

# Evil & Suffering



*"Whatever the status of evil in the world, I know that the only God in whom I can believe will be a God found in the midst of evil rather than at a safe distance from it; suffering the evil rather than inflicting it."*

– Robert McAfee Brown

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## 1<sup>st</sup> break:

What do you think of the “price of good” that Cobb describes?

## 2<sup>nd</sup> break:

Describe the characteristics of the “conventional wisdom” or the “domestication of reality” represented in Deuteronomy and Proverbs.

How would you express the voices of protest found in the book of Job and Ecclesiastes for today?

What can you say about the “wildness and the splendor and utter magnificence of undomesticated reality”?

Varghese says for anybody to claim the “luck of the world – wealth, prosperity, comfort, power” as a sign of God’s love is profoundly heretical. Explain.

**3<sup>rd</sup> break:**

What are some of the ways our institutions – the principalities and powers – be compromised by expediency?

Where are you hearing Brueggemann’s statement, “Voiced pain becomes a public fact that requires the re-arrangement of social power” today?

If God is “the power of life, the power of creativity, the power of the Spirit in community, the power of justice,” what part do we play?

**General Reflection:**

What do you find most helpful or interesting from the material so far?

What are the implications for your personal spiritual journey? For Christianity as a whole?

## Words of Wisdom

In the days of the Psalmist the Jews had no understanding of hell. However, they did speak of a place of the dead called Sheol. Yet the Psalm proclaims that even there one cannot escape God. Such spiritual convictions have bolstered the Jewish people through thousands of years of collective and individual suffering. Despite hatred, oppression, pogroms, and holocaust, they have endured.

**Read Psalm 139.7-8.**

Two calamities had just occurred that were the talk of Jerusalem. The Roman governor Pilate had slaughtered a group of Galileans and a tower near the Pool of Siloam had collapsed, killing eighteen people. One was an atrocity, an act of political violence. The other a tragedy, a whim of fate (what insurance companies call an "act of God"). Were those killed at the hands of Pilate worse sinners than all other Galileans? Were those who perished in the tower catastrophe worse sinners than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? Jesus says, "No!" implying that they were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. Bad things happen – often without explanation.

**Read the story in Luke 13.1-5.**

Where is God amidst suffering and death – especially the death of the virtuous? The psalmist suggests that God is our strength and our comfort. "It doesn't say I will fear no evil because evil only happens to bad people," Kushner relates. "It says there is a lot of evil out there, but I can handle it because God is [with me]."

**Read Psalm 23.**

Although Christianity has made "Satan" the proper name for the archenemy of God and the personification of evil, in all of Hebrew scripture the character only appears a couple of times (and in just four books). In fact, the Hebrew word "satan" is not a pronoun but appears with the definite article "ha." The phrase "ha satan" can be more faithfully translated into English as "the adversary" and can be used to refer to anyone playing an opposing role. When Jesus calls Peter, "Satan," he's not suggesting that Peter is possessed by Satan or influenced by Satan, but calling Peter what he is – his adversary.

**Read either Matthew 16.23 or Mark 8.33**

### For further reference:

*Walter Brueggemann references Exodus 2:23 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> section of the DVD.*

*Rebecca Ann Parker references Romans 8:38-39 in the 3<sup>rd</sup> section of the DVD.*

**"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**

– Paul, Romans 12:21

## Spirit Practice

Haiku is poetry form that is only three lines long. It typically has five syllables in the first line, seven syllables in the second line, and five syllables in the third line.

Child sentenced to death  
Dying slowly in Auschwitz  
God on the gallows

– Cynthia Langston Kirk

Prayerfully consider your view of evil, suffering and God. Express your thoughts or theology in a haiku poem. Spend time in prayer about the evil and suffering in the world.

## Try it

Reclaim the ancient roots celebrating All Hallow's Eve and/or All Saints Day in your faith community. Many churches have sensationalized Halloween as the "Devil's holiday" and made it a bully pulpit from which to condemn a manufactured Satanism and the occult. People are whipped into a frenzy of fear. Raising well-balanced, whole, thinking children is made virtually impossible when they're taught that "the devil is everywhere and his demons are waiting to pounce on you and ruin your life at any moment!" Instead of creating unnecessary anxiety and stress and giving credence to something that isn't there, swear off "scaring" people into believing in God and seek out ways to creatively celebrate this diverse and rich cultural holiday.