

WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

1. I believe this question can and should be answered in two primary ways. First, our culture needs to understand that humanity is not as “good” as we pre-suppose. In his powerful book *Shantung Compound*, Langdon Gilkey says, *“Nothing indicates so clearly the fixed belief in the innate goodness of humans as does this confidence that when the chips are down, and we are revealed for what we really are, we will all be good to each other. Nothing could be so totally in error.”* Gilkey made these comments after observing the behavior of civilized people within a Japanese internment camp during WWII. It is important to remember that niceness does not equal goodness. If anything the combination of Scripture (Romans 3:10) and human experience tells us that humanity is fundamentally flawed and sinful. In summary, the question of why bad things happen to good people is really a misnomer—bad things happen to bad people. In reality, God regularly expresses His mercy in continuing to allow goodness to come into the lives of bad people.
2. However, if we are talking to a skeptic or an unsaved friend and they genuinely ask “Why do bad things happen to good people?” it is entirely within reason to argue that in a fallen-world where God honors the free-choice of individuals that virtually all evil/suffering can be explained by the free choice of individuals or the by-product of the free choices of individuals. The following ten categories illustrate this basic principle:
 - 1) Some evil/suffering comes to us directly from our free choices (Abuse of one’s body, poor moral choices & cultivating bad habits which may involve suffering later in life).
 - 2) Some evil/suffering comes to us indirectly from the exercise of our freedom (Suffering might come from choosing to do nothing but poverty often results from laziness and consequently, the pain of being poor may be indirectly caused by one’s own free choice to remain idle).
 - 3) Some physical evil comes to us directly from the free choices of others (In a free world, child abuse is possible as is wife-beating or muggings. Given the nature of free choice and the significant number of people and various relationships you would bet that conflict and pain were inevitable).
 - 4) Some evil/suffering evil comes to us indirectly from the free choices of others (Improper prenatal care & parental laziness can cause child poverty. Ancestral choices have long-range consequences on generations to come).
 - 5) Some evil/suffering may be a necessary by-product of other good activities (In a world where people are free to enjoy boating and swimming, some people will drown. In a world where the natural laws that govern our universe work for the overall benefit of humanity; these laws or the over-lapping of these laws will result in natural evil).
 - 6) Some evil/suffering may come upon us as the result of the choices of evil spirits (In rare cases evil spirits have been known to afflict mankind. Job’s sufferings are attributed to Satan, Job 1:6,7. People in Jesus’ day were afflicted with diseases from evil spirits, Matthew 17:14-15).
 - 7) Some evil/suffering is a God-given warning of greater physical evils (Not all pain is bad. Our bodies are full of alarm systems. In this sense, some physical pain are not unjust, they are highly justified).
 - 8) Some physical suffering may be used by God as a warning about moral evils (physical pain in the world may be a very effective way of alerting men to the need of avoiding moral evil, Job 23:10).
 - 9) Some evil/suffering may be permitted as a condition of greater moral perfection (where finite free choice is the cause of evil, God may still use it as an instrument of moral perfection. God is able to overrule man’s intentions and use our evil to fulfill His own good purposes).

10) Some physical evil occurs because higher forms live on lower ones (since we live in a physical world governed by physical laws of energy flow, it is possible that this is the only way a physical world could be constructed).