

# Solid Ground

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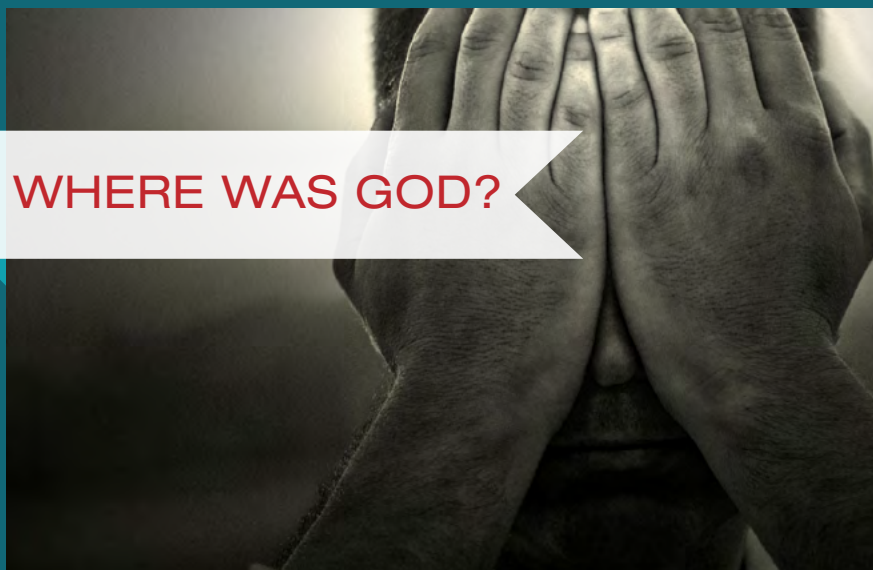
March/April 2014

## I N T H I S I S S U E :

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### WHERE WAS GOD?



Some have answered that God is too weak to intervene and can only weep with us. Others deny God completely reasoning that so much “evil” makes it clear that no such all good, all powerful being exists. In this month’s Solid Ground I show why both of these alternatives fail badly, and that the only answer taking evil seriously and offering a real solution is the God of the Bible—specifically, God in Jesus, on a cross, at Calvary.

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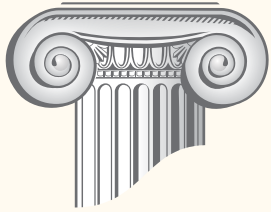


At STR, our daily focus is on training you to understand God more deeply and preparing you to thoughtfully and accurately share the hope of the Gospel with others. We are not that unique in the information we give, but in the way we use information to deepen your convictions, increase your skills, and embolden you to speak truth in the marketplace.

That is our commitment—and your financial support allows STR to continue to advance this work. Please consider a gift today for the ongoing work of Stand to Reason.

*Greg Kousser*





March 1, 2014

Dear Friend,

The well-known conservative talk show host, [Dennis Prager](#), once observed, “If pain were water the world would drown.” Sobering words.

No wonder, then, that the problem of pain is a difficulty vexing the Christian as much as the skeptic. When tragedy hits—whether on a national level through natural disaster or deadly crime, or on a personal level when calamity strikes close to home—we can’t help wondering, “Where was God?”

Some have answered that God is too weak to intervene and can only weep with us. Others deny God completely reasoning that so much “evil” makes it clear that no such all good, all powerful being exists.

In this month’s Solid Ground I show why both of these alternatives fail badly, and that the only answer taking evil seriously and offering a real solution is the God of the Bible—specifically, God in Jesus, on a cross, at Calvary.

Read carefully for two reasons.

First, this is the most tenacious objection against Christianity, and is especially damaging when left uncontested.

Second, it’s in the face of this withering challenge that Christianity shows itself especially tenacious under fire, completely adequate to speak to the problems of life as we find it rather than how we wish it would be.

You’ll also see that we are suspiciously selective in picking and choosing our moral tragedies, crying “foul” when evil assaults us, but remaining mute when our own evil indulgences victimize others.

What you read here will not just inform you and encourage you; it will also equip you to be at the ready when the chips are down, whether for you, for others around you, or for our national community.

At STR, our daily focus is on training you to understand God more deeply and preparing you to thoughtfully and accurately share the hope of the Gospel with others. We are not that unique in the information we give, but in the way we use information to deepen your convictions, increase your skills, and embolden you to speak truth in the marketplace.

That is our commitment—and your financial support allows STR to continue to advance this work. Please consider a gift today for the ongoing work of Stand to Reason.

Thank you for your partnership.

Safely in His hands,

Gregory Koukl





# WHERE WAS GOD?

By Greg Koukl

The images are sadly familiar. Buildings ripped from their foundations. Corpses mingled with debris. Parents and friends grieving for lost loved ones. Flowers and candles and makeshift memorials. New Orleans, Newtown, New York, Littleton.

In one sense, tragedies like these will never be old news. And when new disasters inevitably arrive, the question on the lips of so many is an age old query: “Where was God?”

## One Wrong Answer

One answer is not going to work: the picture of a broken-hearted God, victimized, agonizing over events that are out of His control.

This “finite God” view is Rabbi Harold Kushner’s answer in *Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?* Evil is bigger than God whose hands are tied by the laws of nature and the will of man. Limited in power, He weeps with us at a world out of control.

According to Kushner, this should bring us comfort. “God, who neither causes nor prevents tragedies, helps by inspiring people to help,” he writes.<sup>1</sup>

Clearly, the God Rabbi Kushner has in mind is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the One who brought the universe into existence with a single thought. This is not the God of the Exodus or the empty tomb. A God equally victimized by the march of evil may commiserate with other victims, but He cannot inspire or rescue. He is not worthy of praise, prayer, or trust. Nor is there any real comfort to be gained from one so impotent.

## Another Wrong Answer

But what alternative is there? How can anyone believe in God in the face of mind-numbing tragedy? The great 20th century British

philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell wondered how anyone could talk about God while kneeling at the bed of a dying child.

It is a powerful image. Like the three-word sound byte, “Where was God?,” it strikes many Christians dumb. How can anyone cling to the hope of a benevolent, powerful sovereign in the face of such tragedy?

They might consider Christian philosopher William Lane Craig’s response: What is the atheist Bertrand Russell going to say at the bed of that dying child—or, for that matter, at the funerals of thousands of dead in Katrina’s wake, or to the parents of 20 dead school children in Newtown, Connecticut, or to the families of 2,977 dead on 9/11? Too bad? Tough luck? That’s the way it goes? No happy ending, no silver lining, nothing but devastating, tragic, senseless evil?

No, that also won’t work for an important reason. In a world bereft of God, there are many ways to characterize hurricanes, tsunamis, terrorist attacks, or malicious bloodletting: unpleasant, sad, painful, even ghastly.

Yet if God doesn’t exist, the one thing we can never do is call such human destruction “evil” or wanton murder “wicked.” If in virtue of these tragedies one concludes God doesn’t exist, then the carnage ceases to be morally tragic at all, if by that word we mean a genuine breach of goodness.

Judgments like these require some transcendent reference point, some way of keeping score. Words like “evil” or “tragic” are parasitic on a standard of moral perfection. C.S. Lewis pointed out that a portrait is a good or bad likeness depending on how it compares with the “perfect” original. But if there is no standard, then there is no “good” or “bad.”

“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust,” Lewis reasoned. “But how had I gotten this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call something crooked unless he has some





idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?"<sup>2</sup>

Evil is spoiled goodness. That's Lewis's point. We already know this. Note the words we use to describe it: *unrighteousness, immorality, impurity*. Evil depends on the good. Where does such goodness come from, though?

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IF THERE IS NO GOD, IT'S HARD TO EVEN BEGIN MAKING SENSE OF THE NOTIONS OF EVIL OR MORAL TRAGEDY IN AN OBJECTIVE SENSE.

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This point was explored in the movie, *"The Quarrel."*<sup>3</sup> The main characters, Hersh and Chaim, were boyhood friends who separated in a dispute over God and evil. Then came the Holocaust. Each thought the other had perished. After the war, they reunite by chance and immediately become embroiled once again in their boyhood quarrel.

Hersh, now a rabbi, offers this challenge to the secularist Chaim:



*If there's nothing in the universe that's higher than human beings, then what's morality? Well, it's a matter of opinion. I like milk; you like meat. Hitler likes to kill people; I like to save them. Who's to say which is better?*

*Do you begin to see the horror of this? If there is no Master of the universe, then who's to say that Hitler did anything wrong? If there is no God, then the people that murdered your wife and kids did nothing wrong.*

If there is no God, it's hard to even begin making sense of the notions of evil or moral tragedy in an objective sense.<sup>4</sup> The events that trouble us are reduced to mere "stuff" that happens. There are

different kinds of "stuff," to be sure, some we like (Mother Teresa), and some we don't (Newtown), but in a universe bereft of God it's all reduced to "stuff" in the end.

We know better, though. Words like "wicked," "tragic," and "evil" are on the lips of everyone constantly. We cannot describe our daily experience of the world without them.

Yet the questions remain: Why doesn't God intervene? Why is He inactive—apparently impotent—when He could restrain both wayward winds and wicked people? This protest rings hollow, though, because we don't really want God to end evil, not all of it.

### Picking and Choosing Our Moral Tragedies



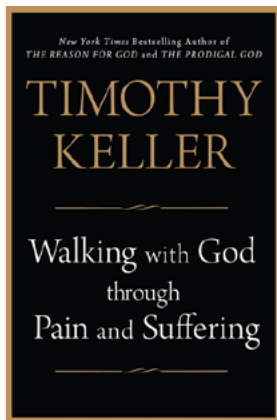
Why does this question about God only come up with *magnum* tragedies—like a hurricane or a schoolyard massacre—or when we are personally stunned by deadly disease or financial ruin? What about the mass of evil that slips by us every day unnoticed and unlamented because *we are the perpetrators* of the evil, not its *victims*?

On December 14, 2012—the same day 26 were murdered, most of them children, at Sandy Hook elementary school—I wonder how many Americans were committing adultery around the country? What of the cumulative effect of the personal pain and destruction that resulted from all those individual acts of sin? What of the unplanned pregnancies (and subsequent abortions), the sexually transmitted diseases, the shame and embarrassment?

On August 30, 2005, a day when Katrina left so many homeless in the Gulf states, what of the children whose homes were broken through





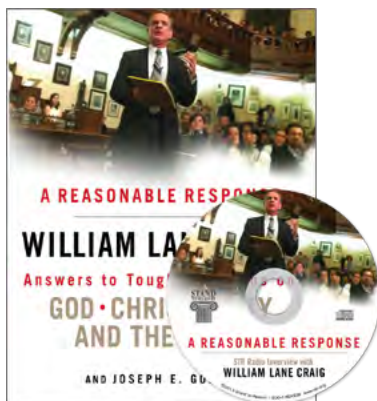


## Walking with God through Pain and Suffering – \$26.95

Timothy Keller, Hardcover: 288 pages (BK383)

*Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* answers one of life's most troubling questions: why do bad things happen? The question of why there is pain and suffering in the world has confounded every generation; yet there has not been a comprehensive pastoral treatment from a Christian perspective exploring why they exist for many years. It's time for a new, contemporary examination of this issue uniquely suited to our context and struggles.

Tim Keller, a pastor known for unique and biblically based insights is eminently qualified to address these issues. He is thoughtful, well studied, and lives in the midst of human struggle everyday as the pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* will bring a much-needed, fresh viewpoint on this important issue.



## A Reasonable Response: Answers to Tough Questions on God, Christianity, and the Bible – \$21.99

William Lane Craig, Paperback: 432 pages (BK381)

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## Evil, Suffering, and the Goodness of God – \$8.95

Gregory Koukl, Audio CD with PDF Study Notes (CD106)

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What is evil and where did it come from? Why does God allow it and what is He doing about it?

The reality of human suffering poses the most difficult question anyone can ask about a God who is both good and powerful. If God is absolutely powerful and ultimately good, He would deal with evil. Instead, He appears too frail to oppose it or too sinister to care, and no one can believe in a God like that.

Greg answers these questions and shows that there is no contradiction. You'll also learn why the presence of evil in the world is one of the best proofs for the existence of God.

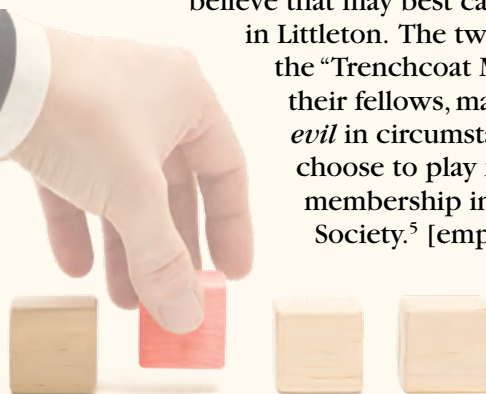




- Resources
- Speakers
- Training

While reading on the Littleton shooting several years ago, I stumbled upon a refreshing bit of honesty and moral clarity by John Hewitt in a piece entitled “*Seeking to Make Sense Where There Is None*.” Hewitt wrote:

We would rather think of bad acts as the unfortunate consequences of discoverable and remedial social and personal conditions. Yet it is precisely the account we do not wish to believe that may best capture what happened in Littleton. The two dead members of the “Trenchcoat Mafia,” together with their fellows, may simply have *chosen evil* in circumstances where others choose to play football or to crave membership in the National Honor Society.<sup>5</sup> [emphasis added]



Simply put, humans—you and I—make choices that cause evil. Consequently, any judicial action God might take today would pin us all under the gavel. When God wipes out evil, He’s going to do a complete job. C.S. Lewis soberly observed, “I wonder whether people who ask God to interfere openly and directly in our world quite realize what it will be like when He does....When the author walks on the stage the play is over.”<sup>6</sup>

No, God hasn’t banished evil from His kingdom—not yet. The Bible describes a future time when God will wipe away every tear and repair the effects of evil on the world. Men will no longer endure the ravages of wickedness or be victimized by bouts with nature. And no one will ever ask the question, “Where was God?”

Until then, though, God has chosen a different strategy, a better plan, one that’s moral on a higher level. It’s a plan that ultimately deals with evil, but allows room for mercy as well. It’s called forgiveness.

### The Patience of God

God is waiting. Patience, not lack of goodness or lack of ability, stays God’s hand from writing the last

chapter of human history. “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness,” Peter reminds us, “but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish, but for all to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). God is patiently waiting for people to turn to Him.

Suffering, tragedy, and profligate evil now function as warning signals. Like the ache of a limb out of joint, the pain of living in a broken world tells us that something is amiss. If God took away the pain, we’d never deal with the disease. And the disease will kill us, sooner or later.

Why doesn’t God do something about evil? God *has* done something, the most profound thing imaginable. He has sent His Son to die for evil men. Because we are ultimately the source of evil, God would be entirely justified in punishing us. Yet He chose instead to offer mercy. He took the punishment due you and I and poured it out on His Son Jesus so He could make forgiveness available to anyone who asks.

God is not the author of evil. Neither is He incapable of responding nor unwilling to act. But His remedy for evil is not capricious. He doesn’t obliterate us, the offenders, with one angry blow. Instead He waits.

Bertrand Russell had nothing to say while kneeling at the bed of a dying child. He could have spoken of the patience and mercy of God. He ought to have mentioned the future perfection that awaits all who trust in Christ and experience God’s forgiveness. He might have remembered that a redemptive God “causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28). He may have considered the Gospel, the only source of hope for a broken world.

But Russell could not. As an atheist he had surrendered those resources. We can do better.

Our dilemma should not be why God allows evil. Instead, our wonder should be why He would pay such an incredible price to rescue us at all when we have rebelled so completely against Him.

### A Piece of My Mind

Listen to Greg talk about this edition of *Solid Ground*.

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When this reality grabs our hearts, we will get down on our knees and ask forgiveness instead of criticizing God for not doing enough.

#### Putting Your Knowledge into Action

First, be sympathetic to this problem. It hits all of us sooner or later, and sometimes with great force in very personal ways.

Second, don't let others leverage the problem of evil into an argument against God. It doesn't work. Ask them how they would answer for evil if there were no God. Further, how would they answer the problem of good?

Remember the Bertrand Russell challenge and William Lane Craig's powerful response. It takes a liability and turns it into an asset.

When someone asks "How does Christianity explain tragedy?" say "Christianity doesn't explain it; Christianity predicts it. This is exactly what you'd expect to see if the Christian worldview is true."

Explain that God's answer to evil at the moment is not to destroy those who perpetrate evil—each one of us—but to patiently extend an offer of clemency, forgiveness through His Son.

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# Why Does God Allow Natural **Evil?**

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## Stand to Reason Speakers Near You



### Greg Koukl

#### March

9 Dayspring Christian Center, Gardena, CA 11 a.m. [Contact](#)

15-16 Mountview Christian Church, Columbus, OH [Contact](#)

20 Tactics book group potluck, West Hills

22 Men's Breakfast, Calvary Community Church, Brea, CA 7 p.m. [Contact](#)

29 New Hope Church, New Hope, MN [Contact](#)

#### April

1 Washburn University, Topeka, KS [Contact](#)

5-6 Texas Baptist Evangelism, Conference Kingwood, TX [Contact](#)

6 Woodbridge Baptist Church, Kingwood, TX [Contact](#)

12 Watermark Church, Dallas, TX [Contact](#)



### Alan Shlemon

#### March

5 Grace Fellowship Church, Costa Mesa, CA Time: 7-9 p.m. Topic: "Tactics in Defending the Faith" [Contact](#)

7 412 Church, San Jacinto, CA Time: 7 p.m. Topic: "Homosexuality: Truth & Compassion" [Contact](#)

10 Summit Ministries, Colorado Springs, CO Time: 12:45-9:30 p.m. Topic: "A Closer Look at Islam" [Contact](#)

23-26 Oregon Right to Life, Portland, OR Topics: "Making Abortion Unthinkable", "Stem Cell Research & Cloning" [Contact](#)

28 North Coast Church, Vista, CA Time: 11 a.m.-1 p.m. Topic: "Dead Men Rise" [Contact: cathyd@northcoastchurch.com](#)

#### April

2 Heart Christian Academy, San Juan Capistrano, CA Time: 3-4 p.m. Topics: "A Closer Look at Islam" [Contact](#)



### J. Warner Wallace

#### March

14-16 Bethel Baptist Church, Jacksonville, AR Topics: "Cold Case for God's Existence", "Cold Case Reliability of the Gospels", "Cold Case Resurrection", "Cold Case Problem of Evil" [Contact: Joe.Manning@att.net](#)

19 Heart Christian Academy, San Juan Capistrano, CA Time: 3-4 p.m. Topics: "Cold Case Reliability of the Gospel" [Contact](#)

21-22 Church Everyday, Northridge, CA Time: Friday- 7 p.m., Saturday- 2 & 6:30 p.m. Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

28-29 Ray Ciervo Ministries, Oakhurst, NJ Time: TBD Topics: "Cold Case Reliability of the Gospels", "Cold Case Difference Between Artifacts and Evidence" [Contact](#)

30 Liquid Church, Morristown, NJ Time: 9, 10:30 a.m. & 12 p.m. Topics: "Cold Case Reliability of the Gospels" [Contact](#)

31 Ratio Christi at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ Time: TBD Topics: "Cold Case Reliability of the Gospels" [Contact](#)

#### April

20-21 First Presbyterian Church, Bonita Springs, FL Time: Sunday, 7:30, 9 & 11 a.m. Monday, 7-8 p.m. Topics: TBD [Contact](#)



### Brett Kunkle

#### March

1-2 Fellowship Church, Knoxville, TN Topics: "If God Is Good, Why Is There Evil?", "Can We Be Good without God?", "What Is Gods Will for My Life?", "Who's Waiting for You?" [Contact](#)

12-16 Upland Christian Academy, Berkeley, CA Topic: Berkeley Mission Trip [Contact](#)

19-23 Immanuel Baptist, Ridgecrest, CA Time: TBD Topics: TBD [Contact](#)

26 Heart Christian Academy, San Juan Capistrano, CA Time: 3-4 p.m. Topics: "If God Is Good, Why Is There Evil?" [Contact](#)

#### April

4-6 Lutheran Church & School of Messiah, Grand Junction, CO Topics: "Atheist Role Play", "Why I Am a Christian", "Does God Exist", "Can We Be Good without God", "Why Can I Trust the Bible", "Is One Way the Only Way" [Contact: ScottMausser@discovercreation.org](#)

14-17 Orange Lutheran High School, Orange, CA Time: TBD Topics: "Atheist Challenge", "Why I Am a Christian" [Contact](#)

27 Grace Christian Fellowship, Costa Mesa, CA Time: 10 a.m.-12 p.m. Topic: "Mormonism 101" [Contact](#)

To get information about inviting an STR speaker to your church, email [Dawnielle@str.org](mailto:Dawnielle@str.org) for Alan, Brett or Jim, or [Melinda@str.org](mailto:Melinda@str.org) for Greg.



## Endnotes

1 Rabbi Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken, 1981), 140, quoted in Norman Geisler and William Watkins, *Worlds Apart* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 203.

2 C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), 31.

3 “The Quarrel,” directed by Eli Cohen, released 1991.

4 Of course, relativistic morality—grounded in personal preference or cultural convention—fares just fine because it’s not a true moral system, but rather a denial of universal moral obligations.

5 John P. Hewitt, “Seeking to Make Sense Where There Is None,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1999.

6 Lewis, 66.

## Putting This Solid Ground into Action

- First, be sympathetic to this problem. It hits all of us sooner or later, and sometimes with great force in very personal ways.
- Second, don’t let others leverage the problem of evil into an argument against God. It doesn’t work. Ask them how they would answer for evil if there were no God. Further, how would they answer the problem of good?
- Remember the Bertrand Russell challenge and William Lane Craig’s powerful response. It takes a liability and turns it into an asset.
- When someone asks “How does Christianity explain tragedy?” say “Christianity doesn’t explain it; Christianity predicts it. This is exactly what you’d expect to see if the Christian worldview is true.”
- Explain that God’s answer to evil at the moment is not to destroy those who perpetrate evil—each one of us—but to patiently extend an offer of clemency, forgiveness through His Son.

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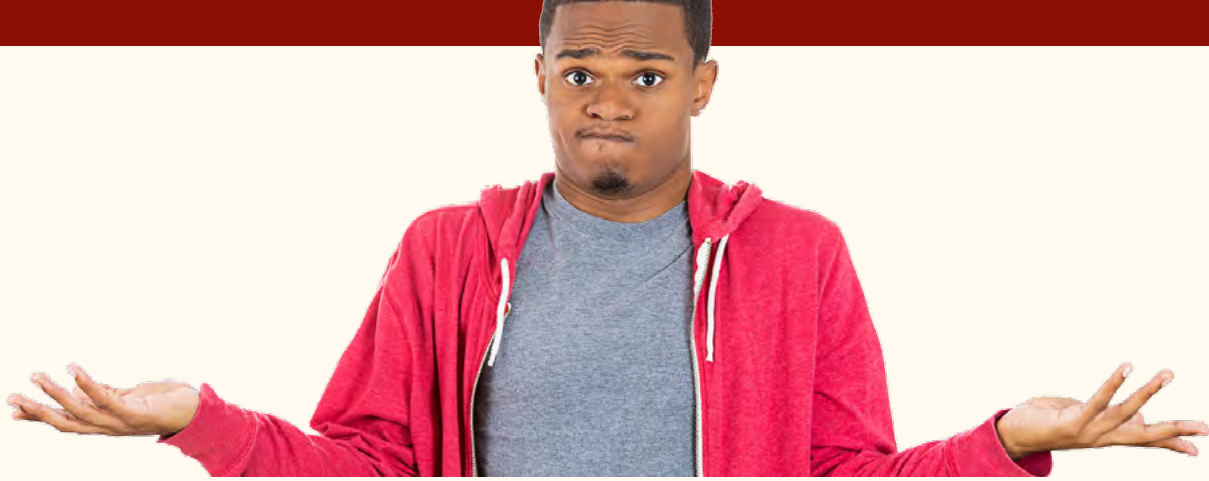
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## *The Problem of Evil Is Everyone's Problem*

By Brett Kunkle

No matter someone's belief or lack of belief in God, everyone has to answer for the existence of evil in the world.

In our discussion of evil it is important to realize every worldview, not just Christianity, must explain evil. Christians are often on the defense with regards to this objection, yet the tables can be turned on the atheist, with his naturalistic worldview in tow. Given naturalism, what is evil and how does the atheist account for it?

British philosopher and atheist Bertrand Russell once commented, "No one can believe in a good God if they've sat at the bedside of a dying child." Now, I agree that sitting beside a dying child is a heart-wrenching situation not to be treated simplistically or in a cavalier manner. Providing pat answers and quoting Romans 8:28 over and over will not suffice. But what of Russell's response? What can the atheist say to the dying child?

- "In the grand scheme of the universe your suffering is utterly meaningless—life and all that comes with it has no transcendent meaning or value."
- "Your suffering is completely pointless since there is no purpose to any of this anyway."
- "Fortunately, you will soon die and return to dust."
- "Take heart, you will soon pop out of existence forever and your suffering will be over."
- "Stuff happens."
- "Bummer."

Or let's try the actual words of Russell:

- "Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure dooms falls pitiless and dark."
- "Blind to good and evil...omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way."
- "...no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave..."
- "...all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system..."
- "Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins..."
- Hmmm...comforting. Russell certainly makes clear for us the absurdity of life without God.

Make no mistake, the problem of evil is not just a problem for Christians—it is a problem for all because evil is fundamental to our human experience. If any worldview is to be considered plausible it must provide us with the intellectual and existential resources to deal with this issue.

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