

# Podcast Companion

## The Problem of Evil & Suffering

Hi guys! Welcome back to the podcast.

This week in the podcast we looked at the emotional problem of evil! This is mostly going to be a transcript with some interesting articles and resources to look at, because I said the majority of what can be said on the subject in the podcast itself.

Last week, of course, we wrapped up our look at the intellectual argument of suffering & evil by reviewing and defeating the *probabilistic* problem of evil, namely, that is it unlikely God exists based on the suffering of gratuitous evil & suffering.

Now, we're going to take a look at the emotional problem of evil & suffering.

I want to reiterate the warning from the podcast here: this is the version of the problem that is less defined and straight forward to deal with. Because this is more about opinions and feelings, it's harder to be objective in dealing with it.

We also need to be more ministerial and pastoral when dealing with this approach to suffering & evil, which is difficult.

Let me tell you what the emotional problem of evil is then, before we crack on.

The emotional problem is not like the intellectual problem, as that deals with the idea that it's logically impossible, or at least unlikely, that God and suffering & evil can exist. Rather, the emotional problem of evil is a complete rejection of God based on perceived moral issues. Someone may not like the existence of God because they see Him as evil, harsh, capricious or somehow otherwise morally deficient.

For an example of this, and how to identify and personally defeat these issues, please look back at the podcast companion for part 3, where there's a link to a video in which Stephen Fry's emotional rejection is dealt with.

I said in the podcast you might wonder why we spent so long on the intellectual when most struggle with the emotional problem.

The reason we dwelt for so long on the intellectual before getting here is two-fold:

Firstly, as we discussed when referring to John Mackey a few weeks ago, it's tough to be on the road and know where to go and how to lead others if you haven't first seen the destination from the balcony.

Secondly, many, if not most people, will believe that their rejection really *is* intellectual! This means you may need to use your knowledge and skills that relate to the intellectual problem to lovingly steer people through their perceived issue to the real issue, their emotional struggle. We can show respect to their struggle while lovingly peel back the layers to reveal their real struggle.

For more information on this specifically, have a look at [this wonderful Q&A article](#) on Reasonable Faith, as they explore how to respond to someone whilst still using the free will defence I have spoken about.

As a sort-of aside – what we looked at, particularly the first couple of weeks, puts us in a great place to understand and relate the gospel *accurately*. If you listen to lots of mega churches in America or

even some here, you might hear something called the health-and-wealth, or prosperity, gospel. This basically preaches that when you follow Jesus properly, the outcome is a promise of no sickness, relentless happiness, and an overflow of cash so ridiculous you won't be able to cram it into your private jet. Now, this is technically a false gospel – they've taken the *eternal* promises of God, which I spoke about a couple of weeks ago on Sunday morning, and present them as if they're the instant outcome of belief in Jesus. Do you know why this is a false gospel? Because if you went to Syria or North Korea and preached it, it simply wouldn't land. There is no equating for pain and suffering on the health-and-wealth gospel, so if people are experiencing trials and suffering then it simply won't be heard or be relatable. That's not the gospel – the *true* gospel can be preached anywhere at any time and be heard and have the power to change people's hearts and lives. As I've said before, our hope is not in worldly happiness, but rather in that day when we go to be with God and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

So, how do we respond to someone who is struggling with the emotional problem of evil? Interestingly, it's not necessarily about what you say, it's more about what you do. Sometimes the best thing to do, once you've dealt with any intellectual issues they may pose and get to the root of the issue, is to simply be a sympathetic ear. Beyond that, where appropriate, share with them the gospel in its actuality. Minister to them in the same way I presented in week 1 when we brought the focus clearly onto Jesus and His sacrifice. Why do that? You may ask.

Well, firstly, like I always say – it's all about Jesus!

Secondly, when we contemplate Jesus' plan and sacrifice, we see we have a God who is not some distant, impersonal force and creator who just created and dipped out. God is a loving, heavenly father who shares our hurts and suffering alongside us. Jesus, on the cross, suffered torment and suffering the likes of which we can never know or comprehend, because He endured the guilt of sin that is rightly ours, out of love. As William Lane Craig rightly puts it *"even though he was perfectly innocent, he voluntarily took upon himself the consequences for the sin of the entire world that we deserve. None of us can comprehend that suffering. Even though he was innocent, he voluntarily took upon himself incomprehensible suffering for our sake. Why did he do this? Simply because he loves us so much. To bring us back to a relationship with God, our heavenly Father. How can we reject him who was willing to give up everything for us?"*

*So when God asks you to go through suffering that seems pointless, unnecessary, or unmerited, I think that meditation upon the wounds of Christ can help to give us the moral strength and the courage that we need to bear the cross that we are asked to carry through life. Don't torture yourself trying to figure out why God is permitting you to go through that suffering. As I said, given our cognitive limitations, we should not be able to expect to perceive the reasons for which God is allowing that suffering to enter your life."*

This really is the heart of what combats the emotional argument – a right understanding of who God is and what Jesus' life, death and resurrection means.

Hopefully, this whole series has helped you come to that right understanding in a way that is shareable with others! We're going to pick up this element of rightly understanding God in future sessions.

Allow me to share one more thing as we draw this to a close.

I want to share an amazing testimony of a man who used to work at Westmont College – *"He used to make it a practice of his to visit shut-ins in nursing homes in the community in an attempt to bring some bit of cheer and love into their lives. One Mother's Day he was visiting a nursing home in which he met a woman whom he would never forget. This is his account of that woman and that friendship. He says:*

*On this particular day I was walking in a hallway that I had not visited before looking in vain for a few who were alive enough to receive a flower and a few words of encouragement. This hallway seemed to contain some of the worst cases. Strapped onto carts or into wheelchairs and looking completely helpless.*

*As I neared the end of this hallway I saw an old woman strapped in a wheelchair, her face was an absolute horror. The empty stare and white pupils of her eyes told me that she was blind. The large hearing aid over one ear told me that she was almost deaf. One side of her face was being eaten by cancer. There was a discolored and running sore covering part of one cheek and it had pushed her nose to the side, dropped one eye and distorted her jaw so that what should have been the corner of her mouth was the bottom of her mouth. As a consequence, she drooled constantly. I also learned later that this woman was 89 years old and that she had been bedridden, blind, nearly deaf and alone for 25 years. This was Mabel.*

*I don't know why I spoke to her. She looked less likely to respond than most of the people I saw in that hallway. But I put a flower in her hand and said, "Here is a flower for you, Happy Mother's Day." She held the flower up to her face and tried to smell it and then she spoke and much to my surprise her words, though somewhat garbled because of her deformity, were obviously produced by a clear mind. She said, "Thank you, it's lovely, but can I give it to someone else? I can't see it you know, I'm blind."*

*I said, "of course," and I pushed her in her chair back down the hallway to a place where I thought I could find some alert patients. I found one and stopped the chair. Mabel held out the flower and said, "Here, this is from Jesus."*

*It was then that it began to dawn on me that this was not an ordinary human being. . . . Mabel and I became friends over the next few weeks and I went to see her once or twice a week for the next three years. . . . It was not many weeks before I turned from a sense that I was being helpful to a sense of wonder. And I would go to her with a pen and paper to write down the things she would say. . . .*

*During one hectic week of final exams, I was frustrated because my mind seemed to be pulled in ten directions at once with all of the things that I had to think about. The question occurred to me, what does Mabel have to think about? Hour after hour, day after day, week after week, not even able to know if it is day or night. So I went to her and asked, "Mabel, what do you think about when you lie here?"*

*And she said, "I think about my Jesus."*

*I sat there and thought for a moment about the difficulty for me of thinking about Jesus for even five minutes. And I asked, "What do you think about Jesus?" She replied slowly and deliberately as I wrote, and this is what she said,*

*I think how good he has been to me. He has been awfully good to me in my life, you know. . . . I'm one of those kind who's mostly satisfied. . . . Lots of folks would think I'm kind of old-fashioned. But I don't care. I'd rather have Jesus, he is all the world to me.*

*And then Mabel began to sing an old hymn:*

*Jesus is all the world to me,*

*My life, my joy, my all.*

*He is my strength from day to day,*

*Without him, I would fall.*

*When I am sad, to him I go.*

*No other one can cheer me so.*

*When I am sad, he makes me glad.*

*He's my friend.*

*This is not fiction. Incredible as it may seem, a human being really lived like this. I know, I knew her. How could she do it? Seconds ticked and minutes crawled, and so did days and weeks and months and years of pain without human company and without an explanation of why it was all happening – and she laid there and sang hymns. How could she do it?*

*The answer, I think, is that Mabel had something that you and I don't have much of. She had power. Lying there, in that bed, unable to move, unable to see, unable to hear, unable to talk to anyone . . . , she had incredible power."*

Paradoxically, even though the problem of suffering is the greatest obstacle to belief in God's existence, at the end of the day God is the only solution to the problem of evil. If God does not exist then we are locked without hope in a world filled with pointless and gratuitous suffering. God is the final answer to the problem of suffering for he redeems us from evil and he takes us into the everlasting joy of fellowship with Himself.

With that, I am drawing to a close our discussion on the problem of suffering and evil!

I hope you've found this helpful.

The problem of evil is, as I have said, probably the biggest and most common obstacle to faith in God for most people.

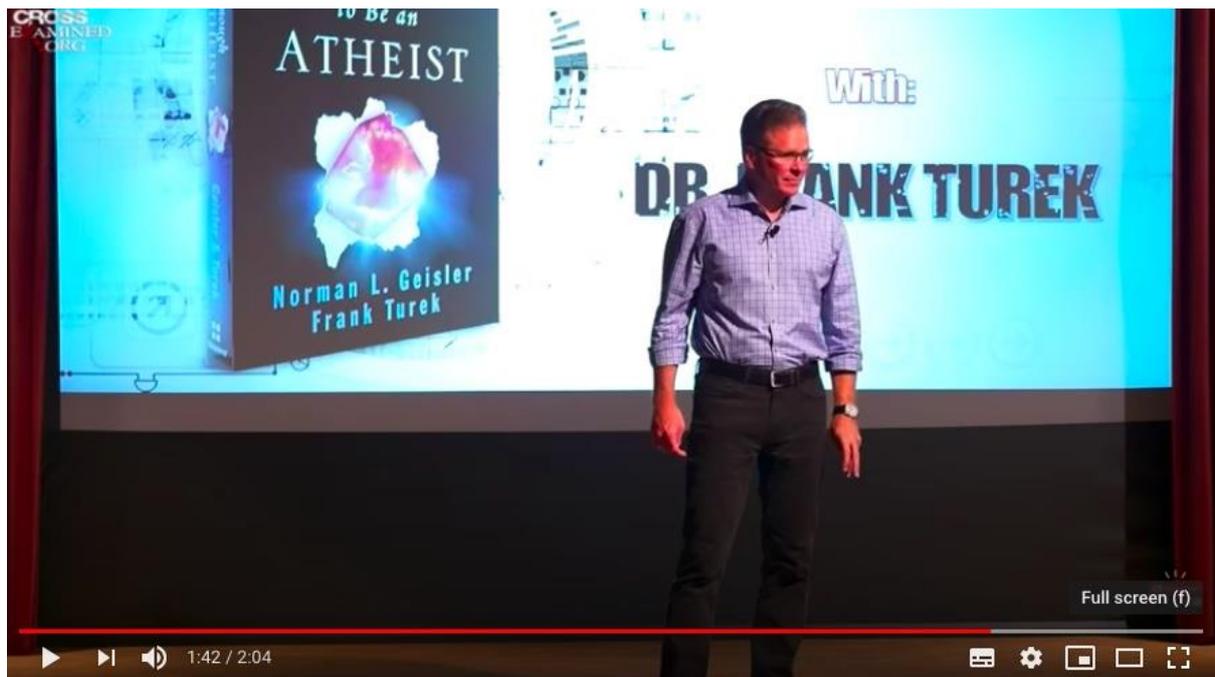
I'm sure this has given you some insight into not only helping others to get past it, but to also help others you know and meet move past it too.

For more examples of speaking through the problem of evil, here are some suggestions!

This is a great little answer to some basic points about evil by the late, great Ravi Zacharias:



Or this insightful example of Frank Turek explaining how to love someone through the emotional problem of evil:



That should about do it, I feel.

Let's look at our scripture for the week – John 17:3:

*“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”*

Why might this be our scripture for this week?

Well, if we consider the testimony of Mabel, what is it that causes her to have such peace and joy in an absolutely hideous trial?

She knows Jesus.

Knowing Jesus has given her that eternal perspective I bang on about so often! She sees through the momentary troubles to the eternal life she will receive in Jesus, as it says in John 17:3.

This eternal perspective will keep you safe from falling to the problem of evil and will help keep your feet on the path God has for you.

So, our question of the week – do you have an eternal perspective? Have you wrestled with the problem of evil and come to terms with justifying both God's and evil's existence?

That's that then, folks!

As always guys don't be afraid to get in the youth group chat on WhatsApp and let us know how you're doing and what you're thinking. Make sure you have your prayer requests ready for our Bible studies on Thursdays so we can make sure we're all in this together. You can also interact with some stuff on Instagram @chawnyouth.

See you next week!