

View

"...Having the eyes of your heart enlightened..." Ephesians 1:18

A publication of the church of Christ meeting at 900 E. Natoma, Folsom, CA 95630

Why Do We Suffer?

BY DAVID POSEY

Remember Nick Vujicic? He's the man who was born with no arms and no legs (see the picture below). Don't you suppose, at some point in his life, he asked, "How did this happen? Why me?"

What causes suffering? You say, "that depends." Right. It depends on what the nature of the trouble is and the circumstances.

Discussing causation is always dicey. More often than not, there are several causes that contribute to an effect. Cognitively, we can only observe



effects, not causes. We have to look at evidence inductively and make a judgment about what the cause of a given effect may be.

But we can identify some probable causes of suffering, even if the answer is not complete. And, as Bible students, we know there is also a theological answer to suffering for the faithful Christian.

We can start with Adam and Eve and blame them for introducing sin into the world which corrupted it and thus introduced suffering. But that's about the only charge we can lay at their feet.

God has given us a treatise on the causes of adversity, through the classic argument of the friends of Job. They argued that Job's sin caused his suffering. But God, through that book, ridicules that idea, just as Jesus does in John 9 when the Jews asked "who sinned" to explain

the blind man's condition. One's suffering is not always directly caused by that person's sin.

Sin does cause suffering when the sin involves abuse of the body, such as recreational drug use, or a criminal act that lands one in jail. But it is a bogus explanation for the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" that nearly all of us suffer at one time or another. Jesus said the rain falls on the just and the unjust (Mt. 5:45).

Still, many forms of suffering are directly or indirectly brought on by mistakes we make — and the line between "sin" and "mistake" can be very thin indeed.

For example, we can eat ourselves into suffering; a diet of junk food and dessert for 30-40 years may lead to all kinds of health problems. We can finance pain; we can get so far into debt that we suffer the consequences and have no one to blame but ourselves (assuming no extenuating circumstances).

One thing can lead to another: the person who fails to take care of himself by eating 8,000 calories a day, may land in the hospital and his

"MANY FORMS OF SUFFERING ARE DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY BROUGHT ON BY MISTAKES WE MAKE — AND THE LINE BETWEEN "SIN" AND "MISTAKE" CAN BE VERY THIN INDEED. "

medical bills may pile up and he may argue that his health problems and his debt are not his fault. Who's to say?

It may sound negative, but it's probably spiritually more healthy for each of us to take ownership for the cause of our problems and ask God's forgiveness for any sin that might have set the problem in motion or exacerbated it. That seems to be a safer course than singing four stanzas of "Poor, poor, pitiful me" and wallowing in victimhood.

Still, the rain *does* fall on the just, and there are problems we face that are not caused by us and should not be a source of guilt. A mother should not blame herself for a baby that is born with a debilitating or life threatening condition, when there is no connection

“...DEBATING THE CAUSES [OF SUFFERING] WILL NOT SPARE ANYONE FROM IT... AND DURING TRIALS, IT’S BETTER TO LIGHT A CANDLE THAN CURSE THE DARKNESS.”

between the health of the baby and the mother’s care during pregnancy.

A parent should not blame himself for a child that has cancer or a teenager who is paralyzed after being hit by a drunk driver. A husband is not the cause of his wife’s Alzheimer’s. There are things that happen both to good people and bad, that are beyond anyone’s control.

Most illness is not caused by sin. Most of those who develop cancer did nothing in their life to bring it on, at least no knowingly (smoking being the major exception). Suffering that is the result of the injury, illness or death of a loved one is obviously out of one’s control.

In summary, the cause of adversity is difficult to determine with any degree of certainty. Our trials may be the direct result of sin in our lives; or sin may have set things in motion that result in the trial. On the other hand, our problems may have nothing to do with sin.

Does God Cause Suffering?

There is a huge philosophical/theological question, a favorite of skeptics. It’s called “theodicy” and goes something like this: “If God is good why is there evil (including suffering) in the world.”

David Holder is dealing with that question in another article. But for our purposes, we can say that

while God permits people to suffer, He does not cause it. Moreover, He tells us that our trials are tests of our faith and, in the end, make us “perfect, lacking in nothing” (James 1:2-4).

That perspective is incredibly important and valuable, and practical. We can debate our whole lives about the causes of suffering, but debating the causes will not spare anyone from trials. During those times, it’s “better to light a candle than curse the darkness.” And we can do that because we know our suffering is producing endurance, character and hope (Rom. 5:3-4). God doesn’t cause our suffering but He has arranged His world in such a way that suffering will cause hope, if we keep our perspective.

Nick Vujicic — with no arms and no legs — gets on a diving board and jumps headfirst into a swimming pool; somehow, he makes it work. He has overcome that adversity.

He has learned how to “light a candle” instead of curse the darkness. He feels the latter is a waste of time and a waste of a perfectly good life. So he goes around telling people that his adversity is a blessing so that he can help others. I recommend that you look him up on YouTube and listen to what he has to say. It’s quite a message.

