

A man and woman near Wausau had a daughter who was very sick with diabetes. She went into convulsions and then a coma. They prayed God would bring her through. They asked their friends to pray. The girl died.

People blow each other up in car bombings in Iraq. Is that God's will? Some believe that whatever happens is God's will. They must submit to Allah and put up with it.

There is sickness and suffering that might be ended if everyone was covered by insurance, so we are talking about a possible common health care system.

Sufferings:

Recession
Racial profiling
Broken relationships
Cancer

What do we do about it? Anger, hurt, depression, escape?

Some of us are studying a book "Same Kind of Different as Me". God has used Deborah's strong faith to care for the homeless and to bring her husband and a homeless man together as friends. Deborah gets that awful cancer, and now the two men are going through their grief. They feel anger and fear, they organize prayers, they are depressed, they question and beg and bargain with God, they try to focus on the positive and ignore the negative. They do all the things I did when my brother got that awful cancer.

God is there in every kind of suffering. But he gives us different tools to handle different kinds of suffering.

I. Pain without reason no one's fault
II. Pain from outside somebody else's fault
III. Pain from ourselves our own fault our own actions or attitudes or sick beliefs brought it on

Examples:

Natural disasters and diseases beyond our control are suffering without a reason.

Race or gender oppression and the actions of others cause suffering from outside ourselves. Bad choices that effect our health or relationships may be self inflicted suffering. We've got to identify the kind in order to use the right tool, the right medicine, the right prescription to undo the suffering.

So I will talk about dealing with suffering in three sermons, one on pain without reason, one on pain from outside us, one on pain caused by ourselves.

Some sufferings are from one category only, some are a mix of two or three. But we get three sermons.

Pain without reason is the kind that comes from nobody's fault.

Tornadoes or floods or plane crashes or cancer or freak accidents or birth defects

I WHY does God set up a world that includes hurt, tragedy, suffering? Why doesn't God stop the droughts, the illness, the accidents?

Some Christians believe the God causes everything to happen. God gives and God takes away. Others believe God sets the world in motion, sometimes intervenes and sometimes does not, like a loving parent. There are statements about both in the Bible.

One famous explanation is in Rabbi Kushner's famous book When Bad Things Happen to Good People. It could be because God's perfect creation is not finished. There is still some chaos that needs to be ordered. God is leading us to participate in harnessing the wind, in predicting earthquakes, in moving away from floods, in curing cancer and diabetes.

Or maybe God is not completely in control, or has decided to let awful, deadly things happen for some good reason we don't know yet.

Maybe God has a good reason for mixing pain into our lives. We've seen that pain is sometimes a helpful motivation to change our bad behavior. It is a warning to get away from danger. But that doesn't answer the question, "why pain without reason". Maybe there are some tragedies that come by chance, maybe each has a purpose.

The Bible gives clues to answers to these questions, but not a final hard and fast answer for our WHY question.

The best answer I've gotten from God is that somehow there must be room for tragedy in order for there to be room for love. And love is the most important

thing. It's not that God wants us to suffer, but that he wants us to love. God has set up an orderly world with laws of cause and effect, growth and deterioration, cycles of life that include death. Our bodies as part of this orderly creation are subject to those laws. It is likely that anything else would not be loving.

What do we do about it?

The movie Saving Private Ryan has awful realistic scenes of death on the beaches on DDay. It shows realistic portrayals of fear and heroism, of cowardice and confusion, of sacrifice and futility in war. Why look at that? Don't we feel bad enough already? The same director made the movie "Schindler's List" with horrible scenes of cruelty and mass killing. Why look? People who saw those movies said "I can't believe people can do that to each other". We can't believe it because we've tried to avoid the pain of evil by pretending it's not real. But it is real. People do that to each other. They are still doing it to each other. Torture is real. Genocide is real. Are you sickened and horrified by that? Good. That's a spiritually healthy hurt. Hang on to it. Watch the movie or visit the museum about the holocaust. Read about the African tribes killing each other by the thousands while we stood by and heard about it on the news. Remember the sight of those twin towers falling. Hang on to the horror of real evil. It will effect how you live, how you vote. If you have a healthy horror of AIDS and cancer and heart disease it will effect how you behave, what you eat. You will be better off with that pain.

We give offerings for disaster victims. We give for a cancer cure. We give some of our foreign aid to projects that fight hunger. We go on a CROP Walk. Of course we fight suffering that comes without reason. Even when we don't know why it comes.

Somehow suffering is a part of life. It is not there to take away life, but to redirect it.

Beatitude: Happy are they who bear their share of the world's pain. In the long run they will know more happiness than those who avoid it."

But just like Job we call out "Where were you when I needed you? Where were you when I wanted you?"

God responds in Job chapter 38. He doesn't answer Job's question directly, but with questions of his own. "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much." Who set up the world's dimensions, laid it's cornerstone, put the boundaries on the sea, commanded the light, made the

source of the water, brought the rain, made places for the animals to live? Where were you at the foundations of creation? Folks, there are things going on here that God doesn't give us answers for yet.

But God is good.

After the death of the lady in our book study, after she died of cancer, we see fruits of her life, because of her faith, that may not have come if she had not died. We don't know for sure. But we do know of a loving God who can bring good out of any tragedy.