

VIDEO - <https://vimeo.com/71270296>

**Text: Matthew 26:36-45**

**Title: “Explore God: Why Pain and Suffering?”**

We’re dealing with some of the tough questions most of us have at some time or another related to God or to the Christian faith. And today we come to one of the most common questions ... why does God allow pain and suffering. In fact, this can be more than a question ... it can be an objection, even a hurdle that many people have trouble getting over. What are we to think about a God who lets us suffer?

The invitation to Explore God is built on the fact that God reveals Himself in creation, in Scriptures and most personally in His Son ... the historic person Jesus of Nazareth. So if Jesus reveals God to us let’s see how Jesus helps us make sense of why God allows pain, suffering and evil.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 26:36. This is the night before Jesus’ crucifixion. He will endure unimaginable physical, emotional and spiritual suffering in dying on the Cross for our sins. But here, on the night before, He shared the Last Supper with His disciples then He led them to a place where Jesus often prayed. **Read Matthew 26:36-46.**

**STARTING POINT: The way Jesus responded to evil, suffering and pain gives us a clue as to what God thinks about it.**

As we face the problem of suffering and evil we have at least three options:

**RESIGN** – We might simply resign ourselves in the thought that there’s just no meaning to suffering. Life is just a string of random events so what does it matter anyway. Just do your best to avoid pain and grab for every chance to be happy while you’re alive. Another option is to...

**MALIGN** – So we look for someone to blame which usually results in a person maligning God. And it usually goes something like this: God is supposed to be a good, all-powerful God. But there is pain and suffering in the human experience. If God *doesn’t* stop it, that must mean that God isn’t good. Or if God *can’t* stop it, that must mean that He isn’t all-powerful.

**PHOTO – ILLUSTRATION** – Earlier this year well-known atheist actor Stephen Fry was interviewed on a British talk show that discusses religion and the meaning of life. The interviewer asked Stephen Fry this question: “Suppose it’s all true, and you walk up to the pearly gates, and are confronted by God. What will Stephen Fry say to him, her, or it?” Fry answered: “I’d say, bone cancer in children? What’s that about? How dare you? How dare you create a world to which there is such misery that is not our fault. It’s not right; it’s utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain? That’s what I would say.”

So people (even ones who don't believe in God) malign God and blame Him for the problem of suffering and pain. But that doesn't line up with the character of God revealed in Jesus. So the third option we have is to...

**ALIGN** – When we align our thinking with what the Bible reveals about God and how He works in pain and suffering, we can begin to make some sense of it. This is what Jesus did that dark night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

There is no completely satisfactory answer to the question of suffering and pain. But of all the options, of all the explanations, the one that is most reasonable is the explanation given through Jesus Christ. Let me take you through four statements that form a line of reasoning from Jesus' experience here in Matthew 26. Hopefully it will help us make sense of the suffering and pain in life.

## **1. THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN RUINED BY SIN.**

As you read the first book of the Bible you see that God created a perfect, suffering-free world for Adam and Eve to live in. God had only one restriction for them and they chose to violate it. They sinned, and the Bible goes on to explain how their sin infected the entire human race and, in fact, all of the universe.

Someone might ask, "Well, couldn't God have created a universe and people without sin and the suffering that results from it. Yes, He could have. But sin is a choice we make to disobey God's laws. God could have made people like robots who are programmed to do right all the time. That way we could never choose to sin. But neither could we ever choose to love God. And that's what God created humans for ... for a love relationship with Himself. So God created humans with the capacity to make choices ... good choices and bad choices. And when Adam and Eve, our first ancestors, chose to disobey God, their sin ruined their relationship with God and infected the whole universe with sin. As a result you and I live every day in a broken world where there's cancer, earthquakes, car wrecks and violence like we saw last week when a gunman walked into a college in Oregon and started shooting people, all of which cause death. And some of the suffering we bring on ourselves; some suffering we inflict upon each other as we sin against one another.

So the first statement in this line of reasoning is that the human experience has been ruined by our sin. Here's the second statement along this line of reasoning from Scripture.

## **2. GOD IS MOVED BY OUR SIN-CAUSED SUFFERING.**

If we take seriously the way God revealed Himself through Christ, then we can't say that God doesn't care about suffering. The fact that God came down into our broken world tells me that He does care. And the way Jesus responded to evil, suffering and pain gives us a clue as to what God thinks about it. On the night before Jesus was crucified He took His disciples into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. It says...

**Matthew 26:37 – (Jesus) began to be sorrowful and troubled.**

**Matthew 26:38 - Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”**

Do you ever feel sorrowful and troubled? Are you ever overwhelmed with sorrow to the point that you think you will die? So has God. He doesn't stand back from our suffering. He cares. Why is Jesus overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death? He has the awful weight of our sin and suffering on His shoulders.

We are not meant to suffer alone. Jesus showed that. He turned and prayed to the Father in His suffering. And so can we.

**Matthew 26:39 - Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”**

Jesus depended on the Father's strength in His suffering. And He understood that the Father had a purpose in His suffering. God has a “will” that is to be done through Jesus' sufferings (and through our sufferings). And that will (purpose) is ultimately good. So like Jesus, in our sufferings we can trust and rest in our Heavenly Father's strength.

Jesus also brought His friends along to suffer with Him. He's the Son of God. Why would He need any one else other than the Father? Well, God created us to for community with others ... in our families and in the church. God puts other people in our lives to share the burden of our suffering.

So into this sin-broken world God came, showing that He is moved by our pain and suffering. But the next statement in this line of reasoning is this:

### **3. GOD ACTED IN RESPONSE TO OUR SUFFERING.**

He didn't just feel sorry for us. He cares *and* He acts. Our sin caused the mess. But God sent His Son into the world so that we might not perish in our sin, but that we might have eternal life.

**Matthew 26:42 - He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”**

What is this cup that Jesus is being asked to drink? He prays about it three times.

**Matthew 26:44 - So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.**

The cup is a picture of the death that Jesus was about to experience. This was no accident. It's the reason God sent Jesus into the world. On the Cross Jesus took the punishment that we deserve. Talk about unjust suffering! Jesus was the Innocent One ... the sinless Son of God. He didn't deserve any of what He suffered. But there's a purpose behind this unjust suffering.

Jesus went to the Cross of Calvary where He suffered and died, taking our sins upon Himself straight to the grave where He was buried. But three days later He rose again. The sin and death that destroyed God's good creation and our relationship with Him would no longer have the final word.

So if there was a purpose behind Jesus' pain and suffering, then maybe there is a purpose behind my suffering. Just because we can't see the purpose doesn't mean there isn't one. It simply means we can't see it. God doesn't waste any of our suffering and pain. Here's the next statement:

#### **4. ONE DAY GOD WILL COMPLETELY RESTORE EVERYTHING.**

Jesus came, lived, died and rose again. His resurrection signaled that our broken, sinful, suffering bodies will one day be raised in perfection. In fact, this whole sin-infected universe will one day be restored and renewed. At the end of the Bible we hear God say...

**Revelation 21:5a - "I am making everything new!"**

**ILLUSTRATION** – Recently I was with one of our young families as their child had a very painful surgery. The little boy was just coming out of the anesthesia and starting to feel the pain. And he cried uncontrollably. With tears running down his little cheeks I remember seeing the boy look at his mom as if to ask her, "Mom, why don't you stop the hurting?" And you know if his mom could somehow make the hurt go away, for a moment she might be tempted to intervene ... to stop the pain. But because she loves the child she knows that pain that her little boy is enduring is necessary for him to be healthy later. Her heart is still broken but she is assured that there's a higher purpose behind the pain.

So God is both good and all-powerful. But that doesn't mean that He will stop suffering right now. In the meantime God uses our sufferings and trials to perfect our faith so we grow in our love relationship with Him.

**BOTTOM LINE: We cannot fully understand all of the problems we encounter. However, we can be certain of God's perfect power, timing, purpose, and love.**