

If God is all-powerful and good, why is there evil?

'Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to; or he cannot and does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, and does not want to, he is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how comes evil into the world?' Epicurus, philosopher.

'The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God's justice and love.' John Stott, theologian.

Is God 'All powerful'?

Is God 'All-powerful or omnipotent? Can God just do away with the realities which he has constructed, including his own reputation and very being? Can God make a stone so heavy that he is not able to lift it up? Can God make $2+2=5$? Can God make a circle into a square? Has not God limited himself by his creation and laws so that there is order and system and predictability in the world? All of these are the very items that science is discovering about in the magnificence of God's creation. Can God break these laws, either whenever he wants to, or especially when he wants to have compassion on someone? What if God continually broke these laws and made it rain whenever we ran out of water so that our crops would grow every year? Would we not become so lax and accepting that we did not value and wisely use the water that we received? What if God healed the woman who was beaten by her husband each time this happened, would this be a long-term sensible way of addressing the issue? Sometimes our idea of what God should do is more for our own immediate gratification and to provide a simplistic solution. The chaos that ensues is graphically visualised in the movie "Bruce Almighty".

Additionally, we see how God has limited himself by giving human beings freedom to make decisions and to act on them, accepting also the consequences of those actions, good and bad. Our freedom has meant that God has sacrificed his power over us and stood back with respect and love for us. But unfortunately we often have not chosen wisely in our freedom. Or we have chosen in narrow and selfish ways, rather than seeing the larger needs, picture and consequences of our actions.

What does it mean for God to be 'all loving'?

Undoubtedly it would be easy for God to be 'all loving' to me if I was the only person in the world. But what happens when this becomes more complicated? The movie Bruce Almighty gives us some insight into the role that God plays when trying to meet the needs of all people everywhere all at the same time.

What is meant by “evil” or “good”?

An example of the complexity of good/ evil is the situation where a kind person discovers a bear in a trap. The bear doesn't understand that the releasing process might require some pain before he can be released. But this presupposes a situation of evil, either through someone hunting for hunting's sake in the first place whereby the bear is in the trap. Or it might be someone who is trying to eradicate and get rid of the 'evil' fox that is threatening the 'poor little chickens'. But then, do we limit the 'poor little chickens' from eating the 'poor little worms' by tying up their beaks and letting them only eat at a certain time or place when there are no worms around?

What is good for one person or animal or thing is not necessarily good for another or in fact seen as totally evil. So how do we live in a world that has millions of sentient beings, each with needs and wills, and give them a reasonable amount of freedom, but not so much freedom that they impinge on the needs and wills of other sentient beings? The ideal would be that all beings lived lives that first and foremost looked out for the needs of other people and beings. If this were the case then we would be able to arrive at reasonable, if not almost perfect, way of living.

I think that this question of 'why evil?' is partly addressing our human way of not wanting to confront the reality that we cannot live our lives in ways that will inconvenience us or call us to lives of genuinely self-sacrificial loving actions, being there first and foremost for other people. When we ask God "Why does this person have to suffer?" we may actually be placing the blame for their suffering solely at God's feet, rather than we being part of the solution for the relief of their suffering.

Augustine said: 'If there is no God, why is there so much good? If there is a God, why is there so much evil?' In a similar way C.S. Lewis asks the question, 'If the universe is so bad...how on earth did human beings ever come to attribute to it the activity of a wise and good Creator?' If we are saying by this question of God being all powerful and loving yet still there being evil, that God therefore cannot exist, on what basis are we saying that there is any good at all? Is not behind this question the assumption that God does exist and that there is, or at least should be, a system of loving justice that acknowledges that people are getting hurt and trodden upon as they travel through life. If there is no God, and life and death are just random events in a world of maximising the benefits that I can get, shouldn't we just cynically get on with getting whatever we can in the short amount of time that we have on this earth? We might concede to agree to live according to the wider needs of society, so long as in the end we will get something out of it, eg a more stable environment in which to pursue our own ends and means.

If God was totally omnipotent and loving then I would not believe in him either, especially when one sees the amount of pain and suffering that goes on in the world. By contrast, the God whom I have come to know, trust and respect, is the

one who is loving, but not totally omnipotent. God has the potential to be omnipotent, but when he created human beings he relinquished part of his omnipotence in giving us freedom to make our own decisions and express our love. I believe that God is personal and relates to his/her creation personally, especially to human beings. The limit of his power is seen in the way he patiently invites us into a relationship with him, wanting communication and reciprocity between all parts of the creation. Vulnerably, God gives himself to us in order that we might engage and communicate with him. For me, the ultimate way in which God has expressed this love for us is through becoming one of us in Jesus Christ. Jesus showed us the heart of God, by not only becoming human and vulnerable, but reaching out to all people in very caring ways, no matter whom they are.

This vulnerability and apparent 'weakness' of God is epitomised in Jesus (God himself) being crucified by his own creation. But out of this seemingly weak manifestation of God on the cross comes the powerful and life-transforming reality of reconciliation. The power of seeing two sides mutually admit their brokenness and failure and find genuine friendship is the most powerful thing I know. Often this has to be initiated by one of the two sides. God has taken the initiative. Likewise between people, one person usually humbly and vulnerably initiates the new relationship, hoping and trusting the other might respond. When you see two friends, two enemies, two family members, two nations, two communities embracing each you know that God exists in a way that is bigger than we are.

I also have seen (and like all human beings am unfortunately part of) the other reality which prefers not to reach out to others but to just selfishly keep to myself, building my own little 'kingdom' and life. This reality in which I am in the centre is the primary breeding ground for most of the evils in my life and the world around me. I need to accept my own responsibility for this, as also does the whole human race that supports, teaches and reinforces this self-centred 'protect-me-at-all-costs' life style. This approach to life destroys communities and relationships. This is why I so greatly value the alternative way of living in which I discover that I have been embraced by God, and in turn can take the initiative to reach out and embrace others, including my enemies.

I believe that God exists and evil exists, and they both meet each other in a very profound way in the life, cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Some further examples of suffering that can be considered are Job and the prophet Jeremiah. Leo Tolstoy wrestled with this question as he saw that there was apparently more evil in the world than good, to the extent that he was tempted to kill himself. But then he realised that he was far better off than many of the peasants in his own community. From them he discovered that it was through their faith that they could nevertheless live with faith and hope.

“The Shack” This book deals with the very question of how God deals with some of the worst evil in our lives. I cannot tell you the detail of the story without spoiling it for you if you have not yet read it. I can only encourage you to read it as it is a very good novel with an amazing amount of theology which addresses the very question of which ‘God’ are we talking about when we ask the question of evil in our lives.

Another amazing example of God working through pain and suffering is seen in the life of Joni Eareckson Tada who was paralysed from her shoulders down after a diving accident at the age of 18 years old. (This happened 50 years ago). Initially she was utterly devastated and ready to give up on God and life by ending it for herself. But then she eventually came around to realising that God could even use her and she has ever since been reaching out to other people of all sorts of disabilities and physical limitations. Her organisation called ‘Joni and Friends’ has found her visiting and speaking words of encouragement and love to millions of people around the world. She paints with her mouth and sings and is in a wheelchair.

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A discussion about good and evil: God versus Science

'Let me explain the problem science has with religion.' The atheist professor of philosophy pauses before his class and then asks one of his new students to stand.

'You're a Christian, aren't you, son?'

'Yes sir,' the student says.

'So you believe in God?'

'Absolutely.'

'Is God good?'

'Sure! God's good.'" Is God all-powerful? Can God do anything?'

'Yes'

'Are you good or evil?'

'The Bible says I'm evil.'

The professor grins knowingly. 'Aha! The Bible! He considers for a moment.

'Here's one for you. Let's say there's a sick person over here and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help him? Would you try?'

'Yes sir, I would.'

'So you're good...!'

'I wouldn't say that.'

'But why not say that? You'd help a sick and maimed person if you could. Most of us would if we could. But God doesn't.'

The student does not answer, so the professor continues. 'He doesn't, does he? My brother was a Christian who died of cancer, even though he prayed to Jesus to heal him. How is this Jesus good? Can you answer that one?'

The student remains silent. 'No, you can't, can you?' the professor says. He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax.

'Let's start again, young fella. Is God good?'

'Er.. yes,' the student says.

'Is Satan good?'

The student doesn't hesitate on this one. 'No.'

'Then where does Satan come from?'

The student falters. 'From God'

'That's right. God made Satan, didn't he? Tell me, son. Is there evil in this world?'

'Yes, sir..'

'Evil's everywhere, isn't it? And God did make everything, correct?'

'Yes'

'So who created evil?' The professor continued, 'If God created everything, then God created evil, since evil exists, and according to the principle that our works define who we are, then God is evil.'

Again, the student has no answer. 'Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things, do they exist in this world?'

The student squirms on his feet. 'Yes.'

'So who created them?'

The student does not answer again, so the professor repeats his question. 'Who created them?' There is still no answer. Suddenly the lecturer breaks away to pace in front of the classroom. The class is mesmerized. 'Tell me,' he continues onto another student. 'Do you believe in Jesus Christ, son?'

The student's voice betrays him and cracks. 'Yes, professor, I do.'

The old man stops pacing. 'Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen Jesus?'

'No sir. I've never seen Him.'

'Then tell us if you've ever heard your Jesus?'

'No, sir, I have not..'

'Have you ever felt your Jesus, tasted your Jesus or smelt your Jesus? Have you ever had any sensory perception of Jesus Christ, or God for that matter?'

'No, sir, I'm afraid I haven't.'

'Yet you still believe in him?'

'Yes'

'According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn't exist... What do you say to that, son?'

'Nothing,' the student replies.. 'I only have my faith.'

'Yes, faith,' the professor repeats. 'And that is the problem science has with God. There is no evidence, only faith.'

The student stands quietly for a moment, before asking a question of His own. 'Professor, is there such thing as heat? '

' Yes.

'And is there such a thing as cold?'

'Yes, son, there's cold too.'

'No sir, there isn't.'

The professor turns to face the student, obviously interested. The room suddenly becomes very quiet. The student begins to explain. 'You can have lots of heat, even more heat, super-heat, mega-heat, unlimited heat, white heat, a little heat or no heat, but we don't have anything called 'cold'. We can hit down to 458 degrees below zero, which is no heat, but we can't go any further after that. There is no such thing as cold; otherwise we would be able to go colder than the lowest -458 degrees. Every body or object is susceptible to study when it has or transmits energy, and heat is what makes a body or matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (-458 F) is the total absence of heat. You see, sir, cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat we can measure in thermal units because heat is energy. Cold is not the opposite of heat, sir, just the absence of it.'

Silence across the room. A pen drops somewhere in the classroom, sounding like a hammer.

'What about darkness, professor. Is there such a thing as darkness?'

'Yes,' the professor replies without hesitation.. 'What is night if it isn't darkness?'

'You're wrong again, sir. Darkness is not something; it is the absence of something. You can have low light, normal light, bright light, flashing light, but if you have no light constantly you have nothing and it's called darkness, isn't it? That's the meaning we use to define the word. In reality, darkness isn't. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn't you?'

The professor begins to smile at the student in front of him. This will be a good semester. 'So what point are you making, young man?'

'Yes, professor. My point is, your philosophical premise is flawed to start with, and so your conclusion must also be flawed.'

The professor's face cannot hide his surprise this time. 'Flawed? Can you explain how?'

'You are working on the premise of duality,' the student explains.. 'You argue that there is life and then there's death; a good God and a bad God. You are viewing the concept of God as something finite, something we can measure. Sir, science can't even explain a thought.' 'It uses electricity and magnetism, but has never seen, much less fully understood either one. To view death as the opposite of life is to be ignorant of the fact that death cannot exist as a substantive thing. Death is not the opposite of life, just the absence of it.' 'Now tell me, professor.. Do you teach your students that they evolved from a monkey?'

'If you are referring to the natural evolutionary process, young man, yes, of course I do.'

'Have you ever observed evolution with your own eyes, sir?'

The professor begins to shake his head, still smiling, as he realizes where the argument is going. A very good semester, indeed.

'Since no one has ever observed the process of evolution at work and cannot even prove that this process is an on-going endeavor, are you not teaching your opinion, sir? Are you now not a scientist, but a preacher?'

The class is in uproar. The student remains silent until the commotion has subsided. 'To continue the point you were making earlier to the other student, let me give you an example of what I mean.' The student looks around the room. 'Is there anyone in the class who has ever seen the professor's brain?' The class breaks out into laughter. 'Is there anyone here who has ever heard the professor's brain, felt the professor's brain, touched or smelt the professor's brain? No one appears to have done so. So, according to the established rules of empirical, stable, demonstrable protocol, science says that you have no brain, with all due respect, sir.' 'So if science says you have no brain, how can we trust your lectures, sir?'

Now the room is silent. The professor just stares at the student, his face unreadable. Finally, after what seems an eternity, the old man answers. 'I Guess you'll have to take them on faith.'

'Now, you accept that there is faith, and, in fact, faith exists with life,' the student continues. 'Now, sir, is there such a thing as evil?' Now uncertain, the professor responds, 'Of course, there is. We see it Every day. It is in the daily example of man's inhumanity to man. It is in The multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil.'

To this the student replied, 'Evil does not exist sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light.'

The professor sat down.

God versus Science (dramatic presentation)

Professor: 'Let me explain the problem science has with religion.'

(The atheist professor of philosophy pauses before his class and then asks one of his new students to stand.)

Prof: 'You're a Christian, aren't you, son?'

Student: 'Yes sir,'.

P: 'So you believe in God?'

S: 'Absolutely.'

P: 'Is God good?'

S: 'Sure! God's good.'

P: 'Is God all-powerful? Can God do anything?'

S: 'Yes'

P: 'Are you good or evil?'

S: 'The Bible says I'm evil.'

P: *(The professor grins knowingly) . 'Aha! The Bible! (He considers for a moment.)*

'Here's one for you. Let's say there's a sick person over here and you can cure him. You can do it. Would you help him? Would you try?'

S: 'Yes sir, I would.'

P 'So you're good...!'

S: 'I wouldn't say that.'

P: 'But why not say that? You'd help a sick and maimed person if you could. Most of us would if we could. But God doesn't.' *(The student does not answer, so the professor continues.)* 'He doesn't, does he? My brother was a Christian who died of cancer, even though he prayed to Jesus to heal him. How is this Jesus good? Can you answer that one?' *(The student remains silent.)*

'No, you can't, can you?' *(The professor says. He takes a sip of water from a glass on his desk to give the student time to relax.)*

'Let's start again, young fella. Is God good?'

S: 'Er.. yes,'

P: 'Is Satan good?'

S: *(The student doesn't hesitate on this one.)* 'No.'

P: 'Then where does Satan come from?'

S: *(The student falters.)* 'From God'.

P: 'That's right. God made Satan, didn't he? Tell me, son. Is there evil in this world?'

S: 'Yes, sir.'

P: 'Evil's everywhere, isn't it? And God did make everything, correct?'

S: 'Yes'.

P: 'So who created evil?' If God created everything, then God created evil, since evil exists, and according to the principle that our works define who we are, then God is evil.' *(Again, the student has no answer.)* 'Is there sickness? Immorality? Hatred? Ugliness? All these terrible things, do they exist in this world?'

S: *(The student squirms on his feet.)* 'Yes.'

P: 'So who created them?' *(The student does not answer again, so the professor repeats his question.)* 'Who created them?' *(There is still no answer. Suddenly the lecturer breaks away to pace in front of the classroom. The class is mesmerized.)* 'Tell me,' do you believe in Jesus Christ, son?'

S: *(The student's voice betrays him and cracks.)* 'Yes, professor, I do.'

P: 'Science says you have five senses you use to identify and observe the world around you. Have you ever seen Jesus?'

S: 'No sir. I've never seen Him.'

P: 'Then tell us if you've ever heard your Jesus?'

S: 'No, sir, I have not.'

P: 'Have you ever felt your Jesus, tasted your Jesus or smelt your Jesus? Have you ever had any sensory perception of Jesus Christ, or God for that matter?'

S: 'No, sir, I'm afraid I haven't.'

P: 'Yet you still believe in him?'

S: 'Yes'

P: 'According to the rules of empirical, testable, demonstrable protocol, science says your God doesn't exist... What do you say to that, son?'

S: 'Nothing,' ... 'I only have my faith.'

P: 'Yes, faith. And that is the problem science has with God. There is no evidence, only faith.'

S: *(The student stands quietly for a moment, before asking a question of His own.)* 'Professor, is there such thing as heat? '

P: ' Yes.'

S: 'And is there such a thing as cold?'

P: 'Yes, son, there's cold too.'

S: 'No sir, there isn't.'

(The professor turns to face the student, obviously interested. The room suddenly becomes very quiet. The student begins to explain.)

S: 'You can have lots of heat, even more heat, super-heat, mega-heat, unlimited heat, white heat, a little heat or no heat, but we don't have anything called 'cold'.

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matter have or transmit energy. Absolute zero (-458 Fahrenheit) is the total absence of heat.

You see, sir, cold is only a word we use to describe the absence of heat. We cannot measure cold. Heat we can measure in thermal units because heat is energy. Cold is not the opposite of heat, sir, just the absence of it.'

(Silence across the room. The student continues....)

S: 'What about darkness, professor. Is there such a thing as darkness?'

P: 'Yes,' *(the professor replies without hesitation)*.. 'What is night if it isn't darkness?'

S: 'You're wrong again, sir. Darkness is not something; it is the absence of something. You can have low light, normal light, bright light, flashing light, but if you have no light constantly you have nothing and it's called darkness, isn't it?'

That's the meaning we use to define the word. In reality, darkness isn't. If it were, you would be able to make darkness darker, wouldn't you?'

P: *(The professor begins to smile at the student in front of him. This will be a good semester.)* 'So what point are you making, young man?'

S: 'Yes, professor. My point is, your philosophical premise is flawed to start with, and so your conclusion must also be flawed.'

P: (*The professor's face cannot hide his surprise this time.*) 'Flawed? Can you explain how?'

S: 'You are working on the premise of duality,'. 'You argue that there is life and then there's death; a good God and a bad God. You are viewing the concept of God as something finite, something we can measure. Sir, science can't even explain a thought.' 'It uses electricity and magnetism, but has never seen, much less fully understood either one. To view death as the opposite of life is to be ignorant of the fact that death cannot exist as a substantive thing. Death is not the opposite of life, just the absence of it.'

'To continue the point you were making earlier, let me give you an example of what I mean.' (*The student looks around the room.*) 'Is there anyone in the class who has ever seen the professor's brain?' (*The class breaks out into laughter.*) 'Is there anyone here who has ever heard the professor's brain, felt the professor's brain, touched or smelt the professor's brain?'

No one appears to have done so. So, according to the established rules of empirical, stable, demonstrable protocol, science says that you have no brain, with all due respect, sir.' 'So if science says you have no brain, how can we trust your lectures, sir?'

P: *(Now the room is silent. The professor just stares at the student, his face unreadable. Finally, after what seems an eternity, the old man answers.)* 'I guess you'll have to take them on faith.'

S: 'Now, you accept that there is faith, and, in fact, faith exists with life. Now, sir, is there such a thing as evil?'

P: *(Now uncertain, the professor responds)* 'Of course there is. We see it every day. It is in the daily example of man's inhumanity to man. It is in the multitude of crime and violence everywhere in the world. These manifestations are nothing else but evil.'

S: 'Evil does not exist sir, or at least it does not exist unto itself. Evil is simply the absence of God. It is just like darkness and cold, a word that man has created to describe the absence of God. God did not create evil. Evil is the result of what happens when man does not have God's love present in his heart. It's like the cold that comes when there is no heat or the darkness that comes when there is no light.'

The professor sat down.

Sermon on 'God and evil'. Calvary March 1st 2020

The question of the existence of God and the existence of evil (both existing at the same time) is probably the most difficult and debated question within the Christian faith. Well before the birth of Christ the logical thinking Greek philosopher Epicurus asked 'if God is all-powerful and good, why is there evil? Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to; or he cannot and does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is weak. If he can, and does not want to, he is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how does evil come into the world?' This question is partly asked by guilty human beings wanting to deflect away from themselves their significant role in the creation of evil. If it is not humans who are evil, then the next best one to accuse is the Creator of the world, namely God, as did Adam and Eve. Because God created this mess, including the humans who have admittedly a role in producing the evil, why did God enable evil to be created or allowed entry into the fabric of the world?

We are beginning this season of Lent in which is a time when we focus on the darker side of life, because that is where Jesus aimed the culmination of his life, addressing the evil of suffering and death. Our readings start by looking at Jesus himself being tempted by evil in the person of the devil out in the wilderness. We then finish Lent with the cry of Jesus, ringing out from the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?' So for these two Reach services we will be looking at the question of evil and how it fits into the world in general, but especially for us as Christians. We will also be thinking about what we might reply to a person who is exploring faith issues and they ask this thorny question of why there is evil in God's apparently 'good world'. You will find in your pigeon hole today a paper I have written titled 'Why do good people suffer?' Please take the time to read this paper and get back to me with any questions that it might create in your heart and mind. In today's sermon I can only start to open up this issue of evil. So I welcome any feed-back from today's sermon and my paper and any other ideas that you might be thinking about, or angles that you may have thrown at you about this topic. I would like to try and grapple with them and come up with some responses in our next Reach sermon on Palm Sunday, the first Sunday in April.

So, to this very difficult question of evil on our lives and world. First of all we need to ask the question: 'Is God 'All-powerful or omnipotent?' Can God just do away with the realities which he has constructed, including his own reputation and his very being? Can God make a stone so heavy that he is not able to lift it up? Can God make $2+2=5$? Can God make a circle into a square? Hasn't God limited himself by his creation and laws so that there is order and system and predictability in the world? All of these rules and laws are the underlying premises that science is discovering when exploring the magnificence of God's creation. Can God break these laws, either whenever he wants to, or especially when he wants to have compassion on someone? What if God continually broke these laws and made it rain whenever we ran out of water so that our crops would grow every year? Would we not become so lax and accepting that we did

not value and wisely use the water that we received? What if God miraculously healed a racing car driver each time he had an accident, so that he could then drive even more and more faster next time, presuming that he would be able to be healed if he had an accident? How would we determine what is an abuse of God's healing power and what is legitimate? Sometimes our idea of what God should do is more for our own immediate gratification and to provide a simplistic solution. The chaos that can occur if God would try and meet all of our immediate needs is graphically and humorously visualised in the movie "Bruce Almighty". In this God is like a large computer trying to respond to all of the requests from everybody at the same time. It goes into overload and ends up messing up everybody's lives. Jesus saw the shallowness of this attitude to healing in his own ministry when he commented that the places where he had done the majority of his healings had ignored the primary message he was trying to bring to them.

Getting back to the question of how powerful God is, we also see how God has limited himself by giving human beings freedom to make decisions and to act on them, accepting also the consequences of those actions, good and bad. Our freedom has meant that God has limited his power over us and stood back with respect and love for us. But unfortunately we often have not chosen wisely in our freedom. Or we have chosen in narrow and selfish ways, rather than seeing the larger needs, the bigger picture and consequences of our actions.

However, it is all very well for us to be able to discuss and even debate, as do the philosophers past and present, this tension between a loving God and the presence of evil in the world. When a person we know is in pain or suffering in whatever form, this discussion will seem irrelevant, if not crass and rude and distant. Their cry for 'Where is God in this evil mess?' is a personal cry that can only be addressed in a personal way. Firstly, that is by a compassionate response which listens to their cry, acknowledges it and lovingly stands by them in whatever ways possible. This cry is echoed in the personal and compassionate cry of Jesus on the cross, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' God's response to evil is not distant and theoretical but empathetic, personal and totally sacrificial, identifying with our human suffering even to the point of the greatest suffering. The greatest human suffering is not just death, but separation from God, as was experienced by Adam and Eve when they decided that they could do one better than God. Jesus suffered our separation from God both in this world and in death, for every one of us. He rescued us from eternal separation from God. This eternal separation allows us the consequences of turning our backs on God and each other. That for me is the ultimate compassion and empathy that anyone could have for me. So during this season of Lent Jesus' call to me and to you is to come and die with him. It is to know first and foremost that God has, and continues to suffer with, each one of us. It is to ask him to open our eyes to the suffering around us, and with the love of God reach out to those who are in need and feeling the brunt of evil in their lives and in our world. How much of that we can do in our own strength is very limited, but as we draw near to Jesus in his walk to the cross, we will find in him that extra love that he also had for those around him, even his enemies. I pray that we will all open our hearts and lives to addressing with Jesus the evil in our world during these forty days of Lent.

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