

A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO SUFFERING

A FINAL PAPER

SUBMITTED TO DR. ADAMS

OF

HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE COURSE

GOD, HUMAN SUFFERING & THE MINISTER 2989

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DECEMBER 13, 2011

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INTRODUCTION

Suffering has first and foremost shaped the theology of all who believe or choose not to believe in God. Our suffering has either placed a wedge in our relationship with God or has drawn us closer than what could have been possible without it. The lack of suffering also has shaped our theology of the God who is love, leading us to think that we may be more blessed, favored, or even more righteous than others who have suffered much. Regardless of how we came to believe this theology, we would still rather not face it head on, simply because we might not like what we find. If we believe that God punishes those who sin, and we seem to be living a worry free life, we might be forced to feel less merited if we find out that those who are well off are obligated to help those who are not. If we discover that we who have been given much are not to merely lavish it on ourselves, but to assist those who don't have much, this may be seen as a bad thing. I believe that there is not one but many explanations for the sufferings we face, and it can be boiled down to the fact that we live in a world that is not as God intended it.

NO CHEAP ANSWERS

In the course of reading various texts and hearing other perspectives on the subject of suffering, I have been humbled by my narrowness and desire to silence those who are suffering. I, like many others, was very uncomfortable with suffering. How can I desire to be a minister of the gospel and wish to walk and live as Jesus did if I cannot stand to hear the deepest needs and pain of those who suffer? Yes, if they are poor and hungry they

would love to have food and clothing but what about a friend to talk to, or someone who cares about their well-being, not merely because it looks good on our pastoral resumes? How can I pastor a people I do not know, or do not love enough to step down from my pedestal and enter their journey with them? While reading of those who differ in opinion from my own I must silence the urge to voice the first argument that comes to mind whether or not it is true. I am learning to appreciate others voices and truly love those who are suffering and see them as who they are, people and not a burden. It is from this new perspective that I revisit the argument of God, human suffering, and the minister.

PUNISHMENT

As a Christian, I believe that the Bible should be the guide of my dealings with both God and man. From here is where I will be conversing with Bart Ehrman and Harold Kushner. These first two authors are almost inseparable because they both ask ‘how could God do such a thing?’ and in turn, they demand that this punishment is expedited. They also question ‘if suffering occurs as a punishment’ then ‘why do the wicked prosper and are not punished?’

My first observation is that many like the friends of Job try to fit the workings of God into a nicely packed theological box, unfortunately, life is not so structured. Developing an approach to alleviate pain and at the same time be feasible to the intellectually inclined is virtually inconceivable, and may actually make things worse. To those who demand an answer, I understand this suffering as intrusion theology, which speaks of the fact that many times throughout history God has intervened and executed

judgment on people. We see this throughout the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament concerning the Israelites while in Egypt, in Babylon, and on other enemies of God's people. Many times God had hundreds to thousands killed, including women, children, and livestock. Many who hold this theory believe that God as a just judge is pouring out divine judgment on earth. This judgment is not limited to hell and the afterlife alone but while we are living. Many of the people being judged were evil and only God knows why some were and are punished while others are not. Those who say that God was so harsh in the Hebrew Bible may not see the whole context and I would invite them to count every instance in which God pleads with Israel and others to do what is right so that punishment will not occur. God always plans for restoration and a way out, though we might not always choose it.

God's loving-kindness is often magnified by the appeal of His mercy. As Jonah is a great example of this that he fled from God's plan because he did not want his enemies to receive mercy or a second chance, but judgment. "That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."¹ So yes, God does in fact punish but the mercy that was given to a murderous nation like Nineveh is rarely highlighted and often overlooked. I am not saying that this should be an answer to quiet those who insist God is evil but to help them see the whole picture and not merely select verses out of context to build their case.

Ehrman critiques the idea of suffering as punishment for our sins by saying, "The problem with this view is not only that it is scandalous and outrageous, but also that it

¹New International Version, 1984, Jonah 4:2.

creates false security and false guilt. Am I more righteous than my next-door neighbor who lost his job or whose kid was killed in an accident...”² I would agree with Ehrman at this point but only partially because these two sufferings of the job loss or loss of a child could be two different reasons and we should not say all suffering happens for the same reason. If we were to misapply punishment as the reason for the neighbor’s suffering as Ehrman does it would create false security and guilt because as we will see in the next section that God tends to deal with us a bit different than the former generations. If we see others who are suffering as unrighteous and we who are not suffering, we will assume that we are sinless. This explanation of punishment is true in some rare cases but nonetheless accurate and should NOT be prescribed to someone suffering. Even when this is reason for suffering the goal of suffering was repentance and not condemnation or a reason to boast.

NO SUDDEN JUDGEMENT

If God is punishing or has punished people in the Bible for their sins, why doesn’t He continue to strike down the tyrants of our day? If God does indeed punish the wicked, then why does it seem that many of them are they doing better than most Christians? Where is there still so much justice at the hands of corrupt leadership around the world? If we were to ask God to stop every instance of evil that takes place, the world would end with another Armageddon, for we are all sinful and it is not simply our actions but even our thoughts are offensive to God. The problem is that we simply want God to stop the

²Bart Ehrman *God’s Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question-Why We Suffer* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 55.

sins of everyone around us, or the ones that directly affect us, but not the sins that we commit.

Ehrman notes “All one needs to do is look around and see that the wicked often thrive and the righteous often suffer, sometimes in horrifying and repulsive ways.”³ Kushner writes in a similar fashion “Some good people die unfulfilled; others find the length of days to be more of a punishment than a privilege.”⁴ We now visit Psalm 92 that suggest that if we wait long enough; we would see the righteousness of God's plan emerge. The Psalmist suggest that the wicked might seem to be prospering because their troubles are far less than the righteous but in the end, they will get what they deserve. Could it be that the Psalmist is not simply thinking about the here and now, but also about the fulfillment of things to come, when the justice so earnestly awaited for will take place? It would certainly seem that there is room for the righteous to flourish like a palm tree in the courts of heaven and not simply on this earth where death is destined for all humans. If the promise of God's plan was just for the here and now, then when we die our vindication is simply a momentary joy, as that of the wicked, soon to pass.

Lastly returning to the Bible we notice when Jesus Himself was in a synagogue in Luke 4:18-19 He spoke of His purpose on earth as fulfilling God's will in His life. It is significant to notice what Jesus chose to leave out on the Isaiah scroll of chapter 61. He did not come in His first advent to execute God's vengeance and comfort all who mourn.

³*Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People* (New York: Avon Books, 1981),

For the fulfillment of these things, we eagerly await the second coming of the Lord.⁵ God deals with us as less harsh now because as Peter declares “The Lord is not slow to fulfill His promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.”⁶ If it seems like the wicked are not suffering it may be contributed to God’s unfailing love that is given to even the most wicked person in hopes that they too would repent and draw near to God.

The person suffering may not need this theological lesson for the beginning of the grieving process, but maybe later it will be of help to see that things will be better in the end. We can have the peace and relief from all sufferings when we are united with Jesus. We can help individuals accept the situation they are in without being inconsiderate of their feelings.

HUMANITY

Some have said that the reason we suffer is because we are “human” and by human they mean sinful. Many say ‘when Hitler took it on his own to attempt to annihilate the Jewish race it was a man who caused suffering and God should not be blamed for this.’ “The prophets also taught that human beings themselves were often the blame for the suffering of others, as the rich and powerful, for example, oppress the poor and powerless...”⁷ Kushner believes that part of being human is that we have to suffer or that

⁵Gary Parrett and S. Steve Kang, *Teaching The Faith, Forming The Faithful* (Downers Grove, IL, 2009), 22.

⁶English Standard Version, 2001.

⁷Ehrman, 33.

we suffer as a price to pay for being human. My question to Kushner would be, ‘If that is true then in heaven will we still be human? If so will there be suffering in heaven?’ To the first question it depends on what makes a person a human, is it the flesh and bones, the ability to decide and feel and interpret as Kushner insists, or just anything above an animal or machine but less than God? If Kushner’s idea of what a human is correct which I agree with, then yes we will be human in heaven. We Will be in spirit form whatever that maybe, but it is possible that we will be humans as Kushner believes? At the same time, the Bible tells us that there will be no suffering in heaven, which Kushner also believes. We will be able to feel and to decide but we will also be perfected as Jesus is the ultimate example of what being human is supposed to be like. For He was fully human yet without sin, the only person to ever do so.

In Revelation 21:4 it states, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”⁸ This would seem that suffering is not a by-product of being human but sin entering the world from the Fall, and when we get to heaven things will be as they were intended to be in the Garden of Eden. We will still be human yet without suffering.

Kushner believes that in Genesis there was no sign of disobedience but a story to show us that we are now humans separated from the animal kingdom because we have the ability to know good and evil.⁹ I, on the other hand, hold to the view that in the beginning, God created everything good Genesis 1:31, and this includes human beings. After the Fall in Genesis 3, humans attained the knowledge of *good* and *evil* and the way God willed

⁸NIV.

⁹Kushner, 108.

them to be, (*good*) was now altered because they gained this knowledge out of disobedience. When God made us, we were given feelings, emotions, and intellect to choose and make good or bad decisions. God told Adam not to eat of the fruit in Genesis 2:17, Adam decided to disobey what God told him to do. The truth is we are sinners and are capable of the worst atrocities beyond the nightmares Stephen King and others can fantasize in their horror movies. We hurt, hate, injure, manipulate, and destroy each other for money, popularity, respect or less. With all of the good we can do there is still so much evil we commit that force atheist to consider there not a God who is involved. Which is also strange since in the same breath they praise humanity so much and overlook its cruel nature. As Dinesh D'souza and many others mention, when Hitler, Bin Laden, or Stalin slaughter many innocent people it should not be God who is blamed for it is man who is committing those crimes against humanity. With sin, this world with earthquakes, injustices, murders, and all of its flaws is a product of the Fall and that Fall can account for the sufferings we experience. It is not intended to be a simple answer but it is an answer that this world and the people here are not perfect. Though it must be noted that this is not the only world there is, for there is one to come that is perfect as we can look forward that that world while we are on this one and strive to make it better each day.

ALL POWERFUL GOD?

I absolutely agree with Kushner when he says that we should walk with God in our suffering as a friend. But Kushner believes that God is not all-powerful. For the sake of the argument, not for the person suffering I wonder how can we turn to God to be comforted if God is not able to stop the suffering we are experiencing? How can God walk us through it, if God is not all-powerful? What kind of God is this to be somewhat

powerful, how can I know God can help beyond that of a friend or relative? My argument seems to echo Ehrman's when he says "Believing in a God who stands beside me in my suffering, but who cannot actually do much about it, makes God a lot like my mother or my kindly next-door neighbor..."¹⁰ Maybe God is just stronger than humans, but not stronger than evil or the Leviathan. This would not give me comfort to lean on God if I thought that evil could overthrow good, and God for that matter. It is hard to trust in a God that might lose in the cosmic struggle and believe there is hope to go on. It would make me paranoid every time I hear the phone ring, wondering if I would be receiving bad news from someone close. What does help me is knowing that evil is defeated and the future of humanity is restored to God. Paul speaks of the love of God in the face of his suffering in Romans 8:35-39:

35Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.¹¹

Maybe to some, it might sound like blind faith but to me, it is a legacy of the faithfulness of God to a man who once murdered Christians and was beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, and flogged repeatedly yet in prison he gave comfort to others in similar situations. We too can have comfort in God knowing that He is well able to overcome evil and will once and for all.

GOD'S RESPONSIBILITY

¹⁰Ehrman, 272.

¹¹ESV

“If God made us (assuming the theistic view for a moment), then presumably our sense of right and wrong comes from him. If that’s the case, there is no other true sense of right and wrong but His. If he does something wrong, then He is culpable by the very standards of judgment that He has given us as sentient human beings.”¹²

This is a great argument that Ehrman poses but it should also be noted that from the Fall not only are we sinful, but we also love to do wrong rather than what is right, it has become our natural inclination. It is much harder to do what is right and seemingly impossible to go without sinning even as a Christian in Seminary myself. To do bad seems, one would not even have to use much effort and be successful. Babies, for example, are not taught to be selfish but even the youngest would snatch his or her toy from another toddler merely because they did not want anyone else to enjoy themselves. Telling a baby ‘NO’ often makes them more curious and more prone to disobey that which was just forbidden. We too gain much satisfaction in thinking that we are more righteous than God if given the chance, especially in our interactions with others. The new atheist and humanist consider the God of the Hebrew Bible to be cruel, evil, and ready to strike down anyone who so much breathes wrong. This love for humans seems to be an arrogant chant of those who do not know what the Bible declares about God’s character and interactions with people. It is not that they do not know what the Bible teaches about God’s longsuffering nature, rather they habitually neglect the many cases and read them out of context. Ehrman quotes from *The Brothers Karamazov*, a story of Ivan Karamazov. “Ivan admits that he does not accept the world because even if God were to reveal at the end the one thing that made sense of it all, Ivan would still find the suffering in the world too horrible.”¹³ Half of me agrees with Ivan that the suffering experienced by many is too

¹²Ehrman, 276.

¹³*Ibid.*, 265-266.

great for a logical answer to exist, and the other half of me thinks how can he be so arrogant to say this? Though I should add Ivan does not seem to be the typical know-it-all atheist or humanist. Can Ivan or anyone else love humans more than the Creator, or can anyone love humans more than the God who sent His own Son to die for us because of His love for us? He can claim to be a lover of human beings but if he is not willing to lay his life down for the vilest and wicked person who may never change or may actually be the one to be the reason he is dying, he can never say that he loves us or cares for us more than God! Atheist or humanist who insists they love humanity so much often cannot tolerate the lowest of humanity not realizing that many who are abusive, and even heartless were themselves victims. For Romans 5:8 declares “But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

Therefore, I cannot agree with those who say ‘God created humans with sin and then punishes them for being sinful.’ How could God be good if He is punishing humans and taking no responsibility for creating us as sinful? It seems that God did take responsibility in the act of sending Jesus to die in our place and took on the wrath of sin once and for all. At the same time, God does hold humans responsible if we knowingly reject this offer, which was so graciously given.

REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING

“The idea that human suffering can serve divine purposes is shown in the very next set of stories of the Bible involving the exodus of the children of Israel in their slavery in Egypt under Moses.”¹⁴ Bart speaks of suffering that brings salvation and how the suffering

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 134-135.

of Christians helped to spread the gospel, and how a person suffering would be better equipped to help those who are suffering.¹⁵ But he goes on to say “I see nothing redemptive in the innocent young child who contracts AIDS, through absolutely no fault of her own, and who can expect nothing but the nightmarish torments that the disease produces.”¹⁶ I would never consider the tragedy of a child who contracted AIDS as redemptive but as another reason for suffering, we will discuss later. Assuming that each reason for suffering given can be applied to all acts of suffering is again a great mistake that Bart and others have made.

Bart continues, “Moreover, if the Christian God is the one who suffers, then who is the one who created and sustains this world? By saying that God suffers with His creation, we seem to have sacrificed the view that God is sovereign over His creation.”¹⁷ Well first no, God is far beyond what we can comprehend and if God wants to create, and be a part of creation as well as sustain it; this does not make Him less powerful but in many ways more powerful for being able to do so! A common error by the atheist is that they put limitations on God, but to do so would by definition make God not God but something less than God.

Here seems a great time to invite James Cone to speak on this idea of what redemptive suffering actually is. “God cannot be defined by human logic. Consequently, prosperity and adversity have no necessary connection with goodness and wickedness.”¹⁸

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 147-152.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁷Ehrman, 274.

¹⁸James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 158.

I think this is a necessary aspect that is not talked about very often. Many believe the opposite is true and even Christians live in condemnation when bad things happen to them instead of being proactive and trying to liberate others and themselves. Some trials are allowed so we can be strengthened and some are to be overcome, or help others overcome their situations. But this reason for suffering as powerful as it is should not be applied to all experiences.

Cone brings up the purpose of Israel as being God's chosen people when he writes, "Because Israel as a new being is Yahweh's servant, its mission is to bring forth justice to the nations. This is a meaning of Israel's double portion which he received from Yahweh's hand: expiation for its own sins and transformation into a new being for the sake of others."¹⁹

"To be Yahweh's servant not only means that God will strengthen and help you and will uphold you with his victorious right-hand Isaiah 41:10; it also means that Israel suffers with Yahweh and divine establishment of justice in the land. For Yahweh takes on the pain of the widow and orphans and transforms slavery into freedom."²⁰

This too is another piece that needs to be addressed; too many Christians in suburbia are not aware or concerned with the struggles others face. "Jesus identified Himself with the Suffering Servant, "for the Son of Man... came not to be served but to serve, and give His life as a ransom for many. Isaiah 53:4, 7, 11 "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."²¹ Jesus was not only able to give good teachings for us to follow but He also practiced what He preached. While on the cross He prayed for those who crucified Him and gave life back to the unlovable and lepers when He touched them and spoke to them as people.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 158.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 159.

²¹*Ibid.*, 160.

“The cross of Jesus reveals the extent of God's involvement in the suffering of the weak. God is not merely sympathetic with the social pain of the poor but becomes totally identified with them in their agony and pain.”²² This was very transformational for me, I've always seen Jesus' suffering as His way of showing He was human. Knowing that Jesus not only suffered like us but suffers with us does give much comfort, and knowing that, I can get through anything with Him as a companion.

“The final victory will take place with the second coming of Christ. In the meantime, Christians are called to suffer with God in the fight against evil in the present age.”²³ I really like this approach because it gives hope to the believer that things will be as they should be in the end but at the same time commissions all believers to do something about it. We are not called to passively wait while others are suffering. I also liked how Cone spoke about our thinking being more influenced by Greek philosophy and therefore leading us to merely talk about evil but never create solutions to eliminate evil.

I do find it interesting that many friends that I have that are Christians, as well as myself, became Christians in times of great suffering. Whether it be the loss of a loved one, a near death experience, depression and suicide attempts or the like, we turned to God and not away from Him. But maybe because of our westernized culture we are taught to seek comfort and when times are not going as we want God should be blamed. We somehow forget that God was there in the midst of our trials and we are not saved from our difficult situations as Jesus promised they would surely come (John 16:33). But we became Christians to be saved from Hell and to one day be united with Jesus and to help

²²*Ibid.*, 160.

²³*Ibid.*, 163.

as many others while we wait. When we forget this we too can fall into a pit of despair and forget that God is real, He is with us, and God is indeed good.

Irenaeus suggests that man was created as imperfect, immature creatures to undergo moral development and growth and be brought to the perfection intended by his maker. I like what Irenaeus is saying but I don't agree with his stance. I would use the same argument that Kushner used that if God was teaching the little boy who drowned a lesson to help his development he would not be able to apply anything if he was dead. The only concern I have with Cone's approach to suffering is that it too does not answer the question to everyone's suffering but only a select of situations that occur.

NOT YET REVEALED

In a debate with Bart Ehrman, Dinesh D'souza gives an example of the mystery of suffering. He mentioned that if we were to give an ant a simple math problem, that no matter how hard the ant tried he could not solve it. It is not that the problem could not be solved but that the ant could never comprehend it. In a similar way, we too cannot fully fathom why there is suffering concurrently with a good and all-powerful God. I cannot yet understand why God allows certain things to happen, or all of the reasons for suffering but at any rate, those who are displeased with these approaches should focus their energies on helping those who are suffering.

This cannot account for all sufferings that occur in everyone's life. "...earthquakes and accidents, like the murder and robbery, are not the will of God, but represent that aspect of reality which stands independent of His will, and which angers and saddens God

even as this angers and saddens us.”²⁴ The many babies born with defects cannot be said to be in disobedience to God, or redemptive, some may put them in the category of punishment but that would not help them or their parents cope, even if it were true. This is where I can stand with Kushner and say I don’t know nor can I begin to explain why these things happen. I don’t believe the explanations so far can account for these to the fullness that is needed to alleviate pain. Some things that happen do not fall into the other categories listed, but they should not be noted as randomness of the universe but simply as the not yet revealed. We don’t know why, and it would be a disservice to those we minister to make up a reason for their suffering. It is not intended to be a simple answer but it is an answer that this world is not perfect and it is not the only world there is, for the one to come is perfect but this world is the one we are on right now. We should as Kushner believes seek to reconcile people to God and not just ask “why” but we should help in every situation we can.

OVERCOMING SUFFERING

What would give comfort to those who are suffering? Here I wanted to add some helpful ideas from the readings and other comforts I have found. In *Suffering* by Dorothee Soelle, she writes “The first step towards overcoming suffering is, then, to find a language that leads out of the uncomprehending suffering that makes one mute, a language of lament, of trying, of pain, a language that at least says what the situation is.”²⁵ Years ago when my wife was upset with God and she like Job gives God a piece of her mind, I being the “godly man” and “defender of God” that I am I would hush her concerns, fears, and

²⁴Kushner, 55.

²⁵Dorothee Soelle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 70.

hurts and show her that to speak of God in such a way was evil. I see now how in doing so I failed to love, and help her much less guard God's reputation. I am now able to see how David, the man after God's own heart related with God throughout the Psalms and we can too. God does not simply want us to walk through problems with bitterness in our hearts towards Him and a smile on our faces. Instead, we should come to really know, love, and depend on God. When we feel betrayed by God is when we should come and not distance ourselves from Him. Ehrman and I agree yet again with Kushner when he quotes him "He can give us the strength to deal with our suffering when we experience it. God is a loving Father who is there for His people, not to guarantee miraculously that they never have hardships, but to give them the peace and strength they need to face the hardship."²⁶ Our duty as Christians and people made in the image of God should be as Ehrman insists along with many others

But we should also work hard to make our world the most pleasing place it can be *for others*—whether this means visiting a friend in the hospital, giving more to a local charity or an international relief effort, volunteering at the local soup kitchen, voting for politicians more concerned with the suffering in the world than with their own political futures, or expressing our opposition to the violent oppression of innocent people. We may not know the why's and wherefore's. But just because we don't have an answer to suffering does not mean that we cannot have a response to it. Our response should be to work to alleviate suffering wherever possible and to live life as well as we can.²⁷

CONCLUSION

It is interesting that Bart Ehrman and myself are approaching the historic question

²⁶Ehrman, 271.

²⁷Ehrman, 278.

from the same point of view but our results are conflicting. Bart's purpose for writing God's problem was to show that the Bible fails to answer the problem of why we suffer but he has done such a great job of showing the opposite. In agreement with the Bible, I hold true that there are many answers and explanations for why we suffer. There is not a one size fits all answer, and there are still some things that the Bible does not answer and to those Bart may feel compelled to say the Bible fails to give a solution. Bart tries to save himself from this mistake by stating "the prophets never stated this as a universal principle, as a way of explaining every instance of suffering. The prophets were speaking only to their contemporaries about their specific situation."²⁸ The problem lies when although stating this as true he still tries to take other biblical answers as having to be universal principals and when they do not satisfy him he declares them as no answer at all. At any rate, many Christians have tried to consider many tragedies and natural disasters to be God's divine punishment against people when actually it would be better if the said nothing about things they don't know. A pastor once recently said, "people don't expect us to be perfect, but they do expect us to be humble."²⁹

The most important thing we can do is to learn how to love those who are suffering even if it is beyond what we have experienced ourselves. We should not speak for the sake of speaking, and we should not be silent when someone needs a word of comfort. People are not math problems and in the realm of suffering one plus one does not always equal two. The subject of theodicy is not yet finished and it probably never will be completed to suit and satisfy all who desire an answer. Regardless of that possibility, we need to hear

²⁸Ehrman, 53.

²⁹Unidentified.

the hurting as they speak and not think of a good cliché to dismiss one's wounds. We don't have to have all of the answers, and what works for you may not work for someone in the same exact situation. Hearing God in the right time and saying what will help them is the primary focus of the minister, not to be known as the know-it-all-Bible champ. Helping others to know God is still hearing and still caring for them can be a substantial step in on their journey to being restored.

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