



D I V I N E D I L E M M A

WRESTLING
WITH THE QUESTION
OF A LOVING GOD
IN A FALLEN
WORLD

K E N H A M

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Introduction

My younger brother, a wonderful Christian preacher, died from an awful degenerative brain disease on June 9, 2002. As a result of this, in 2006 I wrote a book about the experience to help Christians answer the question of why God allows “good” people to suffer. I wrote this from the heart, applying a biblical worldview to give answers, and focused a lot on my dear godly mother and how we handled this sad situation.

The book was called *How Could a Loving God?* Well, now it’s 2023 and I’m totally updating this book with a major rewrite that includes a lot more information. I have learned a lot about dealing with this topic over the years



My brother Robert.



Mum & Dad and all six children.
Robert is second from the left at the back.

from studying God's Word and having spoken to so many people about the topic of suffering as I've heard their stories of tragedies, horrible diseases, and so many other heart-breaking situations.

Can we truly understand why God allows such suffering even for people who love Him and have received His gift of salvation? The answer is yes!

In this book, I relate a true account of life, suffering, and death. I open myself up, sharing my own struggles and the emotional trauma of dealing with this issue. You will feel the struggle and perhaps identify with it. But there really are answers that give that peace we need:

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:7).



Why?

One of the most asked questions I've received as a Christian proclaiming the truth of God's Word beginning in Genesis goes something like this, "How do we understand all the death, disease, and suffering in this world if there really is a loving God?"

Many have attempted to deal with this topic down through the years. But we must admit, this is one of the most difficult issues from a human perspective to understand and deal with. Do we have satisfactory answers?

We've heard of non-Christians who lived long lives, with seeming health and a peaceful death. Yet we've seen wonderful Christian men and women suffer greatly and die in pain. We agonize over why God would take a young Christian mother or father home, leaving a young family distraught trying to cope with such tragedy.

Don't we all as Christians identify with Jeremiah's words? *Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?* (Jeremiah 12:1)

But it doesn't seem fair, Lord! We need more great Christian men and women who stand on Your Word, and yet so many talented, God-fearing people seem to die young, or by some painful disease, or end up suffering horrible tragedies in their lives. It just doesn't seem fair. My younger brother was a wonderful Christian man. He loved God's Word and loved

to teach it. He believed God's Word beginning in Genesis. So many church leaders today compromise God's Word in Genesis, and some are now going soft on the LGBTQ worldview. It doesn't make sense that my brother died at a young age. Don't we need more, not less, men like this?

And Lord, Bethley, the beautiful Christian friend of my wife and I who was so gentle and kind, so loving, and yet suffered from cancer, dying an agonizing death at a young age, leaving a young family. It doesn't seem to make sense. And why did my good friend and colleague Dr. Tommy Mitchell die at a relatively young age? He was a great creationist speaker, and we need more of them, not less. Why did my close friend (he is like a brother) Buddy Davis, have a stroke that took away from him the phenomenal talent of music and speaking You had entrusted to him, and he had used to proclaim Your Word around the world? He could have ministered to so many more people. And my good friend John from Alabama — one minor accident and his life changed to a daily physical struggle. What about the five Christian college students on the way home from Bible college killed



BREAKING NEWS

Students killed in wrong-way crash

LIVE

Current, former Arkansas high school students identified as 5 killed in Wyoming wrong-way crash

Students from Arkansas were visiting Jackson Hole Bible college in Wyoming

by a drunk driver? And there are so many more examples.

I'm sure we could come up with almost endless stories like this. Stories of tragedy and seemingly unfair and devastating situations of grief and suffering.

And, of course, I've had many atheists mock me on social media for believing in a God of love when they see death, disease, and suffering permeating this world. "Isn't your God powerful enough to overcome all this?" they say. And then, when discussing the abortion topic, we hear them say things like, "If abortion is wrong, why does your God allow millions of babies to die from miscarriages?" And I've also had people say to me, "If babies go to heaven when they die, and if you believe human life begins at fertilization, you should support abortion as all these children will go to heaven and not have to be born and maybe go to hell."

Atheists also claim the biblical God is genocidal as He killed so many people including men, women, and children at the time of the Flood. They also point to instances in the Bible when God told the Israelites to kill every man, woman, and child in a particular city such as recorded in 1 Samuel 15:3 where God told them to totally wipe out the Amalekites:

"Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey."

How do we answer all these agonized questions and hostile accusations?

I sometimes think about John the Baptist. He was the man prophesied about in Isaiah 40 and Malachi 3 and 4. He was

called by God to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ's ministry on earth. He baptized Christ. But then he was jailed and beheaded in prison. Does that seem fair to us as humans?

What about the time Herod commanded that all the boys aged two and under in Bethlehem be killed (Matthew 2), but an angel warned Joseph in a dream to take Mary and Jesus and flee to Egypt to protect them from this order? Why didn't God warn the other families of young boys? Or what about when Pharaoh ordered all of the Israelite boys to be killed at the time of Moses' birth as recorded in Exodus 1? Why did God allow all those children to die? Can we even imagine the grief this caused for these families? How can we possibly understand all this?

What about King David? God had Samuel anoint him to be king, but then King Saul set out to kill him, resulting in David having to flee and fight for his life. In Psalm 13, David seems to have sunk to an all-time low, feeling God had left him. David cries out: *How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?* (Psalm 13:1–2). Later on, David commits adultery with Bathsheba, and then, to try to cover it up, had her husband killed. He repents and God forgives him (though there are consequences). But God calls David *a man after my heart* (Acts 13:22). Does this sound right and just to fallible humans like us?

I think about Jeremiah and the battles he fought. God called him to be a prophet, but he was persecuted. I can understand him crying out *Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?* (Jeremiah 12:1).

And then we all know about Job. God let the devil commit all sorts of terrible acts against him. He lost his family, his flocks, his health — in fact, he lost everything. Although God reveals some of what happened behind the scenes, Job didn't know what was happening. His friends counseled Job that it must be the result of some wrong he had done that he needed to repent of. But even with all this, how could Job say, "*Though he slay me, I will hope in him*" (Job 13:15). Would we be able to truly say that if God allowed the same to happen to us?

All this is seemingly nigh on impossible to try to even begin to understand from a Christian perspective, let alone from a non-Christian one.

The questions seem limitless. Why does God allow a dictator to rule North Korea and persecute and torture Christians? Why did God allow Nero to viciously kill so many Christians? Why does God allow dictators like those in Cuba or China to rail against God's people and cause such misery? Why would God allow a tragedy like 9/11 to occur in the USA? Why all the wars and the resulting suffering? Why was Hitler allowed to murder millions of Jews and others? Why does God allow little children to be sexualized by drag queens and predators? Why does God allow children and others to be trafficked? Why? Why? Why?

I've read many articles where people testify to being brought up in church, but they rejected Christianity because of their belief that there can't be a loving God with all the death, suffering, and disease that permeates this world. And then there are those who claim they were once Christians, but because of a tragedy or abuse or some other grievous

circumstance they walked away from the Christian faith.



Even as Christians, we live with many of these questions. And let's be honest, we all struggle to make sense of all of this. Many times, we sort of just ignore or push away such questions, until something happens that brings it all to the forefront.

Tragedy Strikes

We buried what was left of Robert's body on the 12th of June, 2002, in a quiet cemetery on the outskirts of Brisbane, Australia.

Later in the day, we would gather with others in a public celebration of his life, but only those who were closest to him during his earthly life gathered around the freshly dug grave that morning. As the cool winter breeze blew through the forest and the Australian gum trees around us, we held each other close and sought comfort and rest in the words of the pastor and the words of Scripture. It was the end of a long road. For months, a disease called "frontal lobe dementia" had been slowly and persistently eroding the networks of cells in his brain. For months we stood by helplessly as the disease ate away at his independence and physical presence, contorting his



mind and body into a twisted, empty shell. Now, we were standing together, returning to the ground the body of our brother and friend. One who was also a husband and father.

There was a certain sense of relief and peace among us — and a thankfulness that his agonizing battle was now complete — but deep in our souls' stirred thoughts and feelings that would not rest, echoes of questions that could not be quieted.

Why Robert? He was a good man and devoted father and husband, serving as a pastor in a Bible-teaching, Bible-defending church? Why this way? The disease had robbed him of everything that he valued most ... his mind, his ability to communicate the gospel, his awareness of those he loved and who loved him. Why now? Robert was only 43. His ministry, born out of sacrifice and determination, was beginning to grow. And his family would never again hear the counsel and comfort of their earthly father's voice, nor would they feel the guidance and touch of his



Robert as a young boy.



Robert as a young man.

caring hand. Why did this happen when they all needed him the most?

We stood at the grave for some time, quietly, with little left to say ... but the questions would not be silenced among us: Why? Why? Why?

As we wiped the dirt from our hands and said our last goodbyes, the questions hung heavy in the air.

Underneath these questions was a deeper question still — a question that has perplexed mankind for ages, but was now amplified by our circumstances and our pain — and it was a question that demanded an answer: Why would a loving God allow, or even cause, such pain, decay, and death?

As the oldest sibling in the family, I felt the full weight of the question. How would I answer? I'm a Christian and



Robert with me when he had become a preacher.

I believe and love God's Word. I teach it all over the world. I preach the message of salvation and tell people about the wonderful God of love who created us; but how could I reconcile all of that with what had happened to my brother Rob? What was I to say to my mother, my own wife and children, my brothers and sisters, nieces, nephews, and so on?

And what about the non-Christians who looked on and saw our Christian family struggling to cope with this terrible disaster? What were they thinking; what were they asking? What could we tell them in the midst of this tragedy that would cause them to look to the God of the Bible?

As these thoughts swirled without rest, yet another question came up in my mind: What would Robert say about it all? As a devout and gifted teacher of the Word, what would be his answer to these questions? What would he have said about the Bible and the God it portrays, had he been able to understand what had happened to him? Would he be angry? Would he turn his back on the Word of God he so faithfully preached? What would he say to God if he had been able to comprehend the nature of his disease, decline, and death?

Robert's disease and illness, as you might imagine, had been a struggle for me and our whole family. No, there are no easy answers in one sense, but in my search for how I should respond as a Christian, I believe that light can be shed on this seemingly unfair, contradictory, and irreconcilable situation. After all, if the God of the Bible Rob believed in is real, and if His nature is as revealed in the pages of Scripture, then there has to be a way of reconciling what seems to be so grossly unjust with a just and holy Creator — otherwise nothing makes sense.

For decades I've known and taught that the Word of God makes sense out of confusion when it comes to issues of history, geography, family, anthropology, morality, paleontology, etc. Since my brother's death, and the deep soul-searching it has caused, I now also know that the truth of the Word can make sense out of the deepest confusion of the heart, offering answers to the most perplexing, painful issues a person can face.

As we now turn to the infallible Word of God, may we, by His mercy and grace, be given the ability to understand the past, live powerfully in the present, and look to the future with hope, knowing that God Himself has given us answers (though not every answer) to the questions we so desperately ask.

And It Was Good

To understand any event or circumstance one needs to start at the beginning.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good (Genesis 1:1, 31)

The words of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 present to us the incredible chronicle of the first six days of existence. From nothing, God created the heavens and an earth. He spoke forth the first rays of light, separating them from the darkness, then He made distinction between the heavens and the waters below. Gathering the waters into seas and forming the dry land, God then spoke into reality plants and trees of every kind. With His voice He scattered the stars and hung the sun and moon. Filling the waters with living creatures and the skies with flying creatures, He then filled the land with living creatures ... and then He declared that it was *good*.

But God was far from done. On day 6, God created the first two people, from whom all humanity would come. From the dust of the ground God shaped the first man, breathing life into his nostrils, and giving him dominion over everything else that had been created. God showed Adam that he was alone, as only he was made in God's image. God then formed a mate from the man's side, and together they began their rule over all that had been made ... and then God

declared everything He had made was *very good*.

I believe that we are incapable of imagining the perfection that existed in Eden at that time. The harmony, the beauty, the unity, the way everything worked together in peace ... it was very good, but a glance at the morning newspaper or listening to the evening news makes it graphically evident that we no longer live in the beautiful world He originally made. Murder, divorce, abortion, starvation, sexual perversion of many kinds, and war are the norm now; devastation is common, punctuated by disasters that appear to be both natural and man-made. To get away from it all, many retreat toward undisturbed nature, but even there — no, particularly there — we find the world can be extremely disturbing.

Whenever I mention my homeland of Australia, people often say, “Australia is such a wonderful country.” It is. It’s a tremendous country. It’s a wonderful country ... compared to many others. But let’s be honest; it can also be a rough place. We have some of the most dangerous sea creatures on the planet. Some of our sea stingers will happily kill you in minutes, and our sharks will eat you so fast that no one will know what happened to you. The bite of many of our spiders can be the beginning of a slow and excruciating death. We have some of the most dangerous snakes in the world, too. Australia is also home to the most dangerous octopus in the





Yes, Australia has a phenomenal beauty.

world. If you are walking along a rocky shoreline and accidentally step on the octopus, you'll be dead within the hour. We have the most dangerous croc-



But you never know what is lurking around.

odiles in the world. We even have a deadly stinging tree! If you were to just brush up against the leaves of this tree, you would receive a painful sting that can last for years.

So, imagine you've come to Australia for a vacation to get away from "the real world" for a while. While walking on one of our "wonderful" nature trails, let's just say you

brush up against the stinging tree. The pain is so great that you rush down the hillside to the nearby ocean to wash your arm. Immediately you get stung by one of the deadly tropical sea stingers, which almost immediately makes you dizzy and delirious (not to mention the pain), so you crawl out of the ocean and fall into a nearby freshwater creek, and “chomp!” just like that you become lunch for one of our man-eating crocodiles. Isn’t Australia a beautiful country?

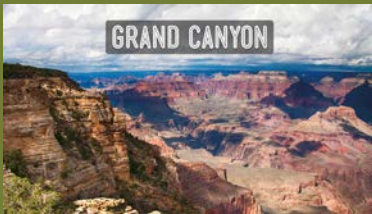
I think we are sometimes very guilty of giving the wrong idea to the non-Christian when we look at nature and say, “Look how beautiful this world is! Can’t you see there’s a God?” And they’re looking at this world and you know what they see? People dying, tragedies, suffering, death, disease — they don’t see a beautiful world.

I even think we sometimes give the wrong message to our kids through many of our Sunday school programs. When we want to talk to kids about God being “the great Designer” or “the great Creator,” we often turn to nature as an example of His creative “beauty.” Look at the pictures you see in the Sunday school books and in Christian school textbooks, aren’t they “beautiful”? Sure, look how God beautifully designed this fox to rip the insides out of the bunny! See the dinosaur bones? Yeah, his body was crushed under the weight of tons of sediment. Look how that mosquito sucks the blood out of that little fawn! We point at nature and life and teach our kids to sing “All things bright and beautiful! The Lord God made them all!” Maybe we should be teaching them to sing “All things maimed and mangled! The Lord God judged them all!”

A friend of mine lived in the mountains near the coast

south of Brisbane. He said, “I take my non-Christian friends up on the mountain here, and we look over this beautiful countryside and the beach and I say, ‘Can’t you see there’s a God? Look at the beautiful world He made!’” I differ with him. What we see in Australia is not the world that God made — and it’s only beautiful compared to certain other places! At those beaches around Brisbane, you’re liable to have the blue ringed octopus and sea stingers bring an abrupt end to your beautiful afternoon outing.

No, it’s not a totally beautiful world; it’s quite a dangerous and deadly one. Now there certainly is beauty in this world, but it’s a world of beauty and ugliness, a world of life and death. It all seems so contradictory. In nature, we do see a remnant of beauty, a shattered reflection of the original perfection of Eden. But it’s all in the context of death and destruction ... all of it. Take the Grand Canyon, for example. If you took a non-Christian to this magnificent place — and it is magnificent, by the way; the views are indescribable, particularly at sunrise and sunset — and the two of you were sitting on the edge of the mile-deep canyon, and you say to your friend, “Can’t you see there is a God of love in the beauty of what He has created?” Would



that be an accurate lead-in to a spiritual conversation? Is nature really an illustration of His love?

Certainly, there is a beauty there, but it's actually a result of judgment. The Grand Canyon wasn't a part of the original creation, it was formed from a cataclysmic act of God's judgment on a wicked world, a violent global flood that tore into the earth and entombed billions of living organisms.

That's the real bigger picture, and to communicate something else to a non-believer isn't communicating the fullness of biblical Christianity.

I remember being in the British Museum in London. It's an impressive place, filled with a massive collection of statues and artifacts that the British have obtained from around the



world over the years. I was watching a group looking at one of the statues from ancient Greece. It was missing part of the head, both arms, and part of the torso. Still, it stood tall, the white marble shining in the light. People were looking at it, saying, “Wonderful!” “Inspiring!” “Beautiful!” But a little boy nearby said, “What are you talking about? It looks all broken to me!”

Both observations were correct, of course. The adults could imagine the beauty in the fact that a tremendously talented sculptor had, at one time, captured the wonder of the human physique in stone ... but the boy saw it for what it was today: a very broken and damaged sculpture. And you know, it is really the same with this earth. How many times do we as people look at this earth and say, “Look at this beautiful world and the trees and the birds and look at the other animals. Isn’t this a beautiful world that God made?” Well, I’ve got news for you: it all looks broken to me. It’s a broken and damaged world. And when we use nature as an example of God’s beauty and love, we can be giving the wrong idea if we’re not explaining it correctly.

The animated movie *Madagascar* does a great job of playing off of this. (That’s a great movie, by the way; very funny.) At one point all these animals are skipping through the forest. They’ve recently escaped from the zoo to find a better life in the wild. As they meander through the woods, the song “What a Wonderful World,” first sung by Louie Armstrong, is playing in the background ... but every time they turn around, an animal jumps out of the bushes and grabs some cute little furry creature and rips its head off, or swallows it, or puts the squeeze on it.

The irony is hysterical. Sure, it's very funny in an animated movie like *Madagascar*, but it's not so funny when it's in your own neighborhood, or in your own family. This world is filled with disease, destruction, decay, and death ... and when it comes to our home, the ramifications can spread like shock waves through every aspect of our being.