

The problem of suffering.

What you need to know:

- What questions does suffering raise about God's love and purpose?
 - In what ways is suffering unjust.
 - Types of suffering: natural or man - made?
 - Does suffering have a purpose?
 - The meaning of **free will**.
 - Religious responses to suffering.
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Suffering is a 'problem' for everyone. We all suffer no matter how lucky we are. Human beings experience pain, illness, loss and finally death.

But suffering is called a 'problem' here because it is a problem for believers in an all - loving, all - good, all - powerful, all - knowing God. It makes people question God's love, God's purpose (will) and God's power.

Questions raised by suffering:

- Why is there so much in the world?
- It is God's intention (purpose) to make us suffer?
- If God is all - loving and cares for us, why does God not stop this from happening?
- God could use his power to stop this from happening.

How is suffering unjust?

Innocent suffering: people who have lived good lives or children who have not done anything wrong do not deserve to suffer.

Types of suffering; Natural or Man made?

- Not all suffering is pointless - pain tells us something is wrong with us so we can do something about it.
- Some people say suffering has made them a better person or a stronger person.

- Some suffer to achieve a goal - for example a mountain climber or an explorer.
- Some suffer to help others - self sacrifice during war.
- Suffering may test a person's faith.
- Suffering may teach a lesson.
- Suffering may have a purpose.

(NOTES ON SELF SACRIFICE CAN BE FOUND IN THE SHARED DOCUMENTS AREA)

A Christian response to suffering:

Within *Genesis* chapter 3 we are given an account of the 'Fall of Mankind'. This explains how evil and suffering came into the world, through mans disobedience to God's will. Adam and Eve had to face the consequences of their actions and as a result of this mankind was given free will.

(NOTES ON THE FALL OF MANKIND CAN BE FOUND IN THE SHARD DOCUMENTS AREA).

Therefore Christians believe that suffering is not God's fault. It is just how the world has developed since He created it. Suffering exists due to mans **free will**. This means that man has a choice of how he behaves.

Christians look to the example of Jesus to see how God solved this problem. Jesus was an innocent, sent from God to die for the world. He was the ultimate sacrifice God could have given - His own son. By Jesus hanging on the cross he was able to break free from the power of evil and suffering. Christians believe that anyone who is truly sorry for past sin and believes in God and Jesus will eventually have the same experience and break free, through death and resurrection in the after life in heaven.

When a Christian is suffering, a trust in God is all that is needed to see them through. Jesus has to trust God when he was about to die, that His father would not let him suffer too much. Therefore Christians believe that suffering is part of God's plan for their lives. This does not mean that they will not do all they can to alleviate the suffering of others or of themselves.

Practice questions:

1. Write down two different questions about God which are raised by suffering in the world.
2. Explain how religious believers can respond in a positive way to suffering.
3. What problems are raised for religious people by suffering?

4. Explain how believing in *God* can help people to cope with suffering in their lives.