

The Problem of Pain

An Introduction to the Problem of Pain

C.S. Lewis (death of mother)

Stanley Hauerwas (God, medicine and suffering)

Terence Fretheim (post-holocaust reappraisals)

Paul Brand, M.D. (befriending pain)

Outline

I. PAIN: WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- A. Pain is.
- B. The theological word is *theodicy*. (Job)
- C. The main issues are *abandonment* and *trust*.
- D. Can God suffer pain?
 1. Metaphors, anthropomorphism and theomorphism
 2. How does God relate to the world? (OT)
 - a. *Monarchical*: affirms divine sovereignty, freedom, immutability, control and radical transcendence.
 - b. *Organismic*: affirms greater continuity and intimacy between God and God's world (*theophany*).
 3. How does God relate to the world? (NT)
 - a. Through Christ at the cross.
 - b. Through Christ's continuing presence through his HS.

II. PAIN'S SOURCES

- A. Sources of Human Pain.
 1. Physical.
 2. Emotional.
 3. Psychological.
 4. Spiritual.
 5. Empathy with and sympathy for others.
 6. The pain we cause ourselves.
 7. Self-hatred and inappropriate guilt.
 8. Nature and "acts of God."
 9. Injustice, oppression and evil (Psalm 137 "We hung up our harps").
 10. Sacrificial, redemptive suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19).
- B. Sources of God's Pain.
 1. God suffers *because of* God's people (Psalm 78:40-41).
 2. God suffers *with* God's people.
 3. God suffers *for* God's people.
 4. "I am the Father and the Son (John 10:30, 14:24, 16:15, 14:9)."

III. GOD'S ANSWER TO PAIN

- A. **Emmanuel**: God's Answer to Fear of Abandonment
 1. Exodus 3:7-8: "I have seen their affliction, heard their cry, deliverance.)
 2. Isaiah 40: "Comfort, comfort my people."
 3. Isaiah 53:4: "Surely he has borne our diseases and carried our pain" (Masoretic text)

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4. Isaiah 63:9: "The angel of His presence saved them."
5. Jeremiah 8:18-9:1: "The Judge who cries"
6. Psalm 23:4: "Thou art with me."
7. Isaiah 7:14: "Immanuel."
8. Matthew 1:23: "Immanuel."
9. I Peter 4:12-19: "Our solidarity in Christ's suffering."
10. Revelation 21:1-6: "The dwelling of God is with mortals."

B. Mystery: God's Call to Trust

1. Psalm 6: "I flood my bed with tears."
2. Psalm 31:22: "Cut off from your sight, yet you heard my cry for help."
3. Psalm 42: "Deep calls to deep"
4. John 6:16-21: "Life in the storm"
5. Colossians 1:24-27: "I rejoice in what was suffered for you... The Mystery, the Hope"
6. Romans 8: "Life in the Spirit"
7. 1 Corinthians 15: "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed."

C. Other "Words of Density": Hope, Patience (*πασχω*, pascho), Healing, Providence

An Experience in Reading and Prayer (*lectio divina*): Luke 10:25-27

Reading List

Paul Brand, M.D., and Philip Yancey, *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

John Claypool, *Tracks of a Fellow Struggler: Living and Growing Through Grief* (Morehouse, 1995).

Terence Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984).

Stanley Hauerwas, *God, Medicine and Suffering* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990).

It is one thing to think that "the problem of evil" can be answered by the "free-will" defense or explained through human sin; it is quite another to confront the illness of the child.

Diane Komp, M.D., *A Window to Heaven: When Children See Life in Death* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992).

C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 1940, 1996).

Arthur C. McGill, *Suffering: A Test of Theological Method* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982).

Jürgen Moltmann, "The Passion of Jesus and the Pain of God," *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994).

Henri Nouwen, *Beyond the Mirror: Reflections on Death and Life* (New York : Crossroad Publishing, 2001).

Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).