argument, the extensive pain of living organisms is precisely what we would expect from processes that have no conscious intention to care for them. His observation should not be reduced to the false claim that atheists cannot love, act morally, or grieve; the real dispute concerns whether the apparent indifference of nature is better explained by a purposeless cosmos or by a creation whose ultimate purpose has not yet been fulfilled. ([River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life](#), 1995, chapter 4.)

**Erik Wielenberg (b. 1972)**, professor of philosophy at DePauw University, argues that robust moral realism need not depend on God: some ethical truths may hold independently of divine command. This is a significant reply to the claim that atheists cannot meaningfully

condemn genocide. The Christian may defend a theistic account of moral value, but should argue for it rather than define every alternative out of existence. (Erik J. Wielenberg, [Robust Ethics: The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Godless Normative Realism](#).)

The Christian can instead ask whether theism offers a persuasive ultimate grounding for human dignity and moral obligation while permitting an equally serious examination of secular alternatives. The skeptic can ask whether God's commands are good because they reflect goodness, or whether goodness would be whatever God arbitrarily commanded—the ancient Euthyphro dilemma. Classical Christian thinkers typically argue that goodness is rooted in God's necessarily good nature, not an arbitrary decree. The skeptic must therefore demonstrate why a materialistic account better grounds moral truth and human worth, rather than merely dismissing the Christian explanation.



## How the World's Major Religions Understand Suffering—And Where Christianity Differs

An honest comparison must not caricature religious neighbors. Most enduring religions treat suffering as a major moral and spiritual concern, and their answers vary within their own communities. Still, their central claims differ in ways that matter enormously to a bereaved parent: what caused suffering, whether there is a personal God who cares, how evil is judged, and what kind of future is promised.

**Wendy Doniger (b. 1940)**, historian of religions and Mircea Eliade Distinguished Service Professor Emerita at the University of Chicago, has documented the diversity of Hindu stories and the interpretations attached to them. Hinduism and Buddhism should not be

reduced to the claim that every child's tragedy is deserved punishment for previous-life wrongdoing: traditions vary, and compassion remains central in many. Islamic theology, likewise, cannot be flattened into one account of arbitrary divine command; discussions of divine justice differ among Ash'ari, Maturidi, and Mu'tazili perspectives. (Wendy Doniger, [The Hindus: An Alternative History](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#), "Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Religion".)

**Judaism** has no single explanation for innocent suffering. The shared Hebrew Scriptures contain covenantal blessings and warnings, but Job and the lament psalms refuse to equate every tragedy with personal guilt. Later rabbinic thinkers and post-Holocaust Jewish theologians have debated divine hiddenness, free will, retribution, and the hope of the world to come. Christianity inherits these profound questions from Israel and differs decisively in its confession that the promised Messiah has already suffered, died, and risen, inaugurating the long-awaited victory over death. Jewish interpreters do not generally accept that identification of Jesus; the comparison turns on that real theological and historical disagreement, not on an alleged Jewish indifference to grief. ([Rabbi Louis Jacobs, Biblical and Rabbinic Responses to Suffering](#); [Jewish Answers to Suffering and Evil](#)).

**Islam** affirms a powerful and merciful Creator, regards earthly life as a moral testing ground, emphasizes patience, prayer, almsgiving, and accountability, and anticipates resurrection and divine judgment. Muslim theologians debate the relationship between God's decree and human action; it would be false to suggest that Muslims simply believe suffering is arbitrary or that divine mercy is irrelevant. The Christian contrast is particularly Christological: while both traditions affirm judgment and hope beyond death, Christianity claims that God the Son personally entered human weakness, bore suffering at the Cross, and rose bodily from the grave. That is a substantive claim about God's action in history which must be judged on its evidence, rather than assumed merely from preference. ([Mohammad Elshinawy, Why Do People Suffer? God's Existence and the Problem of Evil](#); [Suleiman Hani, The Problem of Evil: A Multifaceted Islamic Solution](#)).

**Hinduism** encompasses many theistic, polytheistic, philosophical, and devotional traditions, often interpreting suffering through karma, rebirth, ignorance, and bondage to the cycle of birth and death. Liberation, or moksha, may be described in sharply different ways depending on the school. The language of karma can suggest moral continuity between lives, but it must not be turned into a charge that Hindus lack compassion for the sick or necessarily blame suffering children. The Christian alternative locates human hope not in liberation through repeated lives but in grace, a decisive historical redemption through Christ, resurrection, and a restored creation. ([Encyclopaedia Britannica, Karma](#); [Encyclopaedia Britannica, Moksha](#)).

**Buddhism** begins with the reality of *dukkha*, often translated as suffering or unsatisfactoriness. The Four Noble Truths analyze its relation to craving and describe a path



toward liberation from suffering; compassion and the relief of others' misery are central to major Buddhist traditions. Unlike Christianity, most Buddhist schools do not root this account in a Creator who enters history to defeat death, although there are profound differences among Buddhist traditions about ultimate reality and salvation. The comparison is therefore not between compassion and indifference, but between divergent diagnoses of the human predicament and different promised ends. ([Encyclopaedia Britannica, Four Noble Truths](#); [Encyclopaedia Britannica, Buddhism](#)).

**Sikhism** likewise takes suffering seriously, affirming one God and calling human beings to live in remembrance of God, accept divine hukam (the divine order or command), practice humility, and offer seva, selfless service. Sikh teaching cannot fairly be reduced to resignation: service to those in distress is a moral imperative. Christian distinctiveness here again is not an exclusive possession of compassion, but the proclamation of the incarnate Christ's atoning death and bodily resurrection as the decisive turning point in the story of suffering and evil. ([Encyclopaedia Britannica, Sikhism](#)).

**Shinto**, Japan's indigenous religious tradition, approaches suffering through a worldview centered upon the *kami*—sacred spiritual presences associated with nature, ancestral life, particular places, and various aspects of existence. Rather than offering a comprehensive doctrine explaining why an all-powerful Creator permits innocent suffering, Shinto places considerable emphasis upon harmony, reverence, gratitude, and ritual purification. Illness, death, misfortune, and other disruptive conditions may be associated with *kegare*, commonly translated as ritual impurity or defilement; importantly, this does not necessarily imply moral guilt on the part of the sufferer. Practices such as *harae* and *misogi* seek purification and restoration of harmony, while prayers and offerings to the *kami* may express hopes for health, protection, and deliverance from misfortune. Shinto's historical interaction with Buddhism has also shaped Japanese understandings of death and suffering. The Christian distinction is substantial: Christianity does not merely seek restoration of harmony with sacred powers but proclaims a personal Creator who enters human suffering, confronts evil through Christ, and promises the ultimate resurrection and renewal of creation. ([Encyclopaedia Britannica, Shinto](#); [BBC, "What Japan Can Teach Us About Cleanliness"](#).)

**Confucianism**, originating in the teachings of **Confucius (551–479 BC)** and developed by influential thinkers such as **Mencius (c. 372–289 BC)**, approaches suffering primarily through ethical cultivation, responsible relationships, wise government, and the moral obligations human beings owe one another. Its central virtues include *ren* (benevolence or humaneness), *yi* (righteousness), and *li* (ritual propriety), emphasizing compassion, integrity, family responsibility, and social harmony. Mencius argued that genuine benevolence requires responding to another person's suffering and that rulers bear responsibility for protecting people from hunger, deprivation, and injustice. Confucian

traditions also recognize *Tian*, often translated as Heaven, although interpretations of its personal or impersonal character vary considerably. Rather than providing a single doctrine of salvation from suffering through divine redemption, classical Confucian thought concentrates heavily upon how human beings should respond morally to suffering within family, society, and government. The Christian distinction lies in its claim that humanity requires more than moral cultivation and social reform: sin and death demand God's redemptive intervention, accomplished through Jesus Christ and culminating in bodily resurrection and the restoration of creation. ([Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Confucius"](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Mencius"](#).)

**Atheism and Secular Humanism** deserve consideration alongside religious traditions because the rejection of God's existence does not eliminate suffering or the philosophical responsibility to explain its significance. Atheism itself is not necessarily a religion in a classic definition, but atheistic naturalism offers a comprehensive understanding of reality in which disease, natural disasters, predation, and death arise through physical, biological, and evolutionary processes rather than divine purposes. Secular humanists commonly respond by emphasizing scientific investigation, medical progress, compassion, human rights, and collective responsibility to reduce preventable suffering. Indeed, the American Humanist Association explicitly grounds its ethical outlook in reason, compassion, and shared humanity. Such commitments demonstrate that atheists can possess profound moral convictions and work sacrificially to relieve suffering. Yet important questions remain: **If reality is ultimately impersonal, what establishes the objective moral wrongness of cruelty, the inherent worth of innocent human beings, and the ultimate significance of injustices that will never be corrected during their victims' lifetimes?** Some atheist philosophers defend objective morality without God, and their arguments deserve careful examination. Nevertheless, scientific explanations of suffering's causes do not by themselves establish the ultimate foundations of moral obligation or promise final justice beyond death. Christianity offers a fundamentally different account: suffering is not humanity's intended final condition, moral evil violates the goodness of a personal Creator, and God has acted through Jesus Christ to defeat sin and death. **The atheist may explain why suffering occurs without invoking God; Christianity additionally claims to explain why evil is objectively wrong and why it will not have the final word.** ([Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Atheism and Agnosticism"](#); [American Humanist Association, "What Is Humanism?"](#); [Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, "Moral Arguments for the Existence of God"](#).)

**The Christian case** I find most compelling is therefore a cumulative one. Scripture names evil as evil without making the sufferer automatically guilty; it calls for the protection of the oppressed; it portrays a God who personally shares human sorrow in Jesus; and it makes the startling claim that death will finally be destroyed through resurrection and new creation. Other traditions possess genuine wisdom, practices of mercy, and serious responses to

suffering. Nevertheless, if the claims about Jesus are true, Christianity offers something distinctive: not merely a way to endure pain or escape a cycle, but God's own historical action to judge evil, rescue sinners, and renew the world. The claim is theologically immense and warrants rigorous historical investigation. ([John 11:33–36](#); [Romans 8:18–25](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#)).

Perhaps the most extraordinary feature of the Judeo-Christian revelation is its insistence that **God has possessed a plan to defeat evil from the very beginning—and has been carrying it out throughout human history.** From the first promise of victory over the serpent in Genesis, through God's covenant with Abraham, His deliverance of Israel, the declarations of the prophets, and ultimately the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, Scripture presents a continuous unfolding purpose of redemption. Certainly, critics may reasonably ask why this plan has taken so long, why God has permitted so much suffering along the way, and why humanity must continue waiting while injustice, disease, cruelty, and death ravage our world. Indeed, Christians themselves have echoed the ancient cry, “How long, O Lord?” Yet the biblical answer is not that God has abandoned His creation or surrendered to evil, but that His redemptive purposes are moving toward an appointed culmination. **At the promised return of Jesus Christ, evil will face final judgment, death itself will be destroyed, and God's redeemed people will inherit a restored creation where suffering, sorrow, and mourning will cease forever.** The long campaign against evil that began in Genesis will reach its triumphant conclusion in Revelation—not merely with evil restrained or suffering temporarily relieved, but with their ultimate defeat. **Paradise lost will finally become Paradise restored. Let's discuss that in more details.** ([Genesis 3:15](#); [Psalm 13:1–2](#); [2 Peter 3:8–13](#); [1 Corinthians 15:24–26](#); [Revelation 19:11–21](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#)).

These comparisons reveal that the world's major religious traditions do not offer identical explanations of suffering, evil, salvation, or humanity's ultimate destiny. But another question now demands our attention, and it reaches beyond comparing religious teachings. **Has God ever actually intervened in human history, or must every reported answer to prayer, extraordinary healing, and apparent miracle ultimately be explained without Him?** Christianity's claims concerning divine intervention are not confined to ancient testimony; contemporary reports, medical investigations, philosophical arguments, and historical evidence invite further examination. Most significantly, Christianity proclaims that God's greatest intervention occurred not through an isolated supernatural event, but through the person, ministry, Crucifixion, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Before proceeding to the biblical account of God's long campaign against evil, we must therefore confront this evidence directly and ask whether Heaven has truly remained silent throughout human history.



# The Case for Miracles—Or God's Intervention: Has Heaven Really Never Answered a Prayer?

## Part One: The Evidence for Miracles and Answered Prayer



### To Ask Why God Does Not Always Intervene Is Not to Prove He Never Does

Throughout this investigation, we have confronted some of the most disturbing questions imaginable. Why does God permit innocent children to suffer? Why does one family experience extraordinary tragedy while another escapes unharmed? Why do prayers for healing sometimes appear unanswered, even when offered with remarkable sincerity and faith? These are legitimate and profoundly important questions. But there is another question that deserves equally serious investigation: **Has God ever intervened in human affairs in ways that cannot be adequately explained by ordinary natural causes?** Across centuries and civilizations, countless people have reported extraordinary recoveries, remarkable deliverances, and events they believed occurred in direct response to prayer. Some of these accounts are undoubtedly mistaken, exaggerated, coincidental, or inadequately documented. Yet does the existence of questionable reports justify dismissing every account, including those supported by medical records, identifiable witnesses, and substantial scholarly investigation?

Here we must recognize an essential distinction too frequently overlooked in debates about God's goodness and the existence of evil. **To ask why God does not intervene in every circumstance is entirely fair, but the fact that He does not intervene in every circumstance does not establish that He never intervenes—or even that He does not intervene frequently.** These are fundamentally different propositions requiring different evidence. A grieving parent may reasonably ask why God did not prevent a child's death; that heartbreaking question cannot be answered simply by pointing to another child's remarkable recovery. But neither does one family's tragedy disprove the possibility that another family genuinely experienced divine intervention. The argument against God's existence cannot simply assume that every reported miracle, extraordinary healing, and apparent answer to prayer throughout human history must have an explanation that excludes God. **Before concluding that Heaven has remained silent, we must honestly investigate the evidence that Heaven has sometimes answered.** If skeptics rightly insist that Christians account for prayers that appear unanswered, intellectual fairness requires them to examine the strongest evidence of prayers that appear to have been answered.

So what is the evidence? Are there medically documented recoveries that physicians have struggled to explain? Have researchers recorded measurable physical improvements following prayer? Have respected historians, philosophers, investigative journalists, and medical specialists examined extraordinary events that challenge conventional explanations? As we shall discover, the answer to each of these questions is yes. Whether those findings ultimately establish supernatural intervention remains a matter requiring careful judgment, but the evidence itself cannot responsibly be ignored. **The challenge before us is not to prove that God answers every prayer. It is to investigate whether there are credible grounds for believing that He has answered any—and perhaps many.**

## **The Question That Confronted Me as a Former Atheist**

As someone raised in an atheist and agnostic household, I once approached claims of divine intervention with considerable skepticism. But during my early investigation into God's existence, an unsettling question occurred to me: **Of all the prayers offered throughout human history—across every nation, century, religious tradition, and even by people who scarcely knew whether God existed—was I really prepared to conclude that not one had ever received a genuine divine answer?** Think about the extraordinary scope of that proposition. Countless people have prayed for endangered loved ones, sought healing when physicians had little hope, pleaded for deliverance from seemingly impossible circumstances, or simply asked God to reveal Himself. If even one such prayer had been genuinely answered through divine intervention, then my former understanding of a universe entirely without God would require reconsideration.

I recognized that atheism could account for extraordinary events through coincidence, medical recovery, mistaken interpretation, or natural causes not yet understood. Strictly speaking, atheism does not require denying that remarkable recoveries occur; it denies that a God exists to cause them. Nevertheless, I began to question whether it was reasonable to assume in advance that every reported answer to prayer must belong to one of those natural categories, regardless of the available evidence. **For me, the more difficult intellectual position was no longer believing that miracles might occur, but insisting that divine intervention must be excluded before the evidence was even examined.** This realization did not immediately establish Christianity as true. Agnosticism remained a genuine possibility, as did the need to distinguish the existence of a Creator from the specific claims of Christian revelation. But it became an important turning point: I could no longer regard God's possible intervention as a question that honest investigation was entitled to dismiss without examining the evidence.

My question was never whether every sincere prayer had been answered in the way its petitioner desired. Years of walking alongside suffering families have convinced me that such a claim would be impossible to sustain. Rather, the question was whether I could reasonably maintain that, among the countless petitions offered throughout human history, no divine response had ever occurred. **Was my disbelief grounded in a careful investigation of the strongest available evidence, or had I allowed my prior conviction that God did not exist to settle the question before the investigation began?** That distinction became increasingly important as I studied Christianity, the sciences, world religions, philosophy, and history. I eventually found myself wondering whether the assumption that every apparent intervention must be explained without God required more philosophical confidence than I could reasonably justify.

## **C. S. Lewis: Must Miracles Be Ruled Out Before the Evidence Is Examined?**

**C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)**, the renowned Oxford and Cambridge literary scholar, Christian apologist, and former atheist, addressed this foundational issue in his influential book *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (1947; revised 1960). Lewis recognized that disputes about miracles frequently begin before any particular event is examined. If someone defines the physical universe as the entirety of reality and assumes that no supernatural agency can act upon it, then miracles have already been excluded by definition. But that exclusion is not itself a scientific discovery; it is a philosophical conclusion concerning the nature of reality. Lewis therefore argued that the prior question is whether nature constitutes the whole of existence or whether something beyond nature could act within it. Scientific laws describe the regular operations of the physical world, but they do not independently demonstrate that a Creator could never intervene in the world He established. **A miracle, if genuine, would**



**not necessarily mean that nature had become irrational; it would mean that an agency beyond the ordinary natural sequence had acted within it.** Lewis did not regard every unusual occurrence as miraculous. His contribution was to challenge the assumption that supernatural explanations must be rejected before their evidential merits are considered. (C. S. Lewis, [\*Miracles: A Preliminary Study\*](#).)

This argument encounters a famous opponent in **David Hume (1711–1776)**, the Scottish philosopher whose essay “Of Miracles” remains among the most influential criticisms of supernatural claims. Hume argued that testimony concerning an extraordinary event must be weighed against extensive experience supporting the regularity of nature. His insistence that evidence be proportional to the improbability of a claim remains an important principle: extraordinary assertions should not be believed merely because they are sincerely reported. Nevertheless, the Christian apologist may reasonably ask whether the improbability assigned to miracles has already been influenced by assuming that no supernatural agent exists. If God's existence is independently plausible, then divine intervention cannot simply be assigned a probability of zero. The investigation must therefore consider the reliability of witnesses, the quality of documentary and medical evidence, ordinary alternative explanations, and the wider philosophical evidence concerning whether God exists. **Healthy skepticism demands strong evidence; philosophical prejudice refuses to consider evidence that might overturn its assumptions.** The two must not be confused. (David Hume, [\*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding\*, Section X, “Of Miracles”](#); Dr. Richard Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle*, 1970.)

## **Lee Strobel: When a Former Atheist Investigative Journalist Examines the Case for Miracles**

Few contemporary Christian writers have brought this question before a wider readership as effectively as **Lee Strobel (born 1952)**, the award-winning former legal editor of the *Chicago Tribune*, who earned a journalism degree from the University of Missouri and a Master of Studies in Law from Yale Law School. A former atheist who became a Christian after investigating Christianity's historical claims, Strobel applied his journalistic approach to another consequential question in *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural* (2018): **Is there credible evidence that God continues to intervene in people's lives today?** Rather than interviewing only scholars who agreed with him, Strobel began by consulting **Dr. Michael Shermer (born 1954)**, the prominent skeptic and publisher of *Skeptic* magazine, allowing him to present substantial objections to miracles before examining the affirmative evidence.

Strobel subsequently investigated claims of extraordinary recoveries, dreams, visions, and other reported interventions while interviewing scholars whose work bears directly upon the

subject. Among them were **Dr. Craig S. Keener**, whose extensive research examines ancient and contemporary miracle testimony; **Dr. Candy Gunther Brown**, whose empirical investigations include measurable changes following healing prayer; and Christian philosopher **Dr. Douglas Groothuis**, who addressed the painful reality of prayers for healing that remain unanswered. Strobel's approach is valuable because it moves beyond the simplistic assertion that miracles must be true because believers report them, while also questioning the equally simplistic assumption that miracle claims can be rejected merely because they are extraordinary. His investigation did not independently establish that every reported miracle was genuine, but it challenged the presumption that divine intervention belongs exclusively to an ancient, scientifically uninformed world. (Lee Strobel, [\*The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural\*, Zondervan, 2018](#); [“Do Miracles Happen? An Interview with Lee Strobel,” Bible Gateway, 2018](#).)

One striking feature of Strobel's investigation was a national survey commissioned for his book. According to the results he reported, **67 percent of American adults believed miracles remained possible, while 38 percent believed God had performed at least one miracle in their own lives**. Strobel estimated that the latter figure represented nearly ninety-five million Americans at the time. These percentages measure personal convictions, not independently verified supernatural events, and it would be mistaken to treat them as clinical proof of divine intervention. Nevertheless, they challenge the notion that contemporary belief in miracles is an exceedingly rare phenomenon confined to isolated religious enthusiasts. Millions of people believe they have personally experienced extraordinary answers to prayer. Some may have misunderstood what occurred, but that possibility does not settle the credibility of every individual account. **The important question is whether the strongest cases—particularly those supported by medical documentation, identifiable witnesses, and serious investigation—can be dismissed as readily as the weakest anecdotes**. Here Strobel's research converges with the question that confronted me personally: has God truly never answered a single prayer, or might our prior convictions sometimes determine which explanations we are willing to consider? (Lee Strobel, [\*The Case for Miracles\*, 2018](#); [Bible Gateway interview, 2018](#).)

## **Dr. Craig Keener: Are Reports of Divine Intervention Confined to Antiquity?**

A particularly substantial academic contribution comes from **Dr. Craig S. Keener (born 1960)**, New Testament scholar and professor at Asbury Theological Seminary. His two-volume work, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts* (2011), offers an extensive investigation of ancient and contemporary miracle claims, historical testimony, philosophical objections, and reports from diverse cultures throughout the world. Keener challenges the assertion that reports of extraordinary divine intervention disappear wherever

modern medicine, education, and informed observers are present. He gathers testimony from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and other regions, examining the difficulties involved in distinguishing genuinely extraordinary events from exaggeration, misunderstanding, and ordinary natural processes. His research does not establish that every account is medically verified or supernatural, but it challenges appeals to supposedly uniform human experience against miracles. **A serious historical investigation cannot simply discard an entire category of testimony because its implications would be inconvenient for a preferred worldview.** Each report must be evaluated according to its evidential merits, and the strongest cases deserve more attention than the weakest anecdotes. (Dr. Craig S. Keener, [\*Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts\*, Baker Academic, 2011.](#))

Keener's work also raises an important methodological question about the relationship between testimony and historical investigation. Historians routinely rely upon eyewitness reports and documentary records when reconstructing ancient events, recognizing that witnesses can be mistaken and that testimony requires corroboration. Yet it would be unreasonable to dismiss all eyewitness accounts simply because some witnesses have proven unreliable. Likewise, the proper response to miracle testimony is neither uncritical acceptance nor indiscriminate rejection. Claims involving identifiable participants, contemporary documentation, reliable medical assessments, and independent corroboration deserve closer consideration than vague stories passed from person to person. The existence of fabricated miracle reports establishes the need for careful historical methods; it does not independently establish that all such events are impossible. **If the skeptic insists that the evidence for divine intervention is inadequate, that judgment should follow an examination of the strongest available cases rather than an assumption that none could possibly survive investigation.**

## **When Medical Researchers Investigated Prayer and Healing**

The discussion becomes especially interesting when reported recoveries are examined through measurable clinical methods rather than testimony alone. **Dr. Candy Gunther Brown**, a scholar of religious studies at Indiana University, collaborated with research colleagues in a study published in the peer-reviewed *Southern Medical Journal* in September 2010. The investigators examined twenty-four participants in Mozambique who reported hearing or visual impairments and subsequently received personal, nearby intercessory prayer. Using hearing measurements and standardized vision charts, the researchers reported statistically significant improvements in auditory and visual function following the interventions, with probability values below 0.003 for hearing and below 0.02 for vision. **These findings were not based solely upon participants saying they felt better; measurable differences were recorded using clinical instruments.** Nevertheless, the study was small and lacked the randomized control conditions necessary to establish



prayer as the cause of those improvements. Its findings cannot demonstrate that a supernatural agent intervened. What they do establish is that researchers observed potentially meaningful changes associated with a prayer intervention and considered them worthy of further investigation. (Dr. Candy Gunther Brown, Stephen C. Mory, Rebecca Williams, and Michael J. McClymond, [“Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Proximal Intercessory Prayer on Auditory and Visual Impairments in Rural Mozambique,” \*Southern Medical Journal\* 103, no. 9 \(2010\), 864–869.](#))

Brown further developed this interdisciplinary approach in *Testing Prayer: Science and Healing* (2012), exploring religious healing practices, firsthand testimony, observable changes in bodily function, and the limitations of scientific investigation. Her work raises an important question: can religious healing claims be examined scientifically without assuming either that every recovery is miraculous or that every supernatural interpretation must be false? The scientist can investigate whether a patient's condition changed, what treatments were involved, whether measurements were reliable, and whether known medical mechanisms adequately explain the outcome. The philosopher and theologian must then consider whether the circumstances reasonably warrant an inference to divine agency. Those questions are distinguishable, but they need not be disconnected. **The Christian case is strongest when it welcomes demanding investigation rather than asking readers to substitute religious enthusiasm for evidence.** (Dr. Candy Gunther Brown, *Testing Prayer: Science and Healing*, Harvard University Press, 2012.)

## **The Lourdes Medical Investigations: A Documented Case of Unexpected Recovery**

Another longstanding source of investigated healing claims is the Medical Bureau associated with Lourdes, France. Although Protestants and Catholics differ concerning significant theological questions, the medical facts surrounding a person's recovery should be examined independently of those disagreements. One contemporary example concerns **Antonietta Raco**, an Italian woman diagnosed with primary lateral sclerosis, a rare neurological disorder affecting motor function. According to the Lourdes Sanctuary's published account, Raco experienced an unexpected recovery during a pilgrimage in 2009, followed by medical investigations and follow-up extending over subsequent years. In November 2024, the International Medical Committee of Lourdes judged her recovery unexpected, complete, lasting, and unexplained according to contemporary medical knowledge. Her case was officially proclaimed a miracle by the relevant bishop in April 2025, becoming the seventy-second recognized Lourdes miracle.

This is a specific, identifiable claim involving medical history, neurological assessment, follow-up investigation, and institutional review rather than an anonymous story lacking

documentation. Yet careful reasoning requires an important distinction: **the judgment that a recovery remains medically unexplained is not identical to independent scientific proof that God caused it.** The former concerns medical knowledge and the available evidence; the latter requires a philosophical and theological conclusion concerning causation. Nevertheless, the proper scholarly response is to examine the diagnosis, medical history, duration of recovery, and available alternative explanations rather than dismiss the case merely because its interpretation is religious. Even those who reject the supernatural conclusion should recognize that the underlying medical questions deserve careful consideration. ([Lourdes Sanctuary, “Antonietta Raco: 72nd Lourdes Miracle,” 2025.](#))

## **Could Extraordinary Recoveries Have Natural Explanations?**

An intellectually honest investigation must also acknowledge that extraordinary recoveries sometimes occur without any identified supernatural intervention. Medical literature documents rare instances of spontaneous remission or regression, including cases in which certain cancers diminish or disappear without treatment sufficient to explain the outcome. Biological mechanisms may involve immune responses, tumor characteristics, previously unrecognized processes, or other factors not yet fully understood. Consequently, even an unexpected recovery following prayer cannot automatically be classified as supernatural. But neither does the existence of spontaneous remission establish that every remarkable recovery has already been explained or that divine intervention is impossible. **“We do not yet know how this happened” is a legitimate scientific conclusion; “therefore God must have done it” and “therefore God could not have done it” are additional interpretations requiring justification.** The Christian case should welcome careful investigation of natural mechanisms because discovering how an extraordinary recovery occurred is not an enemy of truth. The relevant question is whether particular cases, viewed alongside the wider evidence concerning God's existence, provide reasonable grounds for considering divine intervention. (Dr. Gudapureddy Radha and Dr. Manu Lopus, [“The Spontaneous Remission of Cancer: Current Insights and Therapeutic Significance,” \*Translational Oncology\* 14, no. 9 \(2021\).](#))

## **What About Controlled Studies That Found No Measurable Benefit from Prayer?**

We must also confront research that has produced negative or inconclusive results. In 2006, a major randomized clinical investigation known as the STEP trial evaluated intercessory prayer among 1,802 patients undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery at six American hospitals. Researchers found no improvement in complication-free recovery among patients assigned to receive additional prayer without knowing whether they were receiving it. Unexpectedly, patients who were certain they were receiving intercessory prayer

experienced a higher complication rate than those who received prayer without such certainty. Similarly, a 2009 Cochrane systematic review considered randomized studies of organized intercessory prayer and found no clear overall clinical benefit. These results should not be concealed merely because they complicate an argument for divine intervention. **They demonstrate that intercessory prayer has not been established as a consistently effective medical intervention under controlled experimental conditions.**

Nevertheless, these findings do not directly resolve the distinct philosophical question of whether a personal God might sometimes respond to particular prayers according to His own purposes rather than according to an experimental protocol. A God who acts according to wisdom and moral purposes cannot simply be assumed to behave as a controllable therapeutic intervention. That theological distinction is legitimate, provided it is not employed as an excuse for rejecting unfavorable results while accepting favorable ones. **If Christians demand that atheists examine the strongest evidence honestly, Christians must apply the same standards to their own claims.** The objective is not to protect religious conclusions from scientific scrutiny, but to recognize what scientific studies have actually established, what remains uncertain, and which philosophical questions extend beyond the scope of a controlled medical experiment. (Dr. Herbert Benson and colleagues, [“Study of the Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer,” \*American Heart Journal\* 151, no. 4 \(2006\), 934–942;](#) Leanne Roberts and colleagues, [“Intercessory Prayer for the Alleviation of Ill Health,” \*Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews\* \(2009\).](#))

## **What the Biblical Record Actually Promises**

The Christian Scriptures themselves portray a God who intervenes in extraordinary ways while refusing to present miracles as an automatic entitlement for every believer. Jesus' healing ministry includes the restoration of sight, mobility, and health, with these signs associated with the arrival of God's Kingdom. The apostles likewise describe remarkable works accompanying the proclamation of the Gospel. Yet the same New Testament records faithful believers experiencing illness, persecution, imprisonment, and death. Paul did not receive the removal of his affliction despite repeated prayer, and the early Christian community was never promised immunity from suffering. Divine intervention may serve as a sign of God's compassion, authority, and redemptive purposes, but it does not follow that every faithful prayer will receive precisely the outcome requested. **The possibility that God sometimes intervenes deepens the question of why He does not always intervene; nevertheless, it also prevents us from assuming that apparent divine silence proves He has never acted.** ([Matthew 11:2–6;](#) [Acts 3:1–10;](#) [2 Corinthians 12:7–10;](#) [James 5:13–16.](#))



## An Intellectual Challenge That Cannot Simply Be Dismissed

We can now return to the question that confronted me during my journey from atheism: **Has God really never answered a single prayer?** I do not claim that every remarkable recovery demonstrates divine intervention, that every sincere testimony must be accepted, or that medical science has established the supernatural origin of a particular event. What I insist upon is that the evidence deserves examination. Lewis challenges the philosophical exclusion of miracles before investigation; Strobel brings together testimony, skeptical objections, and scholarly interviews; Keener offers an extensive historical and cross-cultural body of evidence; Brown's research contributes measurable observations associated with healing prayer; and medically investigated recoveries raise questions deserving careful scrutiny. Negative clinical trials and naturally occurring remissions remind us that extraordinary claims must not be accepted indiscriminately. But neither should anyone insist that a material explanation must exist for every possible event simply because materialism is the worldview they have already embraced.

This demand for intellectual fairness receives remarkable support from **Dr. John Earman**, distinguished philosopher of science and professor emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh. In his scholarly investigation of David Hume's famous argument against miracles, Earman concluded, **"I contend that 'Of Miracles' is an abject failure."** His criticism was not that miracles had thereby been proved, but that Hume's reasoning failed to justify dismissing extraordinary testimony so decisively. Drawing upon probability theory and the evaluation of eyewitness evidence, Earman challenged the notion that the regularity of nature automatically renders credible testimony of exceptional events worthless. **The significance is considerable: even apart from Christian theological commitments, serious philosophical scholarship challenges the assumption that miracles can be ruled out before the evidence is weighed.** (Dr. John Earman, [\*Hume's Abject Failure: The Argument Against Miracles\*, Oxford University Press, 2000, Introduction, pp. 3–4.](#))

For me, this inquiry was one of several important steps away from atheism and toward an open investigation of God's existence. A single unexplained recovery would not establish the Trinity, the reliability of Scripture, or the historical Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Those are distinct claims requiring their own substantial evidence. But if divine intervention remains a genuine possibility, then the universe may not be the closed, ultimately indifferent system assumed by strict philosophical naturalism. And if Christianity's historical claims concerning Jesus Christ withstand careful examination, then reports of divine intervention may find their place within a coherent understanding of the Creator's relationship to His creation. **The skeptic who asks why God did not answer a particular prayer has raised a serious question. But the skeptic who confidently asserts that God has never answered any prayer has taken on an extraordinary burden of his own.** Christianity

invites us to investigate both questions rather than pretending either can be settled without evidence.

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## Part Two: The Greatest Claimed Divine Intervention of All— What If God Himself Entered Human History?



### The Incarnation: Christianity's Most Astonishing Claim

Yet there is one final consideration that towers above every reported miracle examined thus far. **What if the greatest evidence of divine intervention is not an unexplained medical recovery, a remarkable deliverance, or an extraordinary answer to prayer, but the historical person of Jesus Christ Himself?** Christianity makes a claim far greater than that of a distant deity occasionally intervening in human affairs. It proclaims that the eternal Creator entered His own creation, assumed a genuine human nature, lived among ordinary people, experienced their hardships, confronted disease and death, and ultimately surrendered His life for humanity's redemption. The Apostle John declares that the divine Word became flesh and lived among us, while Paul describes Christ humbling Himself even to death on a Cross. Here Christianity presents an extraordinary challenge to the skeptic: **If God truly entered history in Jesus Christ, then the question is no longer merely whether God sometimes intervenes, but whether He has already provided humanity**

with history's most consequential revelation of His existence, goodness, and intentions toward the world.([John 1:1–14](#); [Philippians 2:5–11](#); [Hebrews 1:1–3](#).)

## The Historical Jesus: A Person Who Can Be Investigated

The historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth and His execution under the Roman prefect Pontius Pilate are accepted by the overwhelming majority of specialists in ancient history and early Christianity, including scholars who reject Christianity's supernatural claims. The Jewish historian **Flavius Josephus (c. AD 37–c. 100)** refers to Jesus and to James, identified as His brother, while the Roman historian **Tacitus (c. AD 56–c. 120)** records that Christus suffered execution under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. These references do not establish that Jesus performed miracles or rose from the dead, but they situate His life and execution within identifiable first-century history. Even **Dr. Bart D. Ehrman (born 1955)**, distinguished New Testament scholar and professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who rejects traditional Christian claims concerning the Resurrection, vigorously defends Jesus' historical existence and Crucifixion. This distinction matters because Christianity's central historical claims concern a real person whose life, teachings, death, and the movement that followed Him can be examined through surviving ancient sources. Whether that person was also the incarnate Son of God requires further evidence, but **the investigation begins within history, not merely within religious imagination.** (Josephus, [Antiquities of the Jews, 20.200](#); Tacitus, [Annals, 15.44](#); Dr. Bart D. Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist? The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*, 2012.)

## A God Who Personally Knew Hardship, Grief, and Suffering

What makes the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation especially relevant to theodicy is that Jesus was not portrayed as an earthly visitor insulated from human anguish. The Gospels describe His humble beginnings, the danger surrounding His earliest years, His experience of hunger and physical exhaustion, His rejection by religious authorities, betrayal by a close companion, and grief at the grave of Lazarus. Christians have historically understood Isaiah's portrait of the Suffering Servant as anticipating a Messiah acquainted with sorrow and rejection, while Hebrews emphasizes that Jesus shared humanity's flesh and blood and experienced suffering. In Gethsemane, facing His approaching execution, Jesus prayed in profound distress that the cup before Him might pass. At Calvary, He endured humiliation, physical torment, and death by Roman crucifixion. **The Christian response to suffering, therefore, begins not with a God who observes humanity's pain from an inaccessible distance, but with a God who, according to the doctrine of the Incarnation, voluntarily entered the human condition and experienced its deepest anguish.** This reality does not explain why every innocent person suffers, but it profoundly challenges the accusation that



the God of Christianity is unfamiliar with suffering or indifferent to its terrible cost. ([Isaiah 53:3–6](#); [John 11:33–36](#); [Matthew 26:36–46](#); [Hebrews 2:14–18](#).)

## **The Resurrection: The Greatest Miracle Christianity Proclaims**

The Christian case becomes even more consequential when we examine what happened following Jesus' Crucifixion. Paul, writing within approximately two to three decades of the event, preserved an early confession declaring that Christ died, was buried, was raised, and appeared to Peter, the Twelve, James, and others. Many scholars regard the tradition contained in 1 Corinthians 15:3–7 as substantially older than Paul's letter, although its precise date and formulation remain debated. The historical questions are extraordinary: Why did Jesus' followers proclaim that their crucified Messiah had been raised? What accounts for the experiences they interpreted as appearances of the risen Christ? How should historians evaluate the Gospel accounts of the empty tomb? And why did the earliest Christian movement begin proclaiming Jesus as the victorious Lord rather than simply remembering Him as a respected teacher whose mission had ended in failure? The Resurrection was not a peripheral doctrine added to an otherwise complete religious system. **According to the earliest surviving Christian testimony, the Resurrection stood at the very heart of the Gospel and constituted God's decisive vindication of the crucified Jesus.** ([1 Corinthians 15:3–8](#); [Acts 2:22–36](#).)

**Dr. N. T. Wright (born 1948)**, distinguished New Testament scholar and former Bishop of Durham, investigates these questions extensively in *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (2003). Examining ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman beliefs concerning death, resurrection, and the afterlife, Wright argues that Jesus' bodily Resurrection offers the strongest historical explanation for the distinctive beliefs and experiences of the earliest Christian movement. **Dr. Dale C. Allison Jr.**, New Testament historian and professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, likewise examines the early resurrection confessions, reported appearances, empty-tomb traditions, and competing interpretations in *The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History* (2021). Allison's treatment acknowledges the historical significance of the evidence while also discussing the limitations of what historians can establish. Their investigations demonstrate why the Resurrection deserves more than a simplistic dismissal based upon the fact that dead people ordinarily remain dead. That is precisely what makes the Christian claim extraordinary. **The relevant question is whether the evidence for Jesus' Resurrection is best explained as an unprecedented divine act or through an alternative account that adequately explains the surviving historical testimony.** (Dr. N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Fortress Press, 2003; Dr. Dale C. Allison Jr., [The Resurrection of Jesus: Apologetics, Polemics, History](#), T&T Clark, 2021.)

## Why Did the Earliest Christians Worship Jesus?

Another extraordinary historical consideration concerns the significance attributed to Jesus by His earliest followers. **Dr. Larry W. Hurtado (1943–2019)**, distinguished New Testament scholar and professor at the University of Edinburgh, devoted decades to investigating the emergence of devotion to Jesus within the earliest Christian communities. In *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity*, Hurtado documented how prayers, worship, sacred rituals, and the invocation of Jesus' name became central features of Christian religious life remarkably early in the movement's history. This is especially striking because the earliest Christians emerged from Jewish communities whose religious convictions emphasized devotion to the one God. Jesus was not simply remembered as a wise teacher or admired martyr; He occupied an extraordinary place within the worship and religious identity of the Christian movement. Hurtado's research challenges the popular claim that belief in Jesus' divine significance arose only centuries later through church councils or legendary embellishment. Scholars continue to debate precisely how the earliest believers understood Jesus' relationship to God, but the early emergence of this devotion is itself a significant historical fact requiring explanation. **If Jesus was merely another failed religious teacher executed by Rome, what accounts for the remarkable transformation of His followers' understanding of His identity?** (Dr. Larry W. Hurtado, [\*Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity\*, Eerdmans, 2003.](#))

## A Remarkable Admission from a Jewish Scholar: Was Jesus Claiming the Authority of God Himself?

One of the most revealing assessments of Jesus' extraordinary claims comes from someone who did not accept Christianity: **Rabbi Dr. Jacob Neusner (1932–2016)**, the distinguished American Jewish scholar of ancient and rabbinic Judaism, prolific author of hundreds of scholarly works, and longtime professor at Bard College. In his remarkable book *A Rabbi Talks with Jesus* (1993; revised 2000), Neusner imaginatively places himself among those listening to Jesus' teachings in Matthew's Gospel and asks whether, as a faithful Jew committed to the Torah of Moses, he could become Jesus' disciple. His conclusion is especially significant because his objection is not that Jesus lacked moral seriousness or that His teachings were devoid of spiritual insight. Rather, Neusner recognized that Jesus was claiming a position of authority that, from the standpoint of Jewish monotheism, belonged uniquely to God. Examining Jesus' declaration that He was Lord of the Sabbath, Neusner asked, **“Is your master God? And that forms the crux of the matter.”** For Neusner, the issue was not merely whether Jesus offered a different interpretation of certain commandments, but whether a human teacher could legitimately place His own person and authority at the center of Israel's relationship with God. Neusner remained Jewish because he did not accept the answer Christianity gives to that question. Yet his investigation reveals

something important that critics frequently overlook: **Jesus, as presented in the Gospels, cannot adequately be reduced to another admirable religious teacher offering conventional moral advice. His claims demand a judgment about divine authority and identity.** (Rabbi Dr. Jacob Neusner, [\*A Rabbi Talks with Jesus\*, McGill-Queen's University Press, revised edition, 2000](#); [Matthew 11:27–30](#); [Matthew 12:1–8](#).)

Neusner's assessment gains additional historical significance when considered alongside the scholarship of **Dr. Richard Bauckham (born 1946)**, distinguished British New Testament scholar and former professor of New Testament studies at the University of St Andrews. In *Jesus and the God of Israel* (2008), Bauckham argues that the earliest Christian understanding of Jesus did not merely elevate Him to the status of an extraordinary prophet, angelic intermediary, or exalted religious leader. Rather, the New Testament writers identified Jesus within the unique divine identity of Israel's God, particularly through His association with divine sovereignty, creation, and worship. Similarly, **Dr. Larry W. Hurtado**, distinguished New Testament scholar at the University of Edinburgh, demonstrated that extraordinary devotion to Jesus developed among Jewish believers remarkably early, rather than emerging only after centuries of theological development. Hurtado emphasized how unusual this was within the religious environment of first-century Jewish monotheism. Taken together, these scholars approach the evidence from differing perspectives but identify a common historical challenge: **How did a movement arising within Jewish devotion to the one God so rapidly come to regard Jesus as worthy of extraordinary religious devotion and authority?** Their research does not independently establish that Jesus is God, but it strongly challenges the familiar assertion that His divine significance was simply invented centuries after His death. Christianity's claim about Jesus' identity, therefore, deserves historical investigation precisely because it emerged within a Jewish religious world in which attributing divine honors to a human being was no small matter. (Dr. Richard Bauckham, [\*Jesus and the God of Israel: God Crucified and Other Studies on the New Testament's Christology of Divine Identity\*, Eerdmans, 2008](#); Dr. Larry W. Hurtado, [“Early Devotion to Jesus: A Report, Reflections and Implications,” \*The Expository Times\* 122, no. 4 \(2011\), 167–176.](#))

## **How Jesus Truly Compares with the World's Other Religious Leaders**

This question becomes especially significant when Jesus is compared with the founders and influential teachers of other religious traditions. During my years as an atheist, I was inclined to regard Jesus, Buddha, Confucius, Muhammad, and other religious figures as different expressions of humanity's search for spiritual meaning. But deeper historical investigation demonstrated that their teachings, claims, missions, understandings of salvation, and relationships to the divine differ considerably. **Christianity does not simply proclaim that Jesus discovered important truths about God; it proclaims that God**



**uniquely revealed Himself in Jesus Christ.** His claims concerning divine authority, the forgiveness of sins, His sacrificial death, and His Resurrection cannot be reduced to a collection of moral teachings common to other religious traditions. These distinctions do not automatically establish the truth of Christianity, but neither can they be dismissed through the assertion that all religions ultimately teach the same thing. Careful historical comparison requires examining what these influential figures actually claimed, how their followers understood them, and what surviving evidence supports their distinctive teachings.

I examine these matters more extensively in my separate historical investigation, [How Jesus TRULY Compares to Religious Leaders](#). Readers who wish to pursue the evidence concerning Jesus' identity, divine claims, and historical significance should also examine my treatise **Was Jesus REALLY the Son of God?**, available through [CrossFire USA's Free Downloads & Research](#). These studies are intended to equip Christians and challenge skeptics to examine the strongest available arguments rather than assuming that Jesus' distinctiveness can be dismissed merely because other religions exist. The question is not whether Christianity offers a comforting religious alternative, but whether its central claims concerning Jesus withstand serious investigation better than competing explanations.

## **The Ultimate Challenge: What If God Has Already Entered Our World?**

We return, then, to the question that began this investigation into miracles: **Has God ever intervened in human history?** Reports of extraordinary medical recoveries, apparent answers to prayer, and remarkable deliverances deserve investigation. But Christianity presents an even greater historical claim: **God Himself entered our world in the person of Jesus Christ, shared the suffering of His creatures, willingly endured the Cross, and demonstrated His victory over death through the Resurrection.** If that claim is true, divine intervention is not merely an occasional possibility inferred from isolated events. It stands at the center of human history. The Christian God is not simply a distant Creator who established the universe and abandoned it to impersonal forces. He is the God who, according to the New Testament, entered His creation, confronted evil, suffered on humanity's behalf, and promised a final restoration in which death itself will be abolished.

As a former atheist, I eventually had to confront a question that I believe every thoughtful skeptic deserves to consider: **What if the strongest evidence that God has intervened is not found in the extraordinary things people claim He has done for them, but in what the historical evidence suggests He has done through Jesus Christ?** That question cannot be answered merely by pointing to the existence of other religions, dismissing ancient testimony as superstition, or insisting that supernatural events are impossible before examining their evidence. Nor should Christians expect anyone to accept the Incarnation or Resurrection merely because these doctrines offer comfort in a suffering world. Their claims

must be investigated historically, philosophically, and theologically. But if the cumulative evidence for Jesus' identity, Crucifixion, Resurrection, and the extraordinary origins of Christianity is sufficiently compelling, then the reasonable conclusion may be far more profound than the possibility that Heaven has occasionally answered a desperate prayer. **It may be that the Creator has already given humanity His greatest answer—not merely by intervening in history, but by entering history Himself.** And if that is true, then the God whose apparent silence has troubled generations of grieving people has not remained untouched by their suffering. Christianity proclaims that He has entered it, borne its consequences, conquered death, and promised that suffering will not have the final word. ([John 3:16–17](#); [Romans 5:6–8](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#).)

## **From God's Intervention in History to His Long Campaign Against Evil**

We are now prepared to consider how the Christian Scriptures place these extraordinary claims within the much larger history of God's relationship with humanity. **If God has already intervened in history through Jesus Christ, what does that intervention reveal about His purposes for a world still burdened by evil, injustice, and suffering?** Christianity does not present the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection as isolated supernatural spectacles, disconnected from the suffering of ordinary people. Rather, these events stand at the center of a redemptive story that begins with Creation, confronts humanity's rebellion and its consequences, unfolds through God's dealings with Israel, and reaches its decisive turning point in Jesus Christ. Yet Scripture also teaches that the final consequences of Christ's victory have not been fully realized. Humanity continues to endure illness, cruelty, injustice, and death while awaiting the promised restoration of all things. **The Christian claim is not that God has never permitted evil, nor that He has already abolished every consequence of it. It is that God has entered the struggle against evil, acted decisively through Jesus Christ, and promised to complete what He has begun.** To understand how these claims fit together, we must now follow the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation and examine Christianity's account of God's long campaign against evil and suffering. ([Genesis 3:14–21](#); [Romans 8:18–25](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#).)



## From Genesis to Revelation: the Long Campaign Against Evil

The biblical story does not depict God as a distant observer who discovers evil and then improvises a response. Genesis begins with a good creation, records human rebellion, and immediately introduces God's opposition to the serpent and His continuing dealings with fallen humanity. Cain's murder of Abel is condemned rather than excused; the Exodus portrays God confronting oppressive power and delivering captives; the Law repeatedly demands protection for vulnerable people; and the prophets denounce predatory rulers and injustice. Even where divine judgment raises questions of its own, the narrative insists that evil is not an independent throne beyond God's reach. ([Genesis 1–4](#); [Exodus 3](#); [Isaiah 1:16–17](#)).

Through Israel's lament psalms and the book of Job, God allows sufferers to protest their anguish rather than pretend it does not exist. The prophetic hope then reaches beyond immediate deliverance toward the promised renewal of creation. In the Gospels, Jesus heals the sick, welcomes children, confronts destructive spiritual powers, and teaches His followers to ask that God's will be done on earth. These acts are presented not as the completion of the struggle but as signs that God's kingdom has entered history. ([Psalm 13](#); [Isaiah 25:6–9](#); [Luke 7:18–23](#)).

What makes this unfolding biblical history especially remarkable is the consistency of God's redemptive purpose across centuries of human failure. **Dr. T. Desmond Alexander**, distinguished Old Testament scholar and former Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies at Union Theological College, Belfast, traces this developing theme in *From Eden to the New Jerusalem*, demonstrating how Scripture's opening account of humanity's lost fellowship



with God anticipates its concluding vision of a restored creation. God's covenant with Abraham promises blessings extending to all nations; the prophets anticipate a righteous King who will establish justice and peace; and the New Testament identifies Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of these expectations. **Christianity therefore presents God's answer to evil not as an improvised rescue operation, but as a purposeful work of redemption unfolding throughout biblical history.** The story begins with Paradise lost and moves toward the astonishing promise of Paradise restored. ([Genesis 12:1–3](#); [Isaiah 9:6–7](#); [Galatians 3:6–14](#); [Revelation 22:1–5](#); Dr. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology*, Kregel Academic, 2008.)

Yet this raises a profound question: **If God has already begun His campaign against evil, why does suffering continue to devastate the world?** Dr. George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982), distinguished New Testament theologian and professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, devoted much of his scholarly work to explaining the biblical relationship between the present reality of God's Kingdom and its future consummation. In *The Presence of the Future* (1974), Ladd developed the concept commonly described as the “**already but not yet**” character of the Kingdom: through Jesus Christ, God's redemptive reign has entered human history, yet its final victory over sin, injustice, suffering, and death awaits Christ's return. Jesus' miracles, His authority over evil, and His Resurrection are therefore understood as genuine manifestations of a Kingdom whose ultimate fulfillment remains ahead. **The continuing existence of suffering does not mean Christianity claims that God has accomplished nothing; rather, it means that the biblical drama of redemption has not yet reached its appointed conclusion.** This distinction does not answer every painful question concerning God's timing, particularly when innocent people suffer while awaiting that fulfillment. Nevertheless, it provides an essential framework for understanding why Christians can affirm both that Christ has decisively defeated evil and that evil remains a terrible reality in the present world. (Dr. George Eldon Ladd, [The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism](#), Eerdmans, 1974; [Mark 1:14–15](#); [Romans 8:18–25](#); [1 Corinthians 15:24–26](#).)

The Christian claim culminates in the death and resurrection of Jesus: human wickedness inflicts the Cross, yet God works through it to overcome sin and death rather than bless the wickedness. The apostolic writings speak of Christ disarming hostile powers and of death itself as an enemy awaiting destruction. Revelation finally portrays judgment against evil, the defeat of death, and God dwelling with a renewed people in a renewed creation. **Dr. N. T. Wright**, the New Testament historian, scholar and former Bishop of Durham, has emphasized resurrection and new creation as central to biblical hope; Randy Alcorn develops the same future-facing perspective in his sustained writing on suffering and Heaven. This is why, from beginning to end, Christian revelation is more than an explanation of suffering: it is a claim that God is actively moving history toward its

abolition. ([Acts 2:22–24](#); [Colossians 2:13–15](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–28](#); [Revelation 21–22](#); [Randy Alcorn, If God Is Good: Chapter Summaries](#)).



## What Can We Know About a God Who Suffers?

Having examined Christianity's historical claim that God entered human history through Jesus Christ, we now confront a different but equally consequential question: **What does the suffering of Jesus reveal about the character of God Himself?** It is one thing to investigate whether the Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection provide credible evidence of divine intervention. It is another to consider what those events mean for a world filled with innocent suffering. If Christianity is true, God has not merely demonstrated that He possesses the power to intervene; He has revealed His willingness to enter humanity's anguish, experience rejection and injustice, and bear suffering for the redemption of those He loves. The Cross, therefore, deserves examination not only as an extraordinary historical event, but as Christianity's most profound revelation of God's character in the face of evil.

The Christian answer arrives most decisively at the Crucifixion. Jesus does not stand at a safe distance from bodily pain, political injustice, betrayal, abandonment, and death. In the Gospel narratives He weeps at Lazarus's tomb, grieves over Jerusalem, suffers in Gethsemane, and cries from the Cross using [Psalm 22](#). The New Testament presents the crucified Christ not as one more spectator of suffering but as God's self-giving action in the middle of human evil ([John 11:35](#); [Luke 19:41](#); [Mark 14:32–36](#); 15:34; [Hebrews 4:14–16](#)).

**Dr. Eleonore Stump** (b. 1947), Robert J. Henle Professor of Philosophy at Saint Louis University and a major specialist in medieval philosophy, argues that suffering should be



investigated through persons' stories as well as abstract deductions. Her narrative approach, drawing on biblical lives, invites us to ask about love, union, and the sufferer's own experience rather than reducing people to examples of a theorem. The Cross is Christianity's central disclosure of divine solidarity, not an explanation that makes particular cruelties morally acceptable. (Dr. Eleonore Stump, [Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering](#), Oxford University Press, 2010.)

This invites a theological distinction. Classical Christian thought holds that the divine nature does not undergo involuntary change or deprivation as creatures do. At the same time, orthodox Christology teaches that the eternal Son truly assumed a human nature and genuinely suffered and died according to that humanity. Christians should not blur that distinction with the claim that God's divine nature was tortured or ceased to exist. Yet neither should the distinction be used to make Christ's human agony unreal. The mystery is not a mechanism that explains every flood; it is Christianity's claim that God has entered the very condition humans fear.

A skeptic may reasonably answer that divine participation in pain does not explain why God allowed it in the first place. Correct. The Cross is not a complete philosophical explanation. Its deeper claim is that God's love is not disproved by the mere fact that He permits suffering, because Christians believe His own saving action included suffering under human wickedness. That reasoning depends significantly on whether Jesus' Resurrection occurred. It is an invitation to examine central historical Christian claims, not a demand that the skeptic suppress the original objection.





## Would Heaven Redeem Suffering—Or Simply Make Us Forget It?

The New Testament's ultimate answer is eschatological, a word referring to God's final purposes and the consummation of history. [Romans 8](#) envisions creation liberated from decay. First [Corinthians 15](#) locates Christian hope in resurrection, not in a sentimental claim that death is harmless. [Revelation 21–22](#) portrays a renewed creation in which death, mourning, crying, and pain no longer reign. On this vision, God does not simply teach humanity to accept the present arrangement forever; He promises to overcome the very evils that make the present arrangement intolerable ([Romans 8:18–25](#); [1 Corinthians 15](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#)).

Here Alcorn makes an especially distinctive contribution. In the chapter summaries of “If God Is Good,” he connects the restoration promised in Revelation 21–22 with the claim that eternal life will reveal more of God's gracious work than people can now see. This is a claim about final redemption, not the idea that losing a child is harmless because Heaven lasts forever. The continuing identity of the person who suffered, the seriousness of memory, and the promise of justice must all matter if “restoration” is to mean something beyond forgetting. (Randy Alcorn, *If God Is Good: Chapter Summaries*, sections 7–9; “If Jesus Triumphed Over Sin and Death...”, 2024.)

**N. T. Wright** argues that Christian hope centers on resurrection and the renewal of creation rather than merely escaping a doomed world. That emphasis complements Alcorn's vision of embodied, restored life: God's final answer, in Christian theology, is not the dismissal of creation's suffering but its decisive reversal. (**Dr. N. T. Wright**, [Surprised by Hope](#).)

One of the most frequently overlooked dimensions of Christian teaching about eternity is that **God has promised not merely a New Heaven, but a New Earth upon which His redeemed people will live.** The Apostle Peter declares that believers are looking forward to “a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells” ([2 Peter 3:13](#)). The Apostle John expands this extraordinary promise in Revelation 21–22, describing the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven, God dwelling among His people, and a restored creation featuring the river of life and the tree of life. **Notice the direction of this promise: God brings His dwelling to humanity in a renewed creation.** The Christian hope is therefore not simply that disembodied souls will spend eternity somewhere beyond the physical universe, but that God's redeemed people will experience resurrected, imperishable life in the New Heaven and New Earth. As Jesus promised, the meek will inherit the earth, while Revelation declares that God's servants will reign forever. What began in the Garden of Eden will reach its magnificent fulfillment in a creation where sin, suffering, corruption, and death no longer reign. **Paradise lost will become Paradise restored—not through humanity's permanent abandonment of God's creation, but through His glorious renewal of it.** ([Matthew 5:5](#); [1 Corinthians 15:42–54](#); [Revelation 21:1–4](#); [Revelation 22:1–5](#)).

One of the most fascinating questions about eternal life is whether the redeemed will remember the tragedies, injustices, and heartbreaks they experienced on earth. If every painful memory simply disappears, in what meaningful sense has God redeemed our suffering rather than erased our knowledge of it? Yet if those memories remain, how can Heaven be a place without sorrow? Scripture does not provide a comprehensive explanation of how our earthly memories will function in eternity, but it offers an extraordinary clue in the resurrected Jesus Himself. After conquering death, Christ retained the scars of His Crucifixion, which He showed to His disciples as evidence of His identity and victory ([John 20:24–29](#)). His wounds were not erased, yet they no longer represented suffering's triumph over Him. Might something similar be true of the redeemed—that the painful chapters of our earthly lives will be remembered within the infinitely greater reality of God's justice, healing, and eternal love? **Perhaps Heaven's greatest miracle is not that we will forget everything that once broke our hearts, but that God will so completely redeem our suffering that even its memory can no longer rob us of joy.** This remains a theological possibility rather than an explicit biblical promise, but it offers a compelling way to understand the declaration that God will wipe away every tear and make all things new ([Revelation 21:4–5](#)).

But here the skeptic asks what becomes of the child who did not get to live, the exploited person who did not see justice, and the animal whose suffering had no apparent moral benefit. Christian thinkers differ about the precise relation among resurrection, judgment, restoration, freedom, and the fate of persons who never heard the Gospel. Heaven cannot be invoked as an accounting trick in which future happiness licenses any present atrocity. The doctrine means, if true, that no grave is beyond divine judgment and no loss exceeds God's capacity to heal; it does not authorize us to say the present loss is insignificant.

Another dispute must be faced rather than hidden: hell can appear to reintroduce enduring suffering at the end of a story supposedly devoted to abolishing evil. Historic Christian traditions have included strong views of eternal conscious punishment, conditional immortality, and arguments for eventual reconciliation, with considerable disagreement about the biblical warrants and theological implications. This series has a separate installment devoted to hell, where those alternatives deserve and will receive full treatment. For now, it should be known that the Biblical and Christian hope for redemption and eternal life is God's desire for every human ([2 Peter 3:9](#)).



## When Christ Returns: Will Evil, War, and Death Finally Meet Their End?

The Christian hope, however, does not end with the Cross, the Resurrection, or even the promise that individual believers will enter Heaven after death. Scripture declares that Jesus Christ Himself will return to confront and ultimately abolish the dominion of evil, injustice, warfare, and death. The prophets anticipated a coming reign of righteousness in which nations would no longer train for war and weapons would be transformed into instruments of peace ([Isaiah 2:2–4](#); [Micah 4:1–4](#)). Daniel foresaw the establishment of an everlasting kingdom that would supersede the temporary and often oppressive dominion of earthly empires ([Daniel 2:44](#); [Daniel 7:13–14](#)).

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the promised King who will return in glory, judge wickedness, overthrow the powers opposing God's righteousness, and establish His uncontested reign ([Matthew 24:29–31](#); [Revelation 19:11–21](#); [Revelation 20:7–15](#)). These prophecies depict something far greater than a temporary improvement in human government: the ultimate termination of the rebellion, oppression, violence, and moral corruption that have wounded humanity throughout history. The Apostle Paul explains that Christ's reign culminates in the destruction of every hostile dominion and power, with death itself identified as the final enemy to be abolished ([1 Corinthians 15:24–28](#)). Christians differ over the precise chronology of the Millennium and other end-time events, but the central biblical expectation is unmistakable: evil will not reign forever, and the world's final destiny will not be determined by human tyrants, warfare, or the grave.



The progression of these biblical promises is especially significant for our investigation into God's apparent tolerance of suffering. [Revelation 19](#) portrays Christ's victorious intervention against the forces of evil, depicting the returning King as the One who judges and wages war in righteousness ([Revelation 19:11–16](#)). Yet the final objective is not an endless succession of battles or merely the replacement of one earthly government with another. [Isaiah 2:4](#) provides one of Scripture's clearest prophetic pictures of the ultimate abolition of warfare: nations will turn their weapons into instruments of cultivation, and humanity will no longer learn the art of war ([Isaiah 2:4](#)). The Apostle Paul carries the promise even further, declaring that Christ will ultimately destroy every opposing rule, authority, and power, and that death itself will be the last enemy abolished ([1 Corinthians 15:24–26](#)).

Finally, [Revelation 21:4](#) reveals the breathtaking outcome: God will wipe away every tear, and death, mourning, crying, and pain will cease forever ([Revelation 21:1–5](#)). Consider the extraordinary scope of that promise. The God whom skeptics question for permitting warfare declares that warfare will ultimately end. The God whom suffering families question for permitting death declares that death itself will be destroyed. And the God whose apparent silence has troubled countless grieving parents promises a restored creation in which the very causes of their tears will no longer exist. The biblical answer to evil, therefore, is not confined to explaining why God has temporarily permitted it; it also announces what He intends ultimately to do about it.

This understanding has been developed extensively by **N. T. Wright**. Wright argues that the Christian hope is not simply an escape from a suffering world into a distant spiritual existence, but God's determination to renew His creation through the victory of Jesus Christ. In Wright's understanding, the Resurrection of Jesus inaugurated God's promised new creation, while its complete fulfillment awaits the final restoration of heaven and earth. Randy Alcorn likewise emphasizes that God's eternal purpose is not to abandon the earth to evil but to redeem and restore the creation He originally declared good. This means that God's plan to eradicate suffering is not confined to the occasional miracle, the healing of individual diseases, or the temporary restraint of human wickedness. According to Scripture, it culminates in Christ's victorious return, the final judgment of evil, the resurrection of the dead, and the renewal of creation itself. (Dr. N.T. Wright, “[God's Future in Person](#)”; Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, Chapter 9.)

**Dr. George Eldon Ladd (1911–1982)**, distinguished New Testament scholar and longtime professor at Fuller Theological Seminary, developed this understanding of God's Kingdom as “**already, but not yet.**” As Ladd explained, “Jesus taught a present fulfillment in the setting of future consummation.” Christ's death and Resurrection inaugurated God's decisive victory over sin, evil, and death, but the complete fulfillment of that victory awaits His Second Coming. This distinction addresses a crucial skeptical objection: **If Jesus has already conquered evil, why does so much of it remain?** Christianity's answer is that the

decisive victory has already been accomplished, even though its final consequences have not yet been fully realized. Evil's continued presence does not mean Christ's promises have failed; rather, Scripture declares that His victorious reign will culminate in the destruction of every opposing power, with death itself the final enemy abolished. **The battle has been decisively won, but the final defeat of evil awaits the return of the victorious King.** ([1 Corinthians 15:24–26](#); [Hebrews 2:8–9](#)). (Dr. George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, 1974, p. 123.)

Here, then, is a dimension of the problem of evil that deserves far greater attention than it ordinarily receives. Christianity does not merely proclaim a God who possesses sufficient power to eliminate suffering but inexplicably chooses to tolerate it forever. Rather, the biblical narrative describes a Creator who has been confronting evil throughout human history and who promises that His redemptive purposes will culminate in evil's permanent defeat. From the first promise following humanity's rebellion in Eden ([Genesis 3:15](#)), through the prophets' anticipation of a righteous and peaceful kingdom ([Isaiah 11:1–9](#)), to Christ's triumph over sin and death through His Crucifixion and Resurrection ([Colossians 2:13–15](#); [1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#)), Scripture presents a coherent unfolding purpose that reaches its magnificent conclusion in the new heaven and new earth ([Revelation 21–22](#)). This does not remove every difficulty concerning why God has permitted evil for so long, nor does it explain why a particular family has suffered an apparently unbearable loss. Those questions remain worthy of our most serious attention. Nevertheless, the Christian understanding of divine providence insists that the present world is not the final measure of God's goodness, justice, or purposes.

The God of Scripture has not promised merely to help humanity endure evil indefinitely; He has promised to bring evil's dominion to an end, abolish death itself, and establish an everlasting creation in which righteousness dwells ([2 Peter 3:13](#); [Revelation 22:1–5](#)). For those who have buried children, endured horrific injustice, suffered through seemingly unanswered prayers, or wondered whether evil will always have the final word, the Christian proclamation is that history is moving not toward an eternal triumph of suffering, but toward the promised victory of Jesus Christ. And that is why His Second Coming belongs at the heart of the Christian response to theodicy: God's ultimate answer to evil is not merely an explanation of why it has been permitted, but His promise that it will finally and permanently be defeated.



## If the Innocent Suffer, Does Divine Justice Still Mean Anything?

The biblical hope of judgment is often caricatured as revenge. At its best, it represents the conviction that those who perpetrate atrocities will not evade moral reckoning simply because they died powerful or because earthly institutions failed. A society that punishes the weak while allowing torturers and traffickers to flourish provokes a longing for a justice no statute of limitations can defeat. Still, final justice does not excuse Christians from pursuing present justice. If a camp lacked proper evacuation plans, investigate. If armed forces target civilians, seek accountability. If a child is being abused, protect the child rather than speculating about the abuser's freedom.

There is another dimension of divine justice that deserves serious consideration: **Will the truth about every injustice finally be brought into the light, including the suffering of those whose voices were silenced and whose stories were never told?** Throughout human history, countless innocent people have died without their names being remembered, their suffering acknowledged, or the truth about what happened to them ever being discovered. Some have been falsely accused, publicly disgraced, or condemned by corrupt authorities, while those responsible for their suffering carefully concealed the evidence. Others have endured private injustices known only to themselves and the people who harmed them. Earthly courts depend upon witnesses, documents, evidence, and fallible human judgment; consequently, even our finest systems of justice cannot uncover every deception or correct every miscarriage of justice. Scripture, however, presents a very different horizon. Solomon declares that God will bring every deed into judgment, including what is hidden, while the Apostle Paul teaches that God will disclose what darkness conceals and reveal the motives of the human heart. Jesus likewise assures His followers that nothing concealed will remain



permanently undisclosed. These passages suggest that divine judgment involves something far greater than assigning punishment: **the ultimate unveiling of truth, the vindication of the wrongly accused, and the public acknowledgment that the suffering of the forgotten was never forgotten by God.** Consider what such a promise means to someone whose reputation was destroyed by lies, whose cries for justice went unheard, or whose loved one died without anyone being held accountable. The biblical vision offers hope that history's final verdict will not belong to the powerful, the deceptive, or even the fallible judgments of human institutions. It will belong to the righteous Judge who knows every circumstance, every hidden intention, and every injustice that escaped human discovery. Although Scripture does not explain precisely how every individual wrong will be publicly addressed, it insists that God's judgment will be righteous and impartial, and that no human life is insignificant before Him ([Ecclesiastes 12:14](#); [1 Corinthians 4:5](#); [Luke 12:2–3](#); [Romans 2:6–11](#)).

Randy Alcorn's chapter on hell rightly insists on the seriousness of final accountability for unrepentant evil. His stark contention, "If there is no Hell, there is no justice," draws attention to victims whose killers escaped earthly courts. Yet the skeptic will rightly ask whether "endless" punishment is itself proportionate and just, and some Christians disagree over eternal conscious punishment, annihilationism, and other interpretations. This installment can register the link between judgment and hope without pretending that it resolves the distinct and difficult question of hell reserved for a later investigation. (**Randy Alcorn**, ["Hell: Eternal Sovereign Justice Exacted upon Evildoers"](#), chapter 29.)

Another remarkable feature of biblical justice is its insistence that **no individual enjoys preferential treatment before the judgment of God.** Throughout history, wealth, political influence, military power, and social standing have often determined who receives justice and who escapes accountability. Yet Scripture declares that God shows no favoritism, that earthly rulers themselves remain answerable to Him, and that those who exercise authority will face judgment for how they have treated others. The Apostle Paul teaches that every person will ultimately give an account of himself to God, while Jesus warns that greater responsibility accompanies greater privilege. This means that the powerful and the powerless, the celebrated and the forgotten, will stand before the same righteous Judge. **The biblical promise of divine justice is therefore not merely that evil will eventually be punished, but that no human being will be beyond accountability and no innocent person beneath God's concern.** ([Romans 2:11](#); [Romans 14:12](#); [Luke 12:47–48](#); [Psalm 82:2–4](#)).

The parable of the Good Samaritan frames responsibility toward the wounded neighbor as action, not an abstract explanation. James asks what good religious words do when a person lacks food and clothing; Jesus identifies care for the vulnerable as a measure of discipleship

([Luke 10:25–37](#); [James 2:14–17](#); [Matthew 25:31–46](#)). A theology of providence that numbs human urgency contradicts the same biblical tradition it claims to honor.



## What Did Suffering Teach Me—And What Must I Never Claim About Yours?

Across my earlier messages on making sense of suffering, cancer surgery, grief care, the aftermath of 9/11, and my correspondence about divine sovereignty, I have come back to a distinction that I consider indispensable: people need different things when a disaster is fresh and when they later begin asking philosophical questions. In a hospital room, presence is much more valuable than an elegant argument. During investigation, however, the insistence that no answer can help may become another kind of dismissal. Grief and truth-seeking are not enemies.

An Alcorn passage deserves special consideration alongside the personal testimony already provided: he recounts writing “If God Is Good” with input from **Jim Harrell**, a man living with ALS whose physical capacities were steadily disappearing. Listening to sufferers before theorizing about their suffering is part of his method. This offers a sound editorial principle for the entire series: first-person testimony may illustrate resilience and faith, but should never be appropriated to claim that all sufferers must find meaning in the same way. (**Randy Alcorn**, [If God Is Good: Introduction and Chapter 2](#).)

I have also reflected on the comfort I personally found in believing that my experience of cancer and many other hardships I’ve faced have not lied outside God’s providence. I have simultaneously felt God’s hand of comfort and help through the past many decades. That is

testimony about how I interpreted my hardship; it is not an explanation that I have authority to impose upon the illness of a stranger. Neither a survivor's growth nor another person's answered prayer gives anyone permission to announce why someone else's child died. In the biblical account, even Job's friends could defend true propositions about God in ways that failed the test of wisdom and love ([Job 42:7–9](#)).



## Ten Questions the Skeptic Is Right to Keep Asking

We can now see why a serious Christian response must meet more than the familiar formula of freedom plus the Fall. Why create a world with such extreme moral evil if God knew its outcomes? Why not stop the worst cruelty without eliminating freedom? Why does nature injure creatures who never chose wrong? What are we to make of pain predating humanity? Why are hardships distributed so unequally? Why do earnest prayers receive different outcomes? Why would God remain hidden from sincere seekers? When does an appeal to mystery become unfalsifiable? Can later redemption genuinely honor a victim's irretrievable losses? Finally, what independent reasons are there to believe the Christian story about God, Christ, and resurrection is actually true?

One final problem deserves to be explicit: animal suffering before human beings. Evolutionary history includes predation, disease, extinction, and apparently purposeless pain long before any historical human moral decision. A theological account of "natural evil" must therefore engage both scientific chronology and differing Christian readings of Genesis. A free-will defense focused solely on Adam and Eve cannot simply be



assumed to settle this issue. (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, [“The Problem of Evil”](#), sections on natural evil and theodicy.)

Interestingly, the Apostle Paul appears to anticipate a much broader dimension of redemption when he declares that **creation itself eagerly awaits liberation from its present bondage to decay**. In Romans 8, Paul describes the whole creation as “groaning as in the pains of childbirth” while awaiting the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes. His language encompasses far more than humanity's moral struggles; it points toward a cosmic restoration in which the created order itself participates in the promised freedom and glory of God's children. Does this include the animal kingdom, whose creatures have endured predation, disease, injury, and death throughout natural history? The passage does not explicitly identify every creature or explain the precise conditions of animal life in the restored creation, but its sweeping reference to creation certainly provides grounds for considering the nonhuman world within God's ultimate redemptive purposes. Other prophetic passages envision a future peace extending even to relationships among animals, reinforcing the biblical picture of a creation dramatically transformed by divine restoration. **The God of Scripture, therefore, promises not merely to redeem suffering humanity but ultimately to liberate His creation from the corruption and decay that presently characterize it.** This does not explain why animals have suffered for so long, but it does establish that the biblical vision of redemption extends beyond humanity alone ([Romans 8:19–23](#); [Isaiah 11:6–9](#); [Isaiah 65:17–25](#)).

There is also something deeply revealing about the moral expectations underlying these objections. When skeptics protest that innocent suffering is unjust, that cruelty ought to be prevented, or that a loving God should have created a better world, they are appealing to convictions about goodness, fairness, and the value of human life that deserve serious philosophical examination. **Why do we believe the universe ought to be morally different from the way we experience it?** The Christian argues that our ability to recognize evil as a violation of what ought to be may reflect a moral awareness rooted in our creation in God's image, while the atheist may offer alternative accounts grounded in objective moral realism, reason, empathy, or human flourishing. Neither perspective should be dismissed without examination. Yet the question remains important: our outrage at suffering involves more than observing that pain exists; it expresses a conviction that some things are genuinely wrong and that justice ought to prevail. This does not prove God's existence, nor does it diminish the force of the skeptic's objections. Rather, it invites a further investigation into whether our shared moral expectations are better explained by a universe possessing an ultimate moral foundation or one in which moral reality exists independently of God ([Genesis 1:26–27](#); [Romans 2:14–15](#)).

These questions are not threats to the investigation; they are its proper agenda. A Christian answer earns credibility only when its strongest ideas are placed beside the

best objections, not when it assumes that a label such as free will, mystery, or sovereignty has accomplished more than it has. The skeptic, likewise, should distinguish between the existence of pain as serious evidence against theism and a demonstration that every theistic possibility is false. Both positions deserve scrutiny; atheists, too, must defend their explanations.



## **The Verdict Is Not a Slogan**

What can be concluded after this investigation? The logical existence of evil does not by itself establish a formal contradiction within every coherent understanding of an all-good, all-powerful God. The scale, distribution, and at times pointless character of suffering nevertheless remain an extraordinarily serious evidential challenge. Human freedom and sin certainly explains many moral evils, ordered laws of creation may explain features of natural hazards, and spiritual growth may occur through suffering; none of those claims identifies God's reason for permitting every atrocity. Scripture itself resists confident explanations of particular tragedies while calling its readers to lament, responsibility, and hope.

From the Christian perspective I hold, the decisive question is finally not whether I possess an explanation adequate to every nightmare. I do not. The decisive question is whether the cumulative evidence gives us stronger reasons to trust the God revealed in Jesus Christ than to suppose that suffering, moral obligation, and human life arise within an ultimately indifferent material universe. A reasonable conclusion need not answer every conceivable objection before it becomes worthy of belief; we make consequential judgments in every other sphere of life by weighing the best available explanation. The Cross and Resurrection,

if historically true and rightly understood, offer a profoundly distinctive account of divine love and ultimate restoration. They do not turn grief into an illusion. They promise that grief and death will not have the last word.

Alcorn summarizes his governing perspective by connecting the return of Christ and final redemption with God's abolition of the evil and suffering that presently afflict creation. The promise does not give us access to the hidden reasons for each death. It makes a distinctly Christian claim about the direction of history: if the Resurrection is true, death and injustice do not retain the last word. Whether that hope is credible depends on evidence for the Christian story as a whole, including questions this series must continue to investigate. (Randy Alcorn, ["If God Is Good...What Is This Book About?"](#), 2009.)

Our investigation has also introduced an important consideration that must not be overlooked when evaluating the apparent silence of Heaven: **the fact that God does not prevent every tragedy does not establish that He has never intervened in human affairs.** We have examined the philosophical arguments concerning miracles, the extraordinary scope of reported answers to prayer, contemporary investigations of healing, and the limitations of what medical evidence can establish. Most importantly, we have considered Christianity's remarkable historical claim that God Himself entered His creation through Jesus Christ and vindicated Him through the Resurrection. These lines of evidence do not eliminate the painful questions surrounding unanswered prayer, nor do they establish the supernatural origin of every unexplained recovery. But they challenge the assumption that suffering and divine silence constitute the whole of the evidence. **The question is not simply why God sometimes appears absent, but whether the evidence of His presence, intervention, and redemptive purposes provides stronger grounds for trusting Him than the alternative explanations offered by competing worldviews.**

There is one final question I would place before every thoughtful skeptic: **What would it take for you to conclude that Christianity is not merely possible, but the most reasonable explanation of the evidence?** If the answer is that God must first explain every instance of suffering, prevent every injustice, and resolve every mystery before belief becomes justified, then we have established a standard of certainty that virtually no serious historical, scientific, or philosophical conclusion could satisfy. Consider instead what Christianity actually offers: a universe grounded in a rational Creator, human beings possessing inherent dignity as bearers of His image, a moral order in which good and evil have objective significance, a God who entered human suffering through Jesus Christ, and a promised resurrection and final judgment in which injustice and death will be decisively overcome. None of these claims should be accepted merely because they are emotionally appealing; their credibility must be tested against philosophical reasoning, historical evidence, and the strongest competing explanations. But neither should they be dismissed simply because God's reasons for permitting every tragedy remain unknown. **Atheism may**



**challenge Christianity to explain why evil exists, but Christianity challenges atheism to explain why evil is objectively wrong, why human life possesses ultimate worth, and whether death truly marks the final extinction of justice for those who suffered innocently.** These are not questions a thoughtful skeptic can resolve merely by rejecting God. They deserve the same rigorous investigation that Christianity itself has faced throughout these pages.

For the reader who remains unconvinced, I ask for more than a willingness to disagree: compare the competing explanations with intellectual fairness. Examine the strongest arguments for God and against God. Ask what each worldview explains, what it leaves unresolved, and whether materialism offers a more adequate account of moral obligation, human dignity, reason, justice, and hope than Christianity does. And when the philosophical debate gives way to an actual suffering neighbor, let us suspend the urge to win and do the good we can. That, too, is part of taking evil seriously.



## **When the Argument Becomes Your Own Grief: What Can You Do Now?**

If you are reading this investigation while living through cancer treatments, grieving a spouse, burying a child, walking through abuse, or wondering whether you can face another morning, you deserve more than an argument that says suffering might serve some invisible purpose. Your loss is real; your sorrow does not become imaginary because Christian faith promises redemption. Scripture gives language to grief rather than forbidding it: the psalmist asks how long God will seem absent, and Jesus weeps at the grave of His friend. Begin, therefore, by telling the truth about what hurts. You may pray with confidence, with

tears, or with only the words “Help my unbelief.” None requires you to pretend that you understand why this happened ([Psalm 13:1–6](#); [John 11:33–36](#); [Mark 9:24](#)).

Do not mistake another person’s confident explanation for knowledge of your private circumstances. Job’s companions grew dangerous when they presumed to know the reason for his distress. Jesus refused to interpret a man’s blindness as proof of his or his parents’ particular wrongdoing, and He rejected the suggestion that those crushed by the tower of Siloam were worse sinners than their neighbors. If someone insists that your disease, bereavement, or trauma proves deficient faith or secret wrongdoing, you need not accept that verdict. Scripture directs us to mourn with those who mourn, carry one another’s burdens, and speak in ways that give grace rather than deepen the wound ([Job 42:7](#); [John 9:1–3](#); [Luke 13:1–5](#); [Romans 12:15](#); [Galatians 6:2](#); [Ephesians 4:29](#)).

There is another truth I have learned from walking alongside grieving families for so many years: **you do not have to recover according to someone else's timetable, nor must you prove your faith by how quickly you stop hurting.** The loss of a spouse, a child, one's health, or a lifetime of cherished expectations can permanently change the landscape of a person's life. Some days you may experience genuine peace, only to find yourself overwhelmed by sorrow the following morning. An anniversary, familiar song, photograph, or empty chair at the dinner table may suddenly reopen a wound you thought had begun to heal. Such moments do not necessarily mean you have lost spiritual ground or that God has abandoned you. The Bible describes the Lord as close to the brokenhearted and presents His compassion as particularly tender toward those who are overwhelmed. **Christian hope does not require us to erase the significance of those we have lost or deny the depth of what we have endured; rather, it invites us to trust that God can sustain us through grief without demanding that we pretend it has disappeared.** Sometimes faith is expressed not through extraordinary courage or eloquent prayers, but through the quiet determination to face another day while holding on to the promise that our suffering is neither unseen nor the final chapter of our story ([Psalm 34:18](#); [Isaiah 42:3](#); [2 Corinthians 1:3–5](#)).

Take the next practical step even when you cannot see the whole road. Ask a trusted friend to sit with you; accept a meal or a ride; speak with a qualified counselor or physician when suffering overwhelms your sleep, safety, or ability to function. If someone has harmed you, seeking protection and justice is not a failure to forgive. If treatment is available, seeking competent medical care is not a failure to trust God. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, compassion becomes concrete through bandages, transportation, expense, and continued care. Christian hope ought to produce that kind of practical love ([Luke 10:25–37](#); [James 2:14–17](#); [Proverbs 11:14](#)).

If you can pray, pray honestly rather than performing optimism. Jesus Himself prayed that the cup of suffering might pass, even as He submitted His will to the Father. Paul pleaded for removal of his affliction and did not receive the answer he requested; instead he testified

to grace amid weakness. Those passages do not guarantee immediate healing, nor do they imply that every prayer denied is a lesser expression of faith. They make room to ask for deliverance, pursue help, and remain in relationship with God while the desired answer has not come ([Matthew 26:36–44](#); [2 Corinthians 12:7–10](#); [Hebrews 4:14–16](#)).



## **When Cancer Became God’s Servant: the Faith of Nanci Alcorn (1953–2022)**

One of the most remarkable testimonies I have encountered concerning God’s sovereignty over suffering came from my dear friend **Nanci Alcorn**, the beloved wife of Christian author **Randy Alcorn**. Randy and Nanci have been treasured friends, and during my own prostate cancer surgery and treatment, Nanci personally encouraged me in ways I will never forget. Her faith was not theoretical. During her years of battling colon cancer, she wrestled with these questions amid treatments, uncertainty, and pain. In a September 2021 reflection from her personal journal, she wrote: “*My cancer is God’s servant in my life. He is using it in ways He has revealed to me*” (**Nanci Alcorn**, [“My Cancer Is God’s Servant”: Reflections by Nanci Alcorn](#), Eternal Perspective Ministries, September 1, 2021).

Nanci went on to express her confidence that God was using her illness in ways she understood and in many other ways still unknown to her. Those convictions carry weight because she did not receive the healing for which so many of us prayed. She went to be with Christ in March 2022. Her testimony was not an instruction to minimize cancer, deny its pain, or tell another sufferer what God must be doing. Rather, she bore witness to the trust



she personally found possible amid profound uncertainty. Nanci's encouragement helped me approach my own cancer treatment with greater confidence in God's character, even when I could not understand His providence. Her reflection drew directly on the psalmist's conviction that all creation remains subject to God ([Psalm 119:91](#)), and it points toward the Christian hope that present suffering cannot compare with coming glory ([Romans 8:18](#)). Nanci's life and friendship remind me that sound theology should eventually become compassionate encouragement for people still walking through the valley.

Finally, do not measure the worth of your life by how quickly you recover or how much inspiration you provide to others. Some suffering produces recognizable courage; some leaves scars that remain. The Christian claim is not that every tragedy already looks good, but that evil will not have the final word. The Apostle Paul calls death an enemy, not a friend. The risen Christ promises a renewed creation, and the last biblical vision is not of God explaining every grave to our satisfaction but of God dwelling with His people and wiping away their tears. Until that day, a faithful response is to keep seeking truth, receiving help, offering compassion where you can, and refusing to abandon those who suffer. This is the hope I offer—not a complete map of God's secret purposes, but the Crucified and Risen One who meets us in a world still waiting for its restoration ([1 Corinthians 15:20–26](#); [Romans 8:18–25](#); [Revelation 21:1–5](#); 22:1–5).

**Coming Next Tactical Tuesday!...**

## **Christianity in the Crosshairs — Investigation No. 2**

# **If God Exists, Why Doesn't He Make Himself Obvious?**

**If God truly exists, loves humanity, and desires a personal relationship with us, why doesn't He make His existence unmistakably clear?**

Consider the person who has spent years searching for God, examining the evidence, visiting churches, reading Scripture, and even praying for some indication that Someone is listening—yet remains unconvinced. Is that person deliberately rejecting God, or is there something far more complicated taking place?

And consider another troubling question: **If God can reveal Himself without destroying human freedom, why does He sometimes seem so silent when people sincerely seek Him?**

In our next investigation, we will enter one of contemporary philosophy of religion's most challenging debates: **the problem of divine hiddenness**.

We'll examine whether God's apparent absence constitutes evidence against His existence, what philosophers mean by *nonresistant nonbelief*, whether God has already

provided sufficient evidence of His reality, and how the Christian understanding of faith, freedom, revelation, and divine love responds to these objections.

We'll also investigate an important distinction: **Is there a difference between God's existence being evident and a person's willingness to enter a relationship with Him?** And what should we make of those who genuinely desire such a relationship but cannot honestly say they believe?

These are not imaginary objections invented by opponents of Christianity. They are serious intellectual and personal questions raised by thoughtful atheists, agnostics, former Christians, and believers themselves.

As a former atheist, I believe they deserve something better than the familiar accusation that anyone who doubts God's existence must secretly be unwilling to believe.

## **Coming Next Tactical Tuesday: If God Exists, Why Doesn't He Make Himself Obvious?**

Another careful investigation into the arguments, the evidence, and the biblical claims—because hard questions deserve serious answers.

[www.CrossFireUSA.org](http://www.CrossFireUSA.org)

