



The Question That Never Goes Away

Philip Yancey

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Some days, the news seems too much to bear. Yet another tsunami or earthquake or flood or fire or war atrocity. One more gun-toting madman stalking young people in idyllic Norway or moviegoers in Colorado or schoolchildren in Newtown, Connecticut. We turn off the news only to get a phone call about expectant parents with a stillborn baby, or a loved one whose cancer has returned.

Really, God? we ask. This again?

If we have faith in God, it gets shaken to the core. What was God doing in the moment when that tragedy could have been prevented? If we can't trust God to keep our children safe or our loved ones from dying in agony, what can we trust God for?

In his classic book *Where Is God When It Hurts*, Philip Yancey gave us permission to doubt, reasons not to abandon faith, and practical ways to reach out to hurting people. Now, with new perspectives and stories gathered across nearly twenty-five years, once again he tackles the hard questions head-on. His visits to three places in 2012 raised the old problems with new urgency.

More veteran pilgrim than curious journalist in his later years, Yancey faces with his trademark honesty the issues that often undermine faith, yet he emerges with comfort and hope. Along the way, he shows that Christians have an important role to play in bringing healing to a deeply wounded world.

There are hopeful reasons to ask, once again, the question that never goes away. . . .

The Question That Never Goes Away Details

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From Reader Review The Question That Never Goes Away for online ebook

Emily says

This is a sequel to Yancey's first book, *Where is God when it hurts*.

"Why" is the question that never goes away, and he doesn't attempt to provide easy answers. He speaks of his own experiences with suffering, and of times he's been asked to counsel people who have been through horrible tragedies. One point he keeps coming back to is that actions speak louder than words in these situations.

If the church does its job, people don't torment themselves wondering where God is. They know the answer.

He also has some great quotes from other writers, like this one I liked from Miroslav Volf.

Those who observe suffering are tempted to reject God; those who experience it often cannot give up on God, their solace and their agony.

Yancey's writing is compassionate and thought-provoking. There's a lot of his work I haven't read, and this book makes me want to read more.

Lynai says

This book renewed my faith in a God who is present even in pain. More thoughts on this soon.

UPDATE

As I am writing this post, I am also watching a TV special on the 1st anniversary of Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) which ravaged the country on exactly this same day last year. Videos of that tragic day were shown again and my heart is crushed each time I see people crying about their losses and traumatic experiences. There was the man who was able to save a co-worker from being washed away by the flood but lost his 3 children. Another man was shown carrying his dead daughter on his arms. A woman was crying and pleading for help from relatives who might get to watch the video. Footage caught during the height of the storm and the resulting storm surge were replayed and it felt as if it was only yesterday when the deadly calamity made a ghost town of almost all of Leyte.

One year later, survivors are trying to rebuild their lives but the pain lingers and the memory of the tragedy continue to haunt them.

Where is God in the midst of this pain?

What is God up to in the face of this tragedy?

Where is God when it hurts?

In *The Question That Never Goes Away*, Philip Yancey revisited these questions which he attempted to answer in his classic book written 30 years ago, *Where Is God When It Hurts? The Question That Never Goes Away* was written on the face of the tragedy that befell Sandy Hook Elementary School when a gunman killed 20 elementary pupils in 2011. Although written before Typhoon Yolanda, the book still contained examples on unspeakable and unexplainable tragedies similar to it. There was the said Sandy Hook shooting, the earthquake and tsunami in Japan in 2011, the Sarajevo siege. Suffering is always present, always exists, never stops. It can be a person's personal tragedy, or a nation under sorrow. But the question lingers. If there is really a God, why does He allow these things to happen?

Continue reading.

Mina Syrian says

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Adam Robinson says

Wow. Just Wow. There's a reason that people invite Yancey to come speak to them after a tragedy and not John Piper. Yancey has a way of addressing the hardest questions in life with tenderness, theological depth, and compassion. His answers don't seem rigid, trite, or patronizing. His direct involvement in helping people through some of the worst tragedies of the past few years is a testament to this. This short book is a must read for all of us.

Nancy Segovia says

Better than the first

I found this book to be much richer and complete than the first book, "Where is God When it Hurts." In his first book, I felt that I was being fed Christian pablum. However, comma in this book I found some real answers, such as, dad is it going to take your suffering away but he will be there to help you through it . This is the kind of information I was seeking and I found it in this book I highly recommend it for those who are suffering and want to know why

Nermine Hosni says

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Steve Peifer says

I just read an autobiography so bad I mourned the trees sacrificed to create such a dumb waste of time. So grateful that my next book is by Philip Yancey, who does flinch at the hard questions but asks anyway. If you have gone through or are going through something hard, this is the book for you. It flees from dumb religious cliches and runs toward hard truth. What a gift to the church he is.

Pam Brown says

This book was hard to read. I don't mean that it had big words or long sentences. I mean he went on and on about so much suffering in so many different disasters. He sure had plenty to choose from. We don't recover from one before there's another. Imagine if we actually lived through them instead of just catching the headlines.

Actually, I'd rather not imagine. I'd probably like this book better if he'd just tell me the answer in ten words or less. Of course that can't be done, so I don't really blame him, and I'll continue to read more and more of Yancey's books. Of course that list includes Yancey's "Where Is God When It Hurts?", to which this book is a sequel.

If I get just one nugget out of a book it's worth reading. Some books are even worth keeping, but not this one. It's not that there aren't any nuggets, but they aren't short and quote worthy, not bits I'd highlight in my copy if I kept it. But let me try to summarize what I got out of it, as these lessons lingered with me long after each time I set the book down.

Yancey takes us to the biblical story of the man born blind. Jewish tradition was that suffering was punishment for sin. Did this man sin in the womb, or did one of his parents sin? Focusing on the cause leads to accusation, condemnation and blame. Instead, Jesus focused on the effect: this man was suffering, so he healed him. It's like what Mr. Rogers' mother told him when he was a child about bad things happening - look for the helpers. There are always people who are willing to get up and help, and we should focus on them.

Yancey reminds us that God suffered when His son did, yet He sent His son for that assignment. God doesn't cause our suffering, and He won't always protect us from it, but He suffers when we suffer. We're not alone in our suffering because He understands.

When we lose beloved people or things we've lost a gift. We can focus on the loss, or we can cherish memories of the gift.

People can never be replaced. At the end of Job's story, God doubled what he had before. After losing everything Job gained twice as many livestock, but gained only the same number of children he had before, and there was no mention of a new wife. His new children were added to the number of those he'd lost, and if his wife was still alive she was still his wife.

He quotes Bonhoeffer near the end: "I believe that God will give us in each state of emergency as much power of resistance as we need. But he will not give in advance, so that we do not rely on ourselves but on Him alone." I hope he's wrong. I hope that if I face disaster and astounding loss I'd be better prepared, in part from the lessons in this book.

The truth is that I enjoy this book more now that I've finished reading it. While reading I was distressed by so much suffering, but now I'm left with the lessons. I hope to lose the pain and keep the lessons.

Reid McCormick says

"Why are you shocked and upset? What else should we expect from an impersonal universe of random indifference?"

Suffering is a problem. Whether you are an atheist, extreme fundamentalist or somewhere in between, there is a basic need to answer the question of suffering. Why does it happen? What should we do when it happens? Every religion will give you a different response, even in Christianity there is no one accepted response to suffering. Scripture is filled with suffering and people inadequate responses.

I have read many books on pain and suffering. C.S. Lewis is probably the best thinker and author to approach the subject, but Philip Yancey is a very close second place. Yancey has written several classics on suffering including *Where is God When it Hurts?* and *Disappointment with God*. This newer title *The Question that Never Goes Away* continues the conversation.

Over the past decades, we have experienced some of the biggest atrocities history has ever seen. Tsunamis have destroyed civilizations. Terrorists have slaughtered thousands and terrified the world. Gunmen have made our schools combat zones. In these moments, we have looked around and simply yet forcefully asked, "Why?"

Unlike man theologians, Yancey does not try to answer the question. It is foolish to do so. Some "Christian" personalities have blamed these catastrophes on our unfaithfulness or the country's sinfulness. This is the same method fabricated by Job's friends during his experience. It is downright foolish to try to make sense of it all.

So what is God's response to suffering? Fortunately we have a God that has responded. How did Jesus respond to suffering? He definitely did not dole out feel-good philosophies or convenient theology, instead he healed people and suffered alongside them with compassion. Yancey adds, "No other religion has this model of God identifying so deeply and compassionately with humanity." Usually, the people who observe suffering reject God, but the people who experience suffering need God.

This is a short yet difficult book to read. Yancey does not candy-coat the topic, he fills the book with devastating stories of sufferings, but it is a good reminder that there is a problem but much bigger solution. Once you flip the question around, things make a little more sense, “Where is no-God when it hurts?”

I definitely recommend this book especially after you have read Yancey’s previous works mentioned.

Grace James says

I was excited to read this book and be challenged mentally and spiritually, but it let me down a bit. The tragic recounts of stories that were told were interesting and heartbreaking, but the same 3 or 4 stories were the main focuses and seemed repetitive after a while. And the author’s comments in between seemed like they were reaching to connect with his theme and the audience, when in reality I wasn’t a fan of them at all. I found myself skimming through the book to find the more interesting bits, and even then it didn’t hold my attention at all. It was a struggle to finish this book, and even now I couldn’t say what the main point of it is because I was just bored by all of it.

David Mamdouh says

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Tim Chavel says

This book by one of my favorite authors is excellent. If you have ever suffered or you are in the midst of suffering I highly recommend this book. It will challenge you and bring comfort to your heart. I trust you will enjoy the quotes below.

Faith, I’ve concluded, means believing in advance what will only make sense in reverse.

Virtually every passage on suffering in the New Testament deflects the emphasis from *cause* to *response*. Although we cannot grasp the master plan of the universe, which allows for so much evil in pain (the *Why?* question), we can nevertheless respond in two important ways. First, we can find meaning in the midst of suffering. Second, we can offer real and practical help to those in need. In his book *The Problem of Pain* C. S. Lewis wrote, “**God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.**” I hesitate to disagree with Lewis, yet that image makes me uncomfortable. It calls to mind a football coach on the sideline yelling at his players through a bullhorn, and some readers may infer from the metaphor that God dishes out something to get our attention. I don’t think Lewis intended such an inference, and for that reason I would change the image from megaphone to hearing aid. When suffering strikes, it gives us, the afflicted ones, an opportunity to turn up the volume and attend to crucial messages that we might otherwise ignore.

Were it possible, we might look beyond the reach of our knowing... Then perhaps we would endure our griefs with even greater trust than our joys. For they are the moments when something new has entered into us, something unfamiliar. ... Everything within us steps back; a silence ensues, and something new ... stands

in the center and is silent. ~Rainer Maria Rilke

"Despair is suffering without meaning," he wrote; and "everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms -- to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances." – Victor Frankl

A University researching pain recruited volunteers to test how long they could keep their feet in buckets of freezing water. They observed that when a companion was allowed in the room, the volunteer could endure the cold twice as long as those who suffered alone. "The presence of another caring person doubles the amount of pain person can endure," the researchers concluded. All too often our pain-denying, death-denying culture does just the opposite: we put suffering people in hospitals and nursing homes, isolating them from normal human contact. Two out of three people die in such institutions, often alone. Every survey shows that a person who is connected with a caring community heals faster and better. Known "enemies of recovery" such as stress, guilt, anger, anxiety, and loneliness are best defeated by a compassionate community.

For whatever reason, God has chosen to respond to the human predicament not by waving a magic wand to make evil and suffering disappear but by absorbing it in person. "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us," wrote John in the prologue to his Gospel. In the face of suffering, words do not suffice. We need something more: the Word made flesh, actual living proof that God has not abandoned us. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it, "Only a suffering God can help."

Eugene Peterson's *The Message* translates the verse in John as "The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood." What kind of neighborhood to Jesus move into? To answer that question requires a brief history lesson. A succession of great empires tramp through the territory of Israel as if wiping their feet on the vaunted promised land. After the Syrians and Babylonians came the Persians, who were in turn defeated by Alexander the Great. When Alexander died, a series of successors carved up his territory, the most infamous being Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Jews iconic villain until Hitler.

Frustrated by military defeats elsewhere, Antiochus began waging war against the Jewish religion. He transformed the temple of God into a worship center for Zeus and proclaimed himself God incarnate. He forced young boys to undergo reverse circumcision operations and flogged an aged priest to death for refusing to eat pork. In one of his most notorious acts, he sacrifice and unclean pig on the altar in the Most Holy Place, smearing its blood around the temple sanctuary.

Antiochus's actions so incensed the Jews that they rose up in an armed revolt led by the Maccabean's, a triumph commemorated in the Jewish holiday Hanukkah. Their victory was short-lived. Before long, Roman legions marched into Palestine to quash the rebellion and appointed Herod their "King of the Jews." After the Roman conquest, nearly the entire land lay in ruins. Herod was sickly and approaching seventy when he heard rumors of a new king born in Bethlehem, and soon howls of grief from the families of slain infants drowned out the angels' stirring chorus of "Glory to God... and on earth peace."

This, then, was the neighborhood Jesus moved into: a sinister place with a somber past and a fearful future.

"When God seems absent, sometimes it's up to us to show his presence," he told me. Often the world only knows the truth of Immanuel, "God with us," because of his followers.

"People said they grew more during seasons of loss, pain, and crisis than they did at any other time." We discover the value of suffering only by suffering -- not as part of God's original or ultimate plan for us, but as a redemptive transformation takes place in the midst of trial.

“This is not the worst thing to ever happen! Cancer is so limited. It cannot cripple love, shatter hope, corrode faith, eat away peace, destroy confidence, kill friendship, shut out memories, silence courage, quench the Spirit or lessen in the power of Jesus.” ~Margaret, a Scottish woman suffering with throat cancer

"Affliction is the best book in my library," said Martin Luther. ... pain redeemed impresses me more than pain removed. We are concerned with how things turn out; God seems more concerned with how *we* turn out.

“You can protest against the evil in the world only if you believe in a Good God,” Wolf also said. “Otherwise the protest doesn’t make sense.”

“I believe that God can and will generate good out of everything, even out of the worst evil. For that, he needs people who allow that everything that happens fits into a pattern for good.

I believe that God will give us each state of emergency as much power of resistance as we need. But he will not give in advance, so that we do not rely on ourselves but on Him alone. Through such faith all anxiety concerning the future should be overcome.

I believe that even our mistakes and failings are not in vain, and that it is not more difficult for God to cope with these as with our assumed good deeds.

I believe that God is not a timeless fate, but that he waits for and responds to honest prayers and responsible action." ~Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Death, said Bonhoeffer, is the supreme festival on the road to freedom.

... that the issue is not whether I agree with someone but rather how I treat someone with whom I profoundly disagree. We Christians are called to use the “weapons of grace,” which means treating even our opponents with love and respect.

I yearn for the church to compete just as hard in conveying what Paul calls the “incomparable riches” of God’s grace. Often, it seems, we’re perceived more as guilt dispensers than as grace dispensers.

God, help me to see others not as my enemies or as ungodly but rather as *thirsty* people. And give me the courage and compassion to offer your Living Water, which alone quenches deep thirst. ~Henri Nouwen

Hany Adeeb says

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Silvia Fathy says

Nicki says

I enjoyed reading this a lot, and found it very helpful in the light of all the shocking world events that keep happening on the planet. Philip Yancey is never condescending but very honest in this book about how helpless he feels when people ask him difficult questions. He confesses that doesn't have all the answers, but what he does say and points to is really very helpful. I definitely recommend this book.

Erin Henry says

God is with us through suffering and God works through the church to help those who hurt. Go out, do good and be with those who suffer.

Blythe says

Thoroughly appreciate this book. It's short enough and easy to read so that someone in the midst of a trial could pick it up without being overwhelmed. He has great insight and deep compassion; however, it's not a terribly deep book, which I don't think it was meant to be, and when I read it I was hoping for some deeper discussion and deeper digging. But over all, it's wonderful.

Sameh Maher says

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Pam says

A book to be added to the shelves of anyone who has questioned their god(s) or the ways of the world. The author doesn't offer a concrete answer; rather he takes testimony, wisdom, history and personal study and pulls from the mix guidance, hope and understanding that we can all walk away with. This book isn't a religious text nor should it be viewed as such. Whether or not you believe in god, practice faith or consider yourself an atheist you can take something from this book.

Robert Martin says

In the midst

Suffering... too bad our American society in general doesn't understand it. Even the tragedies that Yancey mentioned here are barely even addressed by our society. We experience them and then we try and fix them, but we really don't do anything **WITH** the suffering.

I can speak with experience. My family is suffering even as I write this with one member dealing with stage IV cancer and the rest of us working through all the difficulties and pain that comes from that. And yes, we cry out, "Why?" It's only natural.

But we are looking forward to a hope beyond the now. And even in the now, we are using our experiences to be strengthened and, by doing so, be used as God's instruments to help others experiencing similar trials and pain.

Yancey doesn't provide direct answers as to the "why". What he does with this book is help answer "what should I do". And it is an excellent read on this.
