

Apologetics Guide

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Week 4

There is the *practical problem* of evil—of living out our faith and trust in God when we encounter suffering or evil.¹

Tragedy, suffering, or evil experienced in our own lives can cause us to question God's positioning, role, and power in the midst of our suffering. Someone you love has died, perhaps died in an untimely manner—a parent, a sibling, a friend, a young child—and you wonder why a good God would allow such a thing to happen. This is you wrestling with the *psychological* problem of evil by way of experiencing the *practical* problem of evil.

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This may be rationally satisfying, but still feel wrong in your gut—that is fitting and makes sense. This is not necessarily a source of comfort when we are faced with suffering or evil. While you are in the midst of your suffering, remember that the creator God is with you in the midst of your pain. When you do not know what to pray, the Spirit intercedes for you.¹⁴ When you need to cry out to God, we have a way to do that—God gives us words to cry out in our pain, when we are faced with evil. We are invited to bring those to God, to “complain in the right direction.”¹⁵

Trouble in the World

There is much brokenness in the world, in our city, our own lives. It is disheartening. However, before we succumb to despair, remember what Christians of old have held to in light of suffering in the world: the assurance that God has entered the suffering of the world.¹⁶

The God of the Old and New Testaments, the God Christians profess—has not snapped divine fingers to make right all things immediately. Instead, the God of the Bible has entered the suffering of the world. God became flesh—God took on all the things that make us bleed in the person of Jesus Christ, God’s Son.¹⁷

God became a human being who felt anguish and loneliness; God became flesh in Jesus Christ, Jesus whose parents had to whisk him away from Bethlehem to avoid a murderous king committing infanticide;¹⁸ Jesus who suffered oppression and was ostracized as a Jew living under Roman occupation,¹⁹ whose own family thought he was loony,²⁰ who was homeless as he

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traveled and taught with his friends;²¹ Jesus, who longed to see Jerusalem restored, who longed for the day of redemption to come.²² God didn't get rid of the process—God entered into the process. Jesus knows our frailty and suffering.²³ Jesus knows genocide, war, systemic oppression, poverty, being a refugee, loneliness, being pushed to the fringes, death of a loved one—so, God knows these things intimately.

Being able to hold the existence of God and the existence of evil and suffering together depends a lot on who you believe Jesus to be.

If Jesus was just a Palestinian Jew who was killed by the Roman government in cahoots with the Jewish religious leadership, and that is the end of the story—then, wondering about what to do with the problem of evil is a soul-despairing endeavor.

If Jesus was a Palestinian Jew who was also the Son of God, the Messiah, who was killed by the Roman government with the Jewish authorities, who then rose in bodily form from the dead, and talked and taught his disciples for 40 more days after being raised again to life, and then ascended into heaven to be seated at the right of the Father after ushering in the kingdom of God in a new way—meaning, God is making all things new in Christ. Well, then you have a theology of a suffering Messiah, a theology of an embodied, incarnate Christ who is like us in every way, except he was without sin.

Jesus makes all the difference.

God enters the process in Jesus Christ—the process of human life, the process of human suffering because of sin and evil. More than that, God is a God of redemption, working out for our good all the ways that the world hurts, all the ways the world and us in it bleed.

So, if you believe God is a God who can allow for suffering and evil, even immense, incomprehensible evil to occur because it is *possible* that there is a greater good being brought out of it—then it is *possible* that God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good, *and* that evil

²¹ Luke 9:58

²² Luke 19:41-42

²³ Hebrews 4:15

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Resources Used:

James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment*, Baker Academic, 2006.

