

Question: Why do you think God created humans so that they have to suffer pain?

Questions about pain and suffering are difficult to address, and we are not likely to find one answer that will satisfy everyone. The brief and passing experience with pain that most of us deal with cannot be compared with the almost constant experience of pain that other people face. Especially for the latter, mere words of explanation cannot bring relief. But in compassion for anyone who experiences pain, I feel compelled to offer at least one possible explanation with the hope that this might help them bear their pains.

As bad as pain may be, it is also a lifesaver. Pain is a mechanism God has given us to warn of danger. If we step on a nail or touch a hot stove, the pain we feel leads us to take immediate action to remedy the situation. Without the pain, we might not take the needed action quickly enough to prevent serious harm. When we feel an internal pain, we go to the doctor because pain is a symptom of some illness that might take away our lives.

Many years ago I read about a little boy from Pembury, England, who could not feel pain. He had been diagnosed with “ganglio-neuropathy.” Something was wrong with the nerve centers (ganglia) that transmit the sensation of pain to the brain. The child was scarred from head to toe with injuries that he never felt. At the age of nine months, he almost completely gouged out one of his eyes without feeling any pain. Doctors were amazed to find that they needed no anesthetic to operate on him. At two years, he was found kneeling on a hot oven door with his hands and knees cooking, yet he felt no pain. In the final sentence of the article about the boy, his father stated that life had played a cruel trick on his son “by denying him the gift of pain.”

I’m sure that God could have created some other way to warn us of danger, but I suspect that any system he made would have presented some kind of problem for us. In his wisdom, God chose what he knew was in our best interest. The apostle John wrote that “we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love” (1 John 4:16). Although difficult for us to see sometimes, pain is a gift of God’s love.

Understanding why we have pain does not lessen the pain. Some pain can be controlled by the chemicals (medications) available in God’s creation. We can use them with thanksgiving to our creator God.

But when the medicine cannot reach our pains, there are others things we can do that may make it more bearable.

Begin by drawing near to God in prayer. He has promised that he will never forsake his people (Hebrews 13:5). Pain is somehow more bearable when we do not try to handle it alone but allow our heavenly Father to walk beside us. Pain has been a means of spiritual growth and a closer walk with God for many Christians. If we have little hope of finding relief from pain in this world, we can allow it become an incentive to someday move into God's eternal presence where he "will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain" (Revelation 21:4).

In addition, we can be determined to make our pain work for us and for other sufferers instead of allowing it to embitter or harden us. We may get at least some of the attention off our pain by focusing on others and using what we may learn through this experience that might help them. If anyone should have compassion for someone in pain, it should be a person who often suffers pain.

May those of us who know and love friends and family who face constant pain be patient, compassionate and always mindful of them. We may not be able to relieve their pain, but we can reassure them of our love and the love of Jesus, even in their pain.

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