



# Why does God let bad things happen in the world?

Written by Douglass M. Bailey

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—This question is probably as old as religion itself. It is a stumbling block for some of us, and for many more at given moments of tragedy. There are as many answers to this question as there are people who care to engage in theological dialogue. One understanding is that yes, God allows "bad" things to happen; God does not cause them to happen.

Most "bad" things which happen do so because God gives a radical freedom to God's people; we are free people, not puppets on a string. But **God does not cause "bad" things to happen. God loves us and grieves with us in our pain when "bad things" happen.**

Therefore, we might best respond by saying that God does not *will* "bad" things to happen in life. Rather, "bad" things happen in the freedom that comes with the gift of life. When "bad" things happen to any of God's children, God is grieved and suffers with us, experienced most vividly in the hurt and suffering of Jesus the Christ for all humanity. Any "bad" thing which happens is never the last word. Rather, God is the deepest and last word, and that word is love and eternal life with God.

—The Rev. Dr. Douglass M. Bailey

Like so many people, I have struggled with this question as it pertains to my own life and the lives of others. Only by coming to terms over time with something terribly sad in my life have I come to understand the role God plays when human tragedies occur.

I now feel that my God does not send bad things to punish us or test us. In fact, God does not send them at all. Rather I sense that there are powerful forces loose in the world, forces like evil, disease and death.

What is God's role in all this turmoil? **If God is not sending the disease, the accidents, the tragedies, then why not, Zeus-like, step in and prevent them?** For me, this is a harder question. The experience of the individual cries so clearly for divine intervention, for healing, for salvation from emotional or physical pain. Although sometimes miraculous healings do occur which suggest the presence of the Divine, in my experience there generally is not much physical intervention.

However, the "intervention" I have experienced has been as powerful as anything physical. I have grown certain that God actually mourns these horrible events with us, that God is as sad, even more so, about what is happening to me as I am. God's role, I have felt, is to be "by my side," to understand me, to comfort me, to "lead me beside still waters... [and] restore my soul" (from Psalm 23) in the metaphorical "Valley of Death" which I face, as does every other person in the world. Finally, and most importantly, God's role is to help me heal on a daily basis- help me collect the pieces broken by experience- help me become Whole again, Whole as I was intended and created to be from the beginning by this loving God.

—Elizabeth

In a class I was attending recently, my rector said (and I paraphrase) that faith is not an insurance policy, but a blanket of assurance that God will be with us no matter what we encounter. He also said- in response to someone's claim that the death of a baby must have been the Will of God- that when our hearts break, God's heart breaks also.

God would never wish harm on any one of His beloved children. He is always there with us, holding us in our deepest sorrows as well as our wildest joys. I believe that, but I have not always believed this way. I have drawn much comfort, reassurance and a growing sense of peace from these two thoughts. **Until recently, I believed, on some level, that when something bad happened to me (or to anyone) somehow I had done something wrong, and I was being punished.** Call it karma, bad luck or "making my bed."

Now as a result of my growing understanding of the grace of God, I am recreating my beliefs out of the idea that God is always beside me, and loves me, and wishes me to know love without limits and community without end. No matter what. He never wishes any harm to visit me. Or, to borrow the essence of another of Doug's teachings, God loves me as though I am the only child in the world for God to love. The "me" is really "we" here, but first I have to know the unlimited and unconditional nature of God for myself. Only then can I be a witness to it in others. I now know, without a doubt, that my God never wishes bad in the world. Not for me.

Not for boys.

—Robbin

I have heard some people say that all the bad things that happen in the world prove that God does not exist. How could there be a God, they wonder, who allows so much evil to take place? I would answer these people by assuring them that God does exist and He deeply cares about His children. He cares so much, in fact, that He suffered crucifixion and death so that we might truly live.

I believe suffering results from our separation from God. He is holy, all-powerful, all-loving, all that is good. Each day I find myself doing things that move me away from Him. Every time I sin, the world becomes a little bit worse. I can do no good thing apart from God. The more I separate myself from Him, the more likely I am to cause someone else harm or pain.

To me Christianity is about God seeking us out, calling us back to him. In this life, we are separated from Him, so there will be suffering. However, if we use this precious gift of life to answer His call, He will deliver us into an eternity of peace. He has given us a choice, but most of us choose to reject Him.

—Nick