

Does God Care? Does faith make sense in the face of suffering?

© 2026, Dr Paul B Coulter – www.paulcoulter.net

Does God care? It is an age-old question.

How can we believe God cares when there is so much suffering?

This question is not abstract or theoretical – it is real for all of us at some point in life.

Suffering is an inevitable part of life – from our first cry we have suffered and we have caused suffering. Birth and childbirth are painful. And some of you are enduring intense suffering or bear the wounds.

But at risk of sounding stupid or insensitive, can I ask another question? Why is suffering a problem for us?

I know it sounds ridiculous. Of course, suffering is a problem – because it hurts!

But that is not the only reason – or even the main reason suffering is a challenge.

In my experience – and that of many people I have listened to and cared for – suffering is a problem because it threatens the things long for most deeply

I want to suggest three things we long for that are thrown into question by suffering.

First, we long for **meaning** — that our lives matter and events are not random.

Yet suffering seems meaningless. If all suffering was caused by our own choices, we might not like it, but we might accept it more readily. But we know people suffer through no obvious fault of their own. Or if every experience of suffering resulted in some obviously good outcome we might struggle less. But most suffering brings no obvious good. Suffering seems meaningless.

The second thing we long for is **justice** — that wrongs will be put right.

When someone we love, or someone we understand to be innocent, suffers, we instinctively say: “That’s not fair.” That’s obvious when they suffer from violence or abuse, betrayal or miscarriages of justice. Perhaps if only bad people suffered, we wouldn’t struggle so much. But we know that bad things happen to good people and sometimes the bad guys seem to get away with it. Suffering seems unjust.

Third, we long for **hope** — that the future is not bleak.

We can bear suffering when we know a good outcome is in store – like childbirth or surgery or a trip the dentist – if I’m not stretching it too far. But we know that some suffering cannot be cured and eventually we will be faced with death. We have come a long way in being able to relieve suffering, but it catches us eventually and I we seem to have done a better job with controlling physical pain – imperfect as that is – than with the deep emotional anguishes of abuse, betrayal and death anxiety. Suffering seems hopeless.

So, suffering often – perhaps always – seems meaningless, unjust and hopeless.

And that means that the question “Does God care?” is really a question about meaning, justice, and hope.

But before I attempt to give a Christian answer to those three big challenges, I want to pause for a second and ask another question.

Why do we have a problem with suffering but not with joy? With evil but not with good?

I am not being facetious. I am pointing out that calling suffering meaningless, unjust and hopeless involves making judgements about right and wrong, good and evil. And we do that so instinctively we do not even realise it. No other species on this planet does this. They live – they try to avoid suffering – then they die. They do not question it. But we seek answers.

And I think that tells us something about our nature – I think those instincts point beyond ourselves. That we were made for joy and goodness. That suffering and evil are invaders in our world.

You see, suffering is a problem for everyone – not just Christians. And if we reject faith in the Christian God because of suffering, we must ask what better answer exists.

I suggest we will find no better answer in other faiths. They tend to say that suffering is always our own fault – the payback of karma or the purpose of God whose will cannot be questioned.

And atheism is even worse. If there is no God, suffering is ultimately meaningless and hopeless, and any talk of justice is an illusion. Suffering just happens. It always has and it always will. And talk of joy or goodness is equally meaningless too. Nothing has any meaning. Atheists should ask as often about the problem of good as about the problem of evil.

But Christians have no problem with good. The Christian message uniquely explains why we long for meaning, justice and hope and tells us that those longings have a fulfilment in a good God.

That is why suffering is a problem for Christians. How can God be good when he lets this happen?

To explore that, I want to share some thoughts from the apostle Peter – who knew Jesus personally and taught what he learned from Jesus. He addressed these three longings in a letter he wrote to Christians in the first century who were suffering intensely – going through what he called a “fiery trial”. His letter is part of the Bible – we call it 1 Peter.

Firstly, Peter talks about **meaning**. He writes:

“let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.” (1 Peter 4:19)

That is an astonishing sentence.

Peter talks about “suffering according to God's will.”

Let me be clear what that means. He is not saying God causes your suffering or wants it for you. The Bible is clear that God doesn't enjoy our suffering and it was not what he wanted for us. Especially when it is caused by other people, as it was for Peter's first readers.

But Peter *is* saying that our suffering isn't outside God's will. He knows about it and He permits it. The world might seem broken and meaningless, but it isn't. God is still in control.

That means your suffering is not ultimately meaningless either. God knows about it.

Again, let me be clear. Peter does not give these Christians a reason for every aspect of their suffering, and I cannot give you a reason for every aspect of yours. But I *can* point you to the two truths Peter anchors his confidence in God in.

First, God is your Creator – He made you, He knows what makes you tick, He understands you.

Second, God is faithful – He does not abandon what He has made and He does not fail.

Your suffering is not meaningless because your life is held by a faithful Creator.

But that immediately raises a harder question. If God is good, why do bad things happen?

The answer Peter gives is **SIN**. God does not fail – we do.

The world God originally made was good – completely good – with no human suffering or death. What went wrong was our decision to reject God's way – that is what sin is.

Now, you might ask why God would make a world where we could sin. Two thoughts.

First, we would not be asking the question if we did not have choice. Reason and free will set us apart from robots and animals. Whether God might have made things differently is beyond our knowing, but we are here asking the question because he made things this way.

Second, if we think God's decision to let us choose cost *us* a lot, it cost God much more, as we will see.

We have sinned. But, in what sense does suffering result from sin?

First, directly. Much human suffering is the direct result of wrong human choices: malice and cruelty, selfishness and greed, carelessness and foolishness. Bad diets, bad government, pollution, war, crime, betrayal and violence.

I do not know about you, but the most painful things in my life have not been utterly meaningless and random – they were caused by others who betrayed, misjudged, abandoned or attacked me.

And, to be completely fair, I need to acknowledge that someone else might be saying the same thing about careless or hurtful things I did to them.

When we think about the problem of suffering, we cannot deny the problem of us.

But, you might rightly remind me, 'You said much suffering isn't directly caused by people's choices.'

I did say that and Jesus said it too. So some suffering is an *indirect* result of sin.

This world, for all its beauty, is disordered and decaying. We inherit mutated genes and accumulate more genetic damage. That is why our immune systems sometimes attack our bodies, we get cancers and we age. Bacteria and viruses mutate too, so they attack our bodies instead of co-existing peacefully with us. And then there are natural disasters – earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions.

Are these things meaningless?

In one sense, yes – they happen through seemingly random processes and they are hard – if not impossible – to predict. But the Bible says the world was not always like this. The decay that marks our world results from God's curse on creation after human beings sinned.

So, the question, "How can God be good if bad things happen?" is reframed. The problem isn't God's goodness but our sinfulness. *We should* be asking, how can God be so good – so patient and kind – to put up for so long with all the grief we cause ourselves and Him.

And if you still doubt the extent of our sinfulness, consider **the cross**.

Nowhere is human sin more exposed than at the cross of Jesus. We did the most horrific things to Him:

- Religious leaders wanted Him killed because He threatened their interests.
- Pilate washed his hands to protect his position.
- The soldiers beat Him, stripped Him and nailed Him to a cross for a day's pay.
- The crowds mocked Him as he hung naked and exposed.
- One friend – Judas – betrayed Him.
- Peter – whose words we have been considering – was not much better – he denied knowing Him.

Everyone failed Jesus. The cross is the ultimate revelation of human sinfulness.

Putting the cross at the centre of the question of suffering does not remove our questions, but it does exclude some possible answers – especially the ones that say: "God is disinterested and distant, uncaring and unconcerned" or "God doesn't understand."

Because Jesus was the Son of God – He was God in human form.

In Jesus, God came into the world we spoilt and suffered in every way we do. And His suffering was all the more intense because of His innocence. God knows what suffering is by personal experience

And when we think of our longing for **justice** in light of the cross, we see it was the greatest injustice in human history. That is because **Jesus** – according to Peter – **never sinned** (1 Peter 2:22).

That is a staggering thing for a man who lived for three years in close quarters with Jesus to say. Jesus never made a mistake, never lied, never acted unfairly, never reacted out of turn, even facing injustice.

Live with me for three days – maybe even three hours – and you would never say such an outrageous thing about me. And no one who knows you could say it about you. But Peter could say it about Jesus.

Compared to Jesus we are all exposed as sinners, no matter how good we like to think we are. In that sense, there are no good people for bad things to happen to, except Jesus. No one is utterly undeserving to suffer judgement except Him.

So, where was the good God – the faithful Creator – when Jesus was hanging on that cross?

Peter says this about Jesus' suffering:

“When [Jesus] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to God who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23)

Not only is God the faithful creator – God is the just judge.

And God wasn't distant when Jesus died – He was watching, taking note of all that happened.

Jesus entrusted Himself to the God he called Father – leaving God to judge in the end. No vengeance. No bitterness. No hatred. Only trust. Yes, Jesus *was* sinless – even under immense pressure.

The idea that God will judge justly is good news for those who have suffered because of injustices in this world – like Jesus Himself did. Without God there is no justice. With Him, the guilty will not go free.

But that raises a frightening question: If God judges fairly, would we stand?

Our cries for justice cut both ways – not just against those who mistreat us, but against us!

And here is the scandal.

The Old Testament says: “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” (Deuteronomy 21:33)

And here is the Son of God hanging on a tree. It *looked* like Jesus was being judged by God.

But He was sinless. So why would God judge Him?

Peter gives the answer:

“He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree.” (1 Peter 2:24)

The cross is not merely an example of patient suffering – although Peter does say that too (1 Peter 2:21)

It does not only show us the extent of human sin – it shows us the extent of divine love. Despite the fact that we rejected God and caused Him grief, He took our sins in Himself. He died for you. As another apostle of Jesus – Paul – wrote:

“The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

The cross reveals God's love. And it reveals God's justice too. It is the place where justice is satisfied.

Jesus *was* judged by God when he hung on the tree — but not for His own sin. For ours.

God was not failing Jesus. God was saving us.

Jesus was right to entrust Himself to His Father. We know that because God did not abandon Jesus *in* death or to death. The Father raised Him to life again.

And the cross tells us we can trust God too, because, as Peter quotes from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:5):

“By his wounds you have been healed.” (1 Peter 2:24)

I cannot tell you the meaning of your suffering – why any specific painful experience happened to you. But I can tell you the meaning of Jesus’ suffering. His wounds were meaningful because His wounds healed us. There is forgiveness of sin through Jesus.

And I can say with confidence that Jesus’ suffering is proof that God knows what you are suffering – in a way that no one else can – because Jesus suffered the cost of the sin that is the root cause of your suffering.

This is the heart of justice: God judges sin — but in Christ He bears the judgment Himself.

Sin must be judged justly. We can bear it ourselves – that would mean a lost eternity – it means hell. Or we can do what Peter reminds his readers they had done.

Developing on another quote from Isaiah (Isaiah 53:6), Peter says:

“For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” (1 Peter 2:25)

That is the **response** the gospel calls for:

Going our own way, making our own judgments, our own attempts to run life ourselves – like wayward sheep – that is what sin is. And Peter says we must turn from it.

And faith. As Jesus entrusted Himself to His Father through His suffering, we entrust ourselves to Jesus – the Shepherd who tenderly cares for us and is strong enough to keep us.

Turn and trust.

And what of our final longing – **hope**?

By Jesus’ wounds we are healed. Sins forgiven and wounds made whole. Not now – but finally. And not temporarily, but permanently. Through resurrection.

I have already said God raised Jesus from the dead. Peter knew that because he saw the risen Jesus. Resurrection transforms suffering. Early in his letter, Peter says Christians have been:

“born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead”. (1 Peter 1:3)

Jesus is alive. Hope is alive.

And near the letter’s end, Peter gives a breathtaking promise:

“after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” (1 Peter 5:10)

We will not suffer forever. Eternal glory is ahead, and compared to eternity, even a lifetime of suffering is brief – “a little while”.

Glory means everything the way it should be, without imperfection. By His wounds we are healed.

And glory is in store for those who trust in Jesus – who has already borne our judgement – not hell, but heaven. In this sense – to use an image Jesus used – all the suffering of this world is like the pain of childbirth. Not enduring something bad until it ends but pushing on for the new life to be born. Glory will be born and the pain will pass into joy. And in a way I cannot explain, even our suffering will find new meaning in that glory – a testimony to the healing power of Jesus.

Importantly, this hope is not escapism. It helps us endure and it changes us now. That is why many Christians will testify to learning to trust more and having their character refined through suffering. That does not make suffering good, but it shows that God – only God – can bring good out of what is bad.

We have already seen that God is the faithful creator and the just judge, but here Peter calls Him the God of all grace. That means He is the One who gives generously.

Salvation through faith in Jesus is a gift. We do not earn it – we receive it when we turn from sin and trust.

And God's grace is not just about giving us admission to Heaven when we die. He will also give us what we need to endure now. Peter says God will do four things.

Two of these, I suggest are mainly in the coming glory: **God will restore and confirm us.** Heaven is not consolation after hardship, but restoration – a new creation in resurrection bodies like Jesus – and confirmation – to see that it was all worthwhile and that our trust in God was not misplaced.

The other two things Peter promises are, I think, more for now: **God will strengthen and establish us.** He will supply strength to get through each day. By ourselves we cannot endure forever – death will overtake us eventually – but God can carry us even through death.

Peter wants his readers to know this and to help each other hold on to it.

And God's help to endure most often comes through other Christians.

As Peter says, Jesus died for our sins:

“that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24)

Saved from sin not to do what is wrong – what causes suffering – but what is right. And the right thing that God calls Christians to is a mission of help and hope. Sharing the good news of hope of eternal glory in Jesus and bringing help to people through suffering now.

When Christians follow Jesus, they do not just refuse to take revenge or to revile those who mistreat them. They seek to love others as Jesus loved us. That is why Christians started hospitals and pioneered science. It is why they care for others and share the good news of Jesus.

My question in this article has been: **Does God care?**

Here is Peter's emphatic answer: **God does care!**

Peter writes:

“Cast all your anxieties on Him, because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)

The faithful, just and gracious God cares for you.

Let me remind you of these truths. But I want to make it personal this time. When we suffer or see others suffer, we often weep. That is a distinctively human thing – only human beings among the species on this planet cry with sorrow. It is an echo of the God of compassion in whose image we were created.

Three Bible verses about tears remind us of God's care.

Peter said God is your faithful Creator who knows and cares for you. Another man who trusted God centuries before Peter – king David – wrote in one of his songs to God:

“You have ... put my tears in your bottle.” (Psalm 56:8)

God counts every tear you shed.

Peter said God is the just judge and in love for us He satisfied His justice at the cross. One of the shortest verses in the Bible says that when he was confronted with the death of a friend:

“Jesus wept.” (John 11:35)

That says it all! Jesus knows. He cares. He came for you.

Peter said God is the God of all grace who calls us to eternal glory if we turn from sin and entrust ourselves to Him. One of the Bible’s descriptions of that destiny says:

“God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” (Revelation 21:4)

God counts your tears. God shares your tears. God will wipe away your tears.

So, whether you are a Christian or not, the invitation is the same:

Turn from whatever else you trust in and entrust yourself to the God who truly cares.

God does care. And you can cast your anxieties on Him.

An audio recording of the talk in Windsor Baptist Church that this article was based on can be found at:

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/2Hg8xMFBwkpFStOvKKpEDG>