

Questions & Answers  
Part 3: *Why Does God Allow  
Bad Things to Happen?*

# TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



A publication of **DISCIPLE**, the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. —Psalm 145:11  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —Joshua 22:5

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## Questions for Reflection

- Review Epicurus' statement of "the problem of evil" (see sermon summary).  
As a group, develop an answer to each of his four statements of "problem + conclusion".  
For which statements are you able to develop satisfying responses? For which ones can't you?
- Read Psalm 88. What emotional response do you get from the realization that it's in our Bible?  
Confusion? Embarrassment? Fear? Comfort? Why do you have that response?
- As a group, review for a moment what you know about David's life, and then reflect on Psalm 131.  
What do you think it took for a fugitive turned warrior-king to be able to write such a sentiment?
- Pastor Dan linked the existence of evil and suffering to the fact that human beings are significant;  
our actions **cannot** be **inconsequential**. Does this line of reasoning satisfy you? Why or why not?

Read Psalm 8:3-4. **What** conclusion typically would be drawn, given the contrast between the vast heavens and puny mankind? But then v. 5-8 takes a twist. What is it?

This highlights the issue of mankind's significance: we're not the biggest or most powerful, yet everything on earth has been put under our authority. Think about your workplace or school (ie, a context in which there is a hierarchy, a power structure). Who has more ability to create a positive environment—the boss or the employee? Who has more ability to create a negative environment—the teacher or the student?

How should those in authority reflect on the power of **their own** actions to impact **others**?

Using your "cheat card", role-play a discussion with someone who blames God for the existence of suffering and evil.

## Application-Challenge

- Don't blame God for the existence of evil in the world—we did it!
- Realize that our sovereign, good God is "Captain" of this ship and he uses evil to accomplish his good plans. Trust God and cooperate with him.
- If hard things are threatening to overwhelm you—let your church family know! We want to help you.

# Sermon Summary

Three weeks ago Pastor Lanier kicked off a new, five-part series called “Questions & Answers”. We’re shining a light on this important subject of “worldview”. In our first installment, Lanier helped us answer that foundational question, “How can we know what’s true?” Next we considered whether science has made God obsolete. If you missed either of those messages, they’re available at [tcc.org](http://tcc.org). Today we’ll seek to gain some insight into the thorny question—“Why does God allow bad things to happen?” Often this is called “the problem of evil”. We differ on what we think the world ought to be like, but everyone agrees that something has gone wrong; this world is broken. The Greek philosopher Epicurus put it this way: *Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?* (When Paul was in Athens he debated Epicurean philosophers; see Acts 17.)

Biblical authors understood suffering and despair (see Psalm 88). Although Epicurus dismissed God as either weak or wicked, the author of Psalm 88, however, never lost his faith in the goodness and power of God. What made the difference? Humility (Psalm 131). It takes humility to live with the tension of not understanding suffering, and yet to allow God to be God. Without humility, no answers will satisfy.

Today we’re asking the question, “Why does God allow bad things to happen to people?” “Bad” things happen for the same reason “good” things do: because people are significant (Psalm 8). We’re the pinnacle of God’s creation—and as a result, we’re capable of great good and great evil. Our choices—for good or for evil—cannot be trivial. We cure polio, and we create atomic bombs. We build homes for Habitat for Humanity—and we build concentration camps. We spring into action for disaster relief and we enslave people to dig for blood diamonds. So, my first answer to the question: “Why does God allow bad things to happen?” is because he made us so significant, and humans use their potential for good and for evil. We cannot be insignificant. We’re made in God’s image.

But there’s more: Think about a time you did something which you now regret. In retrospect, of course—we know that we’d prefer to have been spared the broken relationships, lost money, and wasted time we’ve experienced. But in the moment, without the wisdom of hindsight, we want absolute freedom to call the shots in our lives. And some of those choices are wise and good, and we cherish them the rest of our lives. But plenty of them became the raw material for deep regrets. So, the second reason why God allows bad things to happen is because he created us to be able to make choices. And, in retrospect, we learn that many of our choices are unwise, dangerous, or downright evil. But the alternative is that you be a robot or a slave, and you don’t want either of those options.

But our situation is not hopeless, because God is sovereign. Life is like a cruise ship: we the “passengers” make real, consequential choices (for good and for evil), but God—the “captain”—controls the final destination of the ship.. God promises to redeem all suffering in believers’ lives (Romans 5:1-5). The murder of Christ is the greatest act of evil ever, but notice all the good that God brought out of it: The redemption of the world! And God will redeem our suffering: Christ understands your suffering, he sympathizes with our sufferings (Hebrews 4:14-16). Christ shows us how to suffer without becoming bitter or vindictive (1 Peter 2:21-23). Christ uses our sufferings to make us like him—humble and loving (Romans 8:28-39). Christ gave us the Holy Spirit to empower us to follow his example (Acts 1:8a & Galatians 5:22-23). And, when we fail, when we do sin, Christ forgives us (1 John 2:1)!

Christ even uses our sufferings evangelistically. As non-believers see us responding in love and forgiveness, it draws many to the Savior (1 Peter 2:12). Our Savior really understands our suffering. He really cares. He really brings good out of evil in this world. He did it through his own cross, and he’ll do it through the crosses we have to bear as well (James 1:2-4; Titus 2:13-14). Many people consider the existence of evil and suffering to be a huge obstacle to belief in the Christian worldview, but in fact that’s exactly what the Bible is all about: how evil entered into God’s good world, what Christ did to conquer it, and how we should respond to its continued existence in our world today.

## Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

**"Five Question Bible Study"** (see page below) is a simple way to study any passage. We can use it to explore the Scriptures and develop a biblical understanding of suffering...

**Monday**— Genesis 1:24-31

**Tuesday**— Genesis 2:15-25

**Wednesday**— Genesis 3:1-7

**Thursday**—Genesis 3:8-16

**Friday**— Genesis 3:17-24

**Saturday**— ***In preparation for worshipping your risen Lord tomorrow with your church family,*** study Psalm 8.

Need blank copies for doing more

"Five Question Bible Study"?

e-mail: Dan.Clement.TCC@gmail.com

Bible Text: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) is it found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text?



### Why do bad things happen? “*Cheat Card*”



- When God created the world, everything was “very good” (Genesis 1:31).
- The **best** thing God made was human beings (Psalm 8). Human beings **cannot** be **insignificant**—we **either do great good or great evil**. Evil exists in the world because of us.
- The Bible shows great sympathy toward sufferers (Psalm 88).
- We all appreciate (*at times demand!*) the freedom to run our own lives—but then blame God for the consequences.
- Life is like a cruise ship: we “passengers” make real, consequential choices (for good and for evil), but God—the “captain”—controls the final destination of the ship. God promises to redeem all suffering in believers’ lives.  
(Romans 5:1-5; 8:28-39)