

WEEKLY REFLECTION

If God is good, then why is there still suffering in this world? It's not as straightforward as we think it is—on the one hand, God could eradicate terrorists, murderers, and criminals with just a snap of His fingers. But the problem of suffering would still exist. *We* exist, and we continue to hurt each other daily.

On the other hand, suffering is part of what it means to be human—we will have to face death at some point. We've gotten sick before. The tragedy of cancer may not be something that we've personally gone through, but it's close enough that we hear stories of others facing it.

There are no quick and easy answers to this question, and if we claimed to have them, you shouldn't believe us. But we do know that part of human suffering exists because we were given a choice, and we chose to turn away from God. Romans 8 tells us that instead of setting our minds on the Spirit of God, we chose to focus on ourselves. Instead of choosing life and peace, we chose death (v.5-8). Romans 8 also tells us that death and disease were never meant to be part of the human landscape. Instead, all of creation was subjected unwillingly to futility, and it waits with groans and longing for the day it will be set free. (v.19-22)

When Paul writes that “for those who love God all things work together for good” (v.28a), he's not referring to what we think of as good. Instead, he's referring to God's plan for His children to be increasingly conformed to the image of His Son (v.29), so they can take part in His rescue mission for all of creation. Suffering might be a universal problem, but only in Christianity does it become temporary, transformative, and redeemable. So let us face it with grief and endurance, but also hope and joy, because we have a good God who has a unique purpose for His children.

QUESTIONS

QUESTION ONE:

What is a significant experience that greatly shaped your life and contributed to who you are today? How would you characterize that experience—was it mostly positive or negative? In hindsight, how do you interpret it now?

QUESTION TWO:

Have you ever contemplated the conflict between God's love for His creation and the suffering present in the world? Are there circumstances in which suffering could be appropriate, or pain considered beneficial?

QUESTION THREE:

How often do your prayers ask God to bless your agenda, rather than seeking to align with His? In light of God's desire for you to grow in the likeness of His Son, how might this change the way you respond to your personal suffering?