



**WHY DO
BAD THINGS
HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?**

*A Biblical look at
the problem of suffering*



MELVIN TINKER



CHRISTIAN FOCUS





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This book is dedicated with gratitude
to my parents.





Foreword

Throughout my own attempts to share the Christian Faith with others the one question that comes up more than any other is the title of this book, ‘Why do bad things happen to good people?’ or as it’s sometimes put: ‘How in a world of suffering can you believe in a God of Love? Why do people suffer?’ These are timeless and universal questions to which there are no simple answers. However, the Christian faith stands out from all the other religions in the world, and sheds unique light on this question and enables us to explore it with new perspectives.

Melvin Tinker in this lucid and relevant book leads us in the exploration. He is widely read and shows how the Bible offers us insights that are both authoritative and contemporary. Melvin is also a pastor and comes to the question with all the sensitivity of one who has come alongside those who suffer and has heard their cries and their questionings.





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Throughout these pages he never loses sight of the two sides of the coin – God is Love and God is omnipotent. As with a coin it is difficult to see both sides at once; so when we suffer it can be hard to believe both truths about God – that he is both all loving and all powerful. The dominant theme of this book is the sovereignty of God which the author offers as the key doctrine to coming to terms both theoretically and pastorally with the reality of suffering.

Melvin writes in a style that draws the reader into the argument always anticipating the question of the reader. Although these chapters are easy to read (Melvin is a gifted teacher both in the pulpit and on the written page) the reader will find the arguments strong meat, not least chapter eight. I encourage you to approach this subject prayerfully. Theology without prayer is but an academic exercise; with prayer it becomes the means of knowing God and his will for our lives.

More than ever in our recent history the church needs to equip the followers of Jesus to face the questions that seekers after truth and faith are asking. This book is a valuable tool for all Christians wanting to think through their faith for themselves and for the sake of others.

The Right Reverend James Jones,
Bishop of Liverpool





Preface

Switch on the TV, pick up a newspaper, listen to the radio, and there will be at least one item dealing with tragedy – a murder, a train crash, a well-known celebrity struck down in her prime with cancer. It is a sad, sick world causing many to ask the questions: ‘Why? If there is a good God, why does he permit such things to happen? Can’t he *do* something? Doesn’t he care?’

Of course, from one point of view there can never be a full explanation in answer to the question ‘Why?’ The nature of evil is such that it inhabits that sphere of our existence which is dark and impenetrable to reason. Pastorally, the call is often simply to ‘weep with those who weep’ and to offer practical, loving support, including our prayers. Also we need to foster, as much as is humanly possible, the conditions which minimize the occurrence of such horrors. Nevertheless, while a total explanation of these and similar events (including more





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‘natural tragedies’) may not be possible, the Christian believes that God has spoken and acted in such a way that *some* understanding, however tentative, lies within our grasp.

The Bible is a realistic book, dealing with the way things are and not merely as we would like them to be. What is more, the Bible makes the amazing claim that the One who created this world entered into it as a baby in Bethlehem and died as a young man on a cross in Golgotha. The Nazarene, Jesus, was ‘Emmanuel’, meaning ‘God with us’. In other words, God knows from the ‘inside’ what suffering is. Therefore, it would be very surprising indeed if the Bible were found to be silent on this matter of the ‘problem of pain’. As we shall see, the Bible is far from silent; it provides penetrating insight into the whole question of evil and suffering which is without parallel. While what is given may not be exhaustive, the Christian believes it is sufficient (2 Tim. 3:16f.).

The purpose of this book is not to give *the* answer to the problem of evil in general or suffering in particular, but, rather by a combination of a biblical overview and Bible exposition, to indicate practical ways by which we may come to terms with living in a broken, suffering world against the backdrop of God’s greater sovereign purposes.





Preface

The first chapter attempts to provide the overview, indicating one way of perceiving the question of suffering which I believe is true to the Bible's main emphasis. This chapter is doctrinal in nature and touches on some philosophical questions. While the following chapters can be read independently of the opening section, it is worth wrestling with it in order to have a wider framework within which one can place the rest.

There then follows a series of expositions designed to uncover the meaning of certain biblical texts as well as to drive home their application for us today. Not surprisingly, the book of Job receives extensive treatment, it being the most well-known story from the Scriptures which specifically addresses the problem of innocent suffering 'head on', albeit in poetic form. Then, having considered one special form of suffering (spiritual depression), we turn to some key New Testament passages which highlight the dominant themes of the whole Bible on the question of suffering. Vitaly important in this regard is Jesus' teaching in Luke 13 which tends to be largely neglected.

This book tries to tread the difficult path of affirming with Scripture the sovereignty of God without, at the same time, trivialising the suffering of man. It is firmly believed that this





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God who is sovereign over all (including our 'losses and crosses' as the Puritans would say) is our ultimate source of comfort and, therefore, hope. One early Christian writer, offering wisdom and comfort to his congregations undergoing tremendous suffering for their faith, summarises this position well when he wrote: 'For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise (literally, 'suffer with') our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need' (Heb. 4:15, 16).



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Soli Deo Gloria.

