

Why Do Men Suffer?

This is a subject which, as a physician, has of course come early into my thoughts, but in dealing with this subject to night, I must acknowledge a great deal of help from a book of the same title written by Leslie D. Weatherhead.

As a physician, I have seen a great deal of suffering, often in innocent children. Naturally many questions arise. What is the meaning of it all? Why does God allow suffering? How can we account for pain in a world created by an all wise God? Does suffering mean that God made a mistake? What is the correct christian attitude to suffering? Is it the christian thing to do, to employ a doctor or throw yourself entirely upon God?

In trying to answer some of these questions, let us consider some of the reasons for pain; and enquire wherein lies the power and purpose of God. It does not take much thought to realize that pain in man and all animals is a protective mechanism. Pain warns of danger. a dog gets a thorn in his foot and he is not content until he has pulled it out with his teeth. It is hard to imagine how any animal could survive without pain to warn it to jump quickly away from danger.

In man pain is a warning that something is wrong. Pain is the greatest friend of the doctor, it sends him more patients than anything else. It helps tremendously to locate trouble, and perhaps you have noticed that your doctor never seems happier than when he has his fingers on the spot where it hurts the most. Pain ^{often} draws attention to trouble in time to ~~correct~~ ~~the~~ prevent serious consequences. Doctors in general wish there was more pain because some diseases are neglected until it is too late because pain does not drive the sick person to the doctor. For example, cancer of the stomach is practically painless, Pernicious anemia is painless and a great deal of heart disease is painless.

If we think again of the world of animals, and see that God has placed animals here to prey upon one another, it looks as if ~~He~~ must glory in suffering. The mistake we commonly make is in supposing that animals feel pain as keenly as we do. Close observation will show that this is not the case. Appreciation of pain seems fairly closely to parallel development of brain and intelligence. In dogs and horses, we have quite a keen appreciation of pain, while in crabs it has been observed that one crab can placidly eat another, while at the same time he is

being eaten by a larger crab, apparently without pain. again it is quite probable that an animal when seized by another is so paralyzed by fear that it feels no pain, or ~~in some cases~~ ^{perhaps} the smaller animal is hypnotized so that the kill is painless. Perhaps death in the animal world is more merciful than we know. Certainly man has the highest developed brain and with it goes the capacity to feel more keenly both suffering and pleasure. When God created man it was his will that man should have a keen appreciation of the good things of life, and with it went the keen appreciation of pain. It is not however the will of God that man should suffer pain any more than it is your will that your son should bump his head when you give him a pair of roller skates. By giving him a pair of roller skates you immediately make it possible for him to get a bad bump. That is a very different thing from taking him by the neck and banging his head upon the floor. God has put us in a stern school. When He created man he wanted ~~man~~ ^{him} to have first of all the freedom to choose. This freedom of choice meant that sometimes man would choose wrongly and sometimes bring pain upon himself as a result. This does not mean that in every case ~~a~~ person's suffering is his own.

child sinners
in eye.

fault. We have all seen the innocent suffer. For instance in automobile accidents many suffer besides the driver who is at fault. If there is any truth in the old idea that suffering and disease is due to sin why does God allow the innocent to suffer? When God created man, he chose to create a human family, in which no one could live independently, but in which all shared the joys and sorrows.

This arrangement made it possible for one generation to develop and profit by the knowledge of the last: our heritage represents the accumulated knowledge of the whole human race.

The discoveries and inventions of the whole world are at our beck and call. We can scarcely eat a meal without being indebted to men and women all over the world. In this family, each ^{individual} having free will, God gave man the capacity to develop and benefit by his fellows help but at the same time he had to give man the ability to injure his fellow. So in this great family often the innocent suffer. The alternative of creation, man an independent individual eating only what he himself obtained, knowing only what he himself discovered, caring for himself in his own blundering way when sick, knowing nothing of love and companionship, is so unthinkable

even for us, that we have no difficulty in seeing why God chose to create man as a great family. Illness and disease ~~is~~^{is} often the price we have to pay for belonging to that great human family. Well, you might say, couldn't we get along just as well without germs and flies & mosquitoes. On the surface it seems likely we could, but our knowledge is so limited that perhaps there are some ways in which they are useful, which we do not yet know about. Take for instance the sand flies of Arabia. They are a great plague to visitors, but the Arabs seem to have developed an immunity to them. The Arabs claim that without the sand flies, they could not live because they are dependent upon them ~~sand flies~~ to fertilize the date palm.

~~The purpose~~ We commonly think of God as all powerful but this is weatherhead's definition of the power of God. He says "it is ~~to~~ ability to achieve finally, purposes which his nature and character suggest." He can't do anything which is contrary to himself. The purpose of God is to bring in ~~the~~^{his} kingdom of God. That is not a garden of Eden, where all is peace and comfort, but rather an inward state of mind. God may use suffering to call forth worthwhile virtues, such as sympathy and love, and we can

scarcely estimate the redemptive power of innocent suffering. But, we do not believe, that God willed his children to suffer, but he allows it, because the awakened responsibility of the human family, is what God is waiting for. ~~No~~ No one can suppose that God wills sin, which is the greatest disharmony in the universe, but he allows sin. If He did not allow sin, He could not allow free will, and if He did not allow free will, then we should be mere automata. We should not choose good because it was good. We should be good because we could not be anything else. So with suffering God allows suffering, but He does not will it. He cannot achieve His own higher purposes, if He made a universe from which all possibility of suffering was excluded. I do not agree with the idea that God

sends suffering to make saints. ~~It is usually the result of~~ suffering does not ~~make saints. It is usually the result of~~ rebellion, resentment, bitterness and despair. ~~If you want to prove it for yourself just put a man in pain the wrong way.~~

Saints however may be made in spite of pain. ~~but I think is more probably due to the enforced leisure than the pain itself.~~ ~~many of them.~~ Ill health is ordinarily a hindrance to full religious efficiency. Don't forget that God can however, use an evil such as suffering, to gain His own purpose. Take for instance the cross. God did not will the cross in the sense that He conspired with the evil men of

the day to bring it about, but He foresaw it, and chose to use it, as the means of achieving man's redemption. But He was able to achieve it by Christ's perfect obedience and loyalty to the spirit of love.

Suppose you have a severe attack of acute appendicitis. You may say "Why do I need a surgeon? Can't God help me?" The point is not what God can do but what he does do. My mother developed Cancer. She refused to accept surgical help because she believed that God would heal her. I will not say, that her faith was displeasing to God, but she died of Cancer.

What is the effect of a faith healing mission? The healer tells his audience that any one with sufficient faith ^{will be} healed. A man with a critical mind, ~~and~~ with an unshakable faith in Jesus as his saviour, is not healed because he is not ~~often~~ readily open to suggestion yet he is discouraged in his religious life by being told, that he has not sufficient faith. On the other hand a girl of a nervous temperament bordering on the hysterical is readily suggestible and she is healed. She is healed because of her suggestibility, but it is called faith. The same result could have been accomplished by a Christian psychologist ^{without the} powerful effect ~~of~~ a control of the mind

over the body, is a well known scientific observation. When the disease cured by so called faith is psychogenic, that is of nervous origin, the cure is often complete and permanent, but, when the disease is physiogenic, that is has its origin in some organic disease, the cure is only temporary.

Why doesn't God intervene, to relieve suffering, when his children call upon him? Intervention would mean chaos. We could no longer depend upon the laws of God, which we already know, if He were to step in and do something different every little while. Intervention would be an admission of failure on God's part. It would mean that something had gone wrong, which He had not foreseen, which would make Him less than omnipotent. Intervention would defeat His ^{final} purpose, of developing a man with freewill. He planned that we should learn slowly, and correct our folly and sin by our experience. His power is shown, in standing by and not interfering, in order that His ultimate purpose be attained, - man developed to a point of cooperation with Him, by his own free choice. God, like a father, will not do things for us, that we can do for ourselves, but He is ever urging, inspiring, leading men themselves to grapple with the family

problem and make his dreams come true. Let me illustrate. There was a strong man, who had an invalid wife. He carried her about in his arms and protected her. She became worse and more and more helpless. After seeking competent advice, he decided that she must walk, where she wanted to go. He stood by, and helped her, and suffered, when she fell, but eventually she developed power to walk and be independent. It was easier to carry her, but it showed more power to stand by and see her suffer. So God, by not intervening demonstrates His power, and at the same time, because He loves us, bears all our pain and sorrow on his own heart.

Should we employ scientific knowledge to alleviate suffering? Some people take the attitude that God sends pain, therefore they must be resigned and do nothing. If suffering were the will of God, in the ordinary sense of the words, then the only pious and logical thing to do, would be to bow the head without stirring a finger to help ourselves. I do not however believe, that suffering is God's will, although it is certainly allowed by Him. Whether we call a thing, a discovery of science, or whether we call it a revelation of God, is mainly a matter of point of view. I believe that

that every discovery of science, is part of God's intention for the race, to develop and help themselves. You may have heard something of this kind of expression of faith. "He died because it was the will of God, but, I believe, if a certain famous surgeon could have been here, he would have saved him." This ~~It~~ really means that the surgeon is able to frustrate the will of God. I prefer to think that a skilful surgeon does the will of God.

Where is the place of faith in a scientific world such as this? Though we believe that God allows pain, we can still ~~believe~~ have faith that he is Omnipotent. We can believe, that ultimately his plans and purposes, for the human race, and as individuals, must triumph. The kingdom of God within us is still in the making. True faith says: Nothing can possibly happen to our bodies, which has an inherent power to smask us. Much happened to Jesus, but every seeming defeat was turned into triumph. We must never doubt the concern and love of God for us. If a father, through love of his child can, in a sense suffer, because the child suffers, the fact must be faced that God suffers, with us, in an anguish, which we have no means of measuring, and no mind great enough to understand. The significance of

Christ's
~~The~~ story of the lilies of the field, and the sparrows, is not that God will provide for man without work, but that he cares infinitely. To illustrate the hold of faith, a little laddie was told by his mother not to go near an iron grating in the side walk because it was broken. The little fellow disobeyed, played on the grating, and fell through, and broke his leg. Things went wrong, and for a time, it was thought that he would never be able to walk again, and, very unfortunately, the nurse was careless enough to let the little chap hear this report. When his mother came to see him she bent over him lovingly and the tears welled up in his big brown eyes. He wound his arms around her neck and said "Mummy I know it was my fault and I disobeyed you. But if I can never walk or run again will you go on loving me?" You can imagine the answer. Then, said the little chap, smiling through his tears, "I can bear anything."

Where is the place of prayer in suffering? It is quite right to pray for relief from ~~the~~ sickness and pain, in as much as we do not believe, that suffering is the will of God. At the same time, God expects us to seek relief through all means which he has already revealed to his human family. By prayer we reach

out

to God for sympathy and love. Prayers ~~also~~ strengthens faith. Prayers bring strength and quiet of mind. Prayer alters the effect of suffering on the patient's mind and heart. It prevents resentment and despair. By prayer we put ourselves in touch with infinite Life and Power and Love.

To sum up what seems the correct attitude to pain? Man's attitude to pain must be in the first place to fight it, with all the means at his disposal, drawing help from all the discoveries of the whole human family. It is the duty of every doctor, to keep up with every advance, in medical science, in every part of the world. It is the tradition of medical men, that when a discovery is made, they give it freely to all the world.

One who suffers from an incurable disease is helping to bear the burden of suffering of all the human family.

He suffers because, as yet, the human family has not learned all that God wants to reveal.

Suffering is the powerful stimulus, which urges us to correct our mistakes, and free the human family from disease. What grieves the medical profession is, that many are not even applying the preventive measures already known. Besides

doing all we know how to do, we should reach out to God for more and more understanding, always believing that God wants to relieve our suffering but, ~~He~~ has placed upon himself the limitation, that He cannot help us without the cooperation of man. And through it all, we can carry on indomitable faith like St Paul, to them that love ~~the~~ God all things work together for good: a faith which believed that God is able to turn even our failures into the ultimate triumph of his ~~purpose~~ purpose.

Perhaps
Boys who

~~we are somewhat in the position of the Persian~~
~~Boys who weave the Persian Rugs.~~

Persian rugs are woven on an upright frame. Small boys sit at various levels, ~~on the wrong side of~~ and weave the colors into it, while the artist sits on the right side, barely seen by the boys, and shouts his directions to the boys, on the other side. The boys cannot see the pattern and sometimes they make mistakes. When they do so, ~~commonly~~ the artist does not make them take it out but ~~alters~~ ~~changes~~ his design, and ~~transforms~~ ~~changes~~ the defect into a thing of beauty.

alters
builds onto and
transforms

~~I will close with a little poem~~
~~about roses.~~

but in the hereafter we may be allowed to look at the rug. The following little poem illustrates the same thing. My garden has roses red,
My garden has roses white;
But if when the day is sped
I stand by the gate at night,

One fragrance comes, when the day is dead
 From my roses white and my roses red.

The roses of joy are red,
 The roses of pain are white;
 But I think, when the day is sped
 And I stand by the gate at night,
 I shall know just this, when the day is dead,
 That a rose is sweet be it white or red.

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 Dr. W. Stark.