

Suffering... Why?

Coming to grips with suffering, from the story of Adam and Eve

The story of Adam and Eve provides an enlightening glimpse as to why a loving God allows suffering.

The story does seem strange to begin with though, because it looks like God meant Adam and Eve to suffer. First he creates a tree, the fruit of which when eaten would expose Adam and Eve to evil, and then God lets the Devil loose on them to tempt them into eating it. They don't stand a chance, of course. The fruit is irresistible and the Devil has no trouble getting them to eat it. Result? Adam and Eve are overwhelmed by the Devil's evil influence, and from then on they suffer.

But the story doesn't end there. Right after Adam and Eve eat the fruit, they feel so ashamed about being naked they scamper off into the bushes to cover themselves up with fig leaves. God could've left them in their ridiculous fig leaves, but he doesn't. He personally provides them with clothes made of soft, long-lasting leather. So right after Adam and Eve make the worst mistake possible, God doesn't reject them, he extends mercy to them.

In wondering why God did that, I discovered to my surprise that he does the same thing with the rest of us too, "[For God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all \(Romans 11:32\)](#)." God lets evil have its way with us first, and then he extends his mercy. But why do it that way? Why let evil have a go at us at all, when it causes us so much grief?

A couple of parents helped me out on this point, in how they dealt with their teenage daughter. She was exactly like Adam and Eve - not the least bit interested in listening to advice or warnings either - and the world looked just as good to her as the fruit did to Eve. She too found excuse to reject her parents so she could live as she jolly well pleased. To no one's surprise she ended up pregnant and desperate.

Heartbreaking though it was to see her suffer, her parents knew some good might come of it. First, she'd learn she wasn't as smart as she thought she was and secondly, she might admit it, and that's when they'd extend mercy to her.

Why mercy? Because when Adam and Eve made a horrible mess of their lives, God was merciful. When their daughter, therefore, finally got up the courage to tell them what she'd done, they weren't angry or condemning. Instead, they invited her back home and helped her take care of her child.

It gave me a glimpse into how God operates with us. Like a loving parent, he warns us through the story of Adam and Eve, and dozens of other stories in the Bible, that evil is real and we cannot escape it. We may think we can handle whatever life throws at us, and we're strong enough to fend it off, but we aren't as smart as we think we are, either. Suffering soon teaches us that.

But that's just the first step. After we've experienced evil in its many and varied manifestations and we turn to God for help, that's when God extends his mercy to us. We discover, perhaps to our eternal shock, that he doesn't hold anything we've done wrong against us (**2 Corinthians 5:19**). You'd think he'd want nothing to do with us after what we've done, but instead he freely forgives us and offers to take care of us, just like the girl's parents forgave and took care of her.

And why does God do that? For the same reason the parents forgave their daughter. They longed for a relationship with her, just like God longs for a relationship with us. And that's where mercy comes in, because it's through mercy that love really shows, and when love really shows, that's when a relationship is more likely to begin.

Wonderful, because that's exactly what God wants to begin with us. He longs for a relationship with us that will last us happily for eternity. And here we see how he does it. He does it in two stages - first, through suffering, and then through mercy (exactly the same two stages the parents got a relationship started with their daughter).

Suffering plays its part in showing us what destroys our relationship with God. It's the same thing that destroyed Adam and Eve's relationship with God and the girl's relationship with her parents. It was the overwhelming power of evil. And how do we come to understand the power of evil? Through the enormous suffering it creates, for us personally and for the world in general.

But after we've suffered the consequences of our weakness and stupidity, and we admit we need help, God's ready for us with open arms. Now we get to experience the power of mercy. And for a relationship with God to get off the ground, it takes both suffering and mercy. First, through suffering, we learn what destroyed our relationship with God (so it never happens again), and secondly, what restored it - it was God's great mercy.

Suffering and mercy, the way to a relationship with God, at last. The suffering part isn't pleasant, but it's necessary. We have to know the power of evil first, because there's no relationship with God without it. Which explains why Adam and Eve had to experience evil, too.