

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

LIBBY: I'm Libby.

KAI: I'm Kai. This is Catholic Central.

Why do bad things happen to good people? It's one of the most difficult questions we all face.

LIBBY: Catholics have been wrestling with it for literally thousands of years.

KAI: Right. There's God and then there's ...

LIBBY: Bad things.

KAI: Yeah. Today, we'll take a look at how Navy SEALs and horror movies help us to understand why bad things happen.

LIBBY: Can cat videos do that?

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KAI: Suffering. Who needs it? It's a huge question.

LIBBY: And we can't solve it in the next 10 minutes.

KAI: That's disappointing.

LIBBY: But, no matter who you are, bad things do happen in your life and in the lives of the people you love most.

KAI: Right. So, thinking about this will help you be there for those you care about.

LIBBY: And help you see the things that happen in your life in a more meaningful context.

KAI: God allowing bad things to happen to good people is one of the biggest reasons why some people believe God either doesn't care or isn't there at all.

LIBBY: Even for people who do believe in God, it's one of the hardest things to figure out.

KAI: Think of it like this. Ask random people to define God. Even people who disagree on some things or those who don't even believe in God will tell you a few major attributes that God has or should have. One, God is all-powerful. Two, God is all-knowing. Three, God is all-loving. Four, God is all-bearded.

LIBBY: If I loved Kai with every fiber of my being and knew all of his problems, and could do anything in the world to fix them, I'd definitely do it.

KAI: Wow. Thanks.

LIBBY: I wouldn't let anything go wrong for Kai ever. I'd make sure he'd never got sick, everyone would like him, and he'd win the lottery every week.

KAI: That sounds awesome. Wait a minute, that's not how my life is at all.

LIBBY: So, if God is all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, why doesn't he fix all of your problems, or all the problems in the whole world?

KAI: Turn on any news or hop on the old Internet. You'll see war and terrorism. Horrible stuff.

LIBBY: I mean the things that happen in our own lives usually aren't as dramatic, but it's still a struggle to deal with mistreatment or someone hurting a loved one.

KAI: You know what, this is just ... It's getting really heavy right now. Let's cut it. Can we just cue the cat video, please?

LIBBY: You did it Kai.

KAI: Wait, what'd I do?

LIBBY: You made the call to watch a cat video. You just exercise free will. Free will, to be able to choose one thing or another. One of the major reasons why bad things happen and people suffer is we, human beings, have free will.

KAI: We can choose to be nice to each other or basically just be jerks.

LIBBY: And that's true from the level of, like, cutting in line at Starbucks, and all the way up to the Holocaust and the major crimes of history.

KAI: So, if God prevented people from doing bad things or choosing to do bad things, and we wouldn't have free will.

LIBBY: Free will is one of the things we value most as human-beings.

KAI: In fact, some people, like one of my favorite Catholic thinkers, St. Thomas Aquinas, say that free will is so fundamentally part of being a human, that we literally couldn't exist as humans without it.

LIBBY: So, it makes sense that an all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God allows us free will because it's necessary to be fully human.

KAI: Wait, why is that?

LIBBY: Well, love. Catholics believe that humans are made to love, and true love is a free choice for the good of another. This allows us to reflect the image of an all-loving God. A God who freely chooses to love us. A God who wants our love, too, but not forced or compelled.

KAI: So, we're done. Thanks for watching folks. We'll be back next week.

LIBBY: Hold on, Kai. Okay. Sure. free will can explain why God lets people do bad things to other people.

KAI: Ouch. Libby!

LIBBY: But it doesn't explain why God doesn't just totally stop bad things from happening. A lot of people say, "Well, free will is great, but how does that explain cancer, droughts and other bad things?"

KAI: Like random objects falling on you.

LIBBY: Bad things that have nothing to do with people choosing them or causing them.

KAI: Some Catholic thinkers say this, "Suffering is one of the ways that God brings us closer to Himself."

LIBBY: Closer to ... But, wait, if someone's making me suffer, I don't normally feel closer to them.

KAI: Okay, yeah. But what about when you suffer with someone?

LIBBY: Oh, so like a really tough camping trip?

KAI: Sore feet. Cold weather. Lost in the woods.

LIBBY: But you bonded with the people you're camping with, right?

KAI: Definitely.

LIBBY: That's why training to become Navy SEALs and other really demanding jobs is so intense.

KAI: During SEAL training, instructors push candidates way past their physical and mental limits. At the end, the SEALs who've shared all of that misery will literally die for each other.

LIBBY: We're naturally wired so that suffering brings us closer to the ones that really love us and we can really trust. We learn how to empathize with others who are suffering.

KAI: Oh, wait a minute, Libby. This might have been a bad example. Does that make God a drill instructor? He's pushing us through suffering just so that we'll suffer and come closer together?

LIBBY: No. Catholics believe God is right down there in the surf suffering next to us, which is a core truth of Christianity.

KAI: Right. That God came to earth as a human being in the person of Jesus to suffer all the same things that we do. He was poor.

LIBBY: He was disrespected.

KAI: He endured the death of his foster father, Joseph.

LIBBY: He was spat on and cursed.

KAI: Thrown out of a ton of places and rejected by a lot of people.

LIBBY: And then, ultimately, he was betrayed, tortured and executed for a crime he didn't commit.

KAI: So, when we feel pain, Catholics understand that we're feeling pain that God felt as a human being. That's why the Cross is such a powerful symbol for Christians. It visibly reminds them that God is with us.

LIBBY: And of how much God loves us that he will make our suffering his own, and suffer anything to set us free. Catholics aren't saying that suffering isn't real or that suffering doesn't really hurt.

KAI: Right. But they do believe that there's meaning to it.

LIBBY: And that God is with us every step of the way.

KAI: Okay. So, that helps, but are we still missing something? I mean, it's nice to know that God is with me with I break my leg. But what about the girl who dies of malaria in a slum somewhere? Her story's over.

LIBBY: That's what people thought about Jesus. After He was crucified by the Romans, His followers thought that was the end for Him, that His suffering had been for nothing. But when they saw Him risen from the dead three days later, He showed them there's an eternal life that's much bigger than what we have on earth.

KAI: The Catholic worldview, it puts life on earth in a larger context. It says, "We have souls." It says that our suffering is something we pass through to be fully reunited with God in Heaven.

LIBBY: Okay, Kai. I think now is the perfect time for our example of how the larger context works.

KAI: Right you are, Libby.

Did you hear that?

LIBBY: Don't open the door.

KAI: Nothing's better than a good horror movie scare.

LIBBY: The movies only scary because you forget you're not really in danger. Your fear is definitely real. It scares your socks off, but once the movie's over, and we go back outside, we remember that we're OK. Those feelings we had during the movie are much smaller than the greater reality of our lives.

KAI: In the Catholic context, this is a lot like the pain we experience during our lives. There's the pain, yes, and, of course, we're

focused on it in the moment. But it passes, and then comes the greater reality of God in eternity.

LIBBY: So, those are three Catholic answers to why bad things happen to good people. It's a good idea to think about these things before they happen to you.

KAI: One, that God gives people free will because that's what always them to love. Sometimes we abuse that free will and fail to love, which causes suffering.

LIBBY: And two, God suffers with us. Suffering has meaning that strengthens us and brings us closer to God and each other.

KAI: And three, now while suffering may seem overwhelming, it diminishes when we remember the eternal life that we're created for. Having this perspective doesn't take away suffering, but it does help us endure it.

LIBBY: The hardest time to believe in the Resurrection is when you're hanging on the Cross.

KAI: When we suffer, the greatest challenge is to find the meaning and hope.

LIBBY: And the Church gives us a place to do all of that together.

KAI: Remember, if a friend or a loved one is suffering ...

LIBBY: Be with them in compassion to help them through.

KAI: So, that's it for today. This is Catholic Central. Thanks for watching. I'm Kai.

LIBBY: And I'm Libby. And we'll see you next time.

KAI: Got to get some ice pack for that or something.

LIBBY: That's going to leave a mark.

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