

# Suffering



**If There Is a God  
Why Is There  
So Much Suffering?**

Dick Tripp

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## Foreword

We live in a time when life has been made very comfortable and easy for us, both through the increase in our wealth, and advances in psychotherapy and medical science. But we still experience pain: emotional, physical, the pain of loss and the pain of wrong.

And in a way still quite naturally and quite human we seek to avoid it. In 1995, a Private Members Bill, short-titled the Death with Dignity Bill, came before the New Zealand Parliament. In his introductory speech, Michael Laws said:

*I reject most strongly the view that this Bill is unchristian or immoral. That is a criticism that I have heard from certain religious leaders in the last wee while...I also reject the absolutely non-sensical view of some that for a person to die in pain, to die in anguish, and to die suffering, is good for the soul. Theology that teaches such barbarism is bankrupt and inhuman.*

In this short text, Dick Tripp shows us that a theology that encounters suffering

head-on, without an easy retreat into a contrived death, does indeed enable us to encounter both the depths of our humanity and the living God. He carefully, and using a wide range of illustrations, shows us that the God who shares our suffering is not an abstract and philosophically remote ideal, but a living person; and that in travelling our way with him, we will not merely survive for that is the way to true greatness.

This is a timely book, and will, I am sure, be of great help to Christians and seekers alike, in getting to grips with this age-old human problem.

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## Introduction

Few questions have exercised the minds of people down the ages more than the question of suffering. In an otherwise beautiful world, why is there suffering? The problem at times touches all of our lives.

In these days of instant communication we are confronted regularly with unbelievable suffering caused by the major horrors of famine and war. Who can imagine the suffering experienced by a woman in Croatia who has been raped many times, whose husband had been hacked to pieces and brothers also brutally murdered, and whose house, with all her possessions, has been burned to the ground. Even though we may become immune to such things that happen at a distance, sooner or later suffering strikes closer to home, whether in our own lives or in the lives of those who are close to us.

Some people have to live with incredible suffering, either physical or emotional. I think of a couple in their late sixties. They have lost all their five children, two in infancy, two through cancer and one by suicide. Studdert Kennedy, chaplain to the men in the trenches in the First World War, said that if a person was undisturbed by the problem of pain, they were suffering either from a hardening of the heart, or a softening of the brain.

There is also no problem that impinges more directly on the question of the existence of God. In hundreds of conversations I have had with people about the relevance of the Christian faith, this question has come up more than any other. If there is a God why does he allow such suffering?

I believe that most people, unconsciously or otherwise, resist the idea that God is evil and desires to make life miserable for us. It is easier to reject the idea of God altogether. Many do believe in his existence, but think of him as no more than a "Life Force." However, the Bible declares that he is much

more than this. It states consistently that he is a personal, intelligent God who created this universe and that he is just, loving and compassionate. So why suffering?

### **One option**

Many, of course, *do* reject the idea of God altogether, for this or other reasons. This solves the problem by removing the dilemma. However, it also raises several other problems. First, there is no one to *blame* for the suffering. You may complain, but you have no right to complain and no one to complain to. If there is no God, why *shouldn't* there be suffering. In a godless universe there is no *reason* at all why there shouldn't be. Second, you have no one to turn to for strength to cope, other than your own limited resources or the resources of other humans who might hopefully care about your suffering.

To rule out the existence of God raises a third problem. How do you explain such things as love, unselfishness, gentleness, goodness, sacrifice, reason, intelligence, and justice? C. S. Lewis, professor of Medieval and Renaissance Literature at the University of Cambridge, said:

*When I was an atheist...my argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A person does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line...Atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning.*

Of course, whatever the problems of living without God, or whatever evidence there may be to the contrary, some are content to base their lives on that philosophy. Early in this century Bertrand Russell wrote *a Free Man's Worship*, in which he bravely preached:

*That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are the outcome of accidental collections of atoms...that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins...only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.*

In other words, as Russell clearly saw, if there is no God there is no ultimate meaning in anything. The purpose of this booklet is to offer something better than "the firm foundation of unyielding despair" for those who are looking for another option.

The option I will argue for is one that gives some meaning to the whole problem of suffering. It can also give one the courage to face it, the motivation to relieve it where possible, and the certainty of a final end to it. This end will not mean the end of everything. It will be the entering into a future that is so glorious that it will be beyond our most hopeful dreams, though we may get glimpses of it if we know where to look (John 16:13). It will be a future where even death itself is “**swallowed up in victory**” (1 Corinthians 15:54) and where the glory will be such that any comparison with the suffering that has gone before will be meaningless (Romans 8:18).

### **A good starting point**

We all have our prejudices and preconceived ideas. Being human, that is inevitable. The problem with our preconceptions is that they may cause us to overlook evidence that is important in arriving at the truth.

In one of Dorothy Sayers’ detective stories the investigator, Lord Peter Wimsey, is faced with a dilemma. All the known facts support the contention that a certain woman is responsible for the murder in question. However, Wimsey knows the woman's character so well that he is certain she could not have done it. In other words, there must be other facts that he does not know. So, working on the basis that she is innocent, he sets out to discover these other facts and, by building his case around them, eventually solves the mystery.

I believe it is helpful to approach the problem of suffering in the same manner. Assume that if there is a God he must be good. From this starting point see if there are other facts that at least make this view credible. Not all the bits of the puzzle may fit, but at least consider whether more pieces fit using this assumption than any other. As we look at the Christian viewpoint I will leave you, the reader, to judge whether or not this is so.

### **The Christian view of suffering**

There are six truths that together present a balanced Christian view of suffering.

#### **The Bible is realistic in its approach to suffering**

The Bible gives a good deal of attention to the reality of suffering. It does not regard it as an illusion as some religions and sects do, nor deal with it superficially. One of the larger books of the Bible, the book of Job, is given solely to this question. The books of Jeremiah and Habakkuk have much to say about it. About one third of the Psalms, the prayers of the Old Testament, are cries that arise out of doubt, disappointment, or pain.

The New Testament also has some very significant passages about suffering. When we come to the New Testament, however, there is no longer any of the questions we find in the Old Testament such as “Does God care? Has he forgotten to be merciful?” There is joy, confidence and hope here that even the greatest suffering cannot overwhelm. Something has made a dramatic difference. In the New Testament God has a face. He has made himself known in the person of Jesus Christ. We will explore the implications of this further on.

### **Love and freewill**

The Bible declares that we were created with certain God-like qualities. We have a dignity, abilities and spiritual qualities that put us on an altogether different level of being from the animal world. Above all, we were created to exist in a loving relationship both with God and with other humans. However, love cannot exist where there is not the freedom to choose. When I wanted to marry the woman who is my wife I did not take her by the throat and say, “You will love me...or else!” Whether we like it or not, love doesn't work that way. In creating us God loved us enough to give us the freedom to reject that love. Dante Alighieri in *The Divine Comedy* says:

*The greatest gift which God in his bounty bestowed in creating humans, and the most conformed to his own goodness, and that which he prizes the most, was the freedom of the will,*

The problem is that we messed things up. People turned away from God and we have all misused this gift of freewill. We choose alternatives to God. The Bible declares, **“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way”** (Isaiah 53:6). We are not only free to turn away from God. We are free to stay away. That is why hell has been called the greatest monument to human freedom and dignity.

### **The link between suffering and evil**

The freedom to choose leads on to another problem—the problem of evil. Who is responsible for the suffering in what was former Yugoslavia, or in Somalia, or Rwanda, or Sudan, or Angola? Again, who is responsible for the ecological rape of our planet, the pollution of the oceans and the atmosphere, and the destruction of the forests? Not all suffering is caused by human action, but the greater percentage of it is.

Religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, New Age and Christian Science tend to blur the distinction between good and evil, but not the Bible. We are responsible beings and when we choose evil to good, selfishness to love, wilfulness to God, then we, and others, suffer the consequences. The Bible emphasises strongly the link between suffering and evil. We are members of

a fallen and corrupted race, and though still capable of much good we somehow spoil whatever we put our hand to.

Although we may consider ourselves a little superior to others in the moral realm, we are all part of the problem. Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who experienced human nature in the raw in the labour camps of Siberia, said:

*If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.*

It is for this reason that God has not yet intervened to put an end to evil once and for all, as the Bible declares that one day he will. In his mercy he gives us the opportunity to change our ways and turn to him.

It is because of this inseparable link between suffering and evil that God could not deal with one without taking care of the other. The wonder of it all is that God has already acted to deal with the problem of evil through Jesus Christ. In doing so he has ultimately guaranteed the removal of suffering. Richard Halverson, former chaplain to the U. S. Senate, says:

*He was the Great Physician, and in the finest tradition of medical science, he was unwilling to remain preoccupied with the symptoms when he could destroy the disease. Jesus Christ was unwilling to settle for anything less than elimination of the cause of all evil in history.*

How will he achieve this? Let us explore this truth further.

### **God is not indifferent to suffering**

God chose to enter human history in the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> He was born in a feeding trough. At the age of one or two his parents took him to Egypt to escape King Herod's slaughter of all the small children in the area. He spent his early years in a foreign country. He grew up in obscurity, probably following his father's trade as a carpenter. He was poor, depending on the support of others for his public ministry.

Throughout his ministry he was accused of being a glutton, a madman, a drunkard, a deceiver, a demon or possessed of the devil, a friend of prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners. He was excommunicated from the synagogue and several times threatened with stoning. His home folks sought to throw him over a cliff.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bible teaches that within the Godhead there are three equal Persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, commonly spoken of as the Trinity. Jesus, the Son, took on human nature in the womb of Mary. I have dealt with the divinity of Jesus more fully in the booklet, *Is Jesus Really God?*

Finally he was betrayed, deserted by his friends, suffered the worst kind of flogging, and was nailed publicly to a wooden cross. He is described in the Bible as **“a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering”** (Isaiah 53:3). If Jesus is God, as the New Testament declares, and Christians have always believed, then *God knows all about suffering*. As Dorothy Sayers put in *Christian Letters to a Post-Christian World*:

*For whatever reason God chose to make people as they are—limited and suffering and subject to sorrows and death—he had the honesty and courage to take his own medicine. Whatever game he is playing with his creation, he has kept his own rules and played fair. He can exact nothing from us that he has not exacted from himself. He has himself gone through the whole human experience, from the trivial irritations of family life and the cramping restrictions of hard work and lack of money to the worst horrors of pain and humiliation, defeat, despair, and death. When he was man, he played the man. He was born in poverty and died in disgrace and thought it all worthwhile.*

Yet the physical and mental suffering I have described pales into insignificance beside another kind of suffering that Jesus endured on the cross. The Bible says, **“Christ carried the burden of our sins”** (1 John 2:2).

In some remarkable way, when Jesus hung on the cross he was taking on his own shoulders the consequences of the evil of the human race. This is the amazing centrepiece of the gospel story. The God who gave us the dignity of freedom of choice, now takes upon himself the consequences for our wrong choices. **“Christ died once for our sins. An innocent person died for those who are guilty. Christ did this to bring you to God”** (1 Peter 3:18). God suffered at the point of our greatest need. And that, for him, meant the greatest possible suffering.

Where true love exists, and where there is suffering, then love must suffer. American philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff, who lost a son in a climbing accident, says in his book *Lament For a Son*:

*God is love. That is why he suffers. To love our suffering world is to suffer...The one who does not see God's suffering does not see his love. So, suffering is down at the centre of things, deep down where the meaning is. Suffering is the meaning of our world. For love is meaning. And love suffers. The tears of God are the meaning of history.*

The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word “love.” For the Christian a true understanding of love must always begin at the cross of Jesus.

James Jones, in his very helpful book, *Why Do People Suffer?* tells the story of a school that collapsed, killing all the teachers and most of the children. A little boy, badly maimed, was rescued from the rubble and rushed to hospital. For hours a team of doctors and nurses fought to save his life while his mother waited anxiously outside the operating theatre. After seven hours of painstaking surgery the little boy died.

Instead of leaving it to the nurse to tell the mother, the surgeon went himself. As he broke the dreadful news the mother became hysterical in her grief and attacked the surgeon, pummelling his chest with her fists. But instead of pushing her away, the doctor held her to himself tightly until the woman's sobbing subsided and she rested cradled in his arms.

And then in the heavy silence the surgeon began to weep. Tears streamed down his face and grief racked his body. For he had come to the hospital the moment he heard that his one and only son had been killed in the same school.

We may feel angry with God at times. I somehow think he is big enough to take that. He understands. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"** (John 3:16).

The influential Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, once put it like this:

*"There cannot be a God of love" people say, "because if there was, and he looked upon the world, his heart would break." The church points to the Cross and says, "It did break."*

Lisa Goertz was a Jewish lady who lost most of her family in the Nazi holocaust, including her mother, husband, brother, son and daughter. At one point, when 16 members of her family had disappeared, she decided to end it all. In her book, *I Stepped Into Freedom*, she tells what happened:

*I walked out into the night, feeble with hunger, half crazy with fear and fatigue, and made my way down to the river Neisse. In a few hours all would be over, I told myself. What a relief! And there it happened. Across the dark river I saw the Cross and Jesus Christ on it. His face was not the face of a victor; it was the face of a fellow-sufferer, full of love and understanding and compassion. We gazed at each other, both of us Jews, and then the vision disappeared.*

For Lisa this was the beginning of the road that led to faith and personal healing.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the public demonstration that he had defeated the forces of evil and conquered death itself, the end

result of evil. In so demonstrating his victory he pointed the way to the final victory, when both sin and suffering would be banished forever from his kingdom.<sup>1</sup>

What I am saying here is that the answer to the problem of suffering is not an idea—it is a person. For the problem is about someone (God— why does he...?why doesn't he...?). We don't just ask the questions in a vacuum, but within a relationship, like a little child with tears in its eyes looking up at Daddy and weeping, "Why?" Or perhaps in anger, demanding an answer. God's answer is not just to give us words, but to give us Jesus. As philosopher Peter Kreeft puts it in his excellent book *Making Sense out of Suffering*:

*He didn't give us a placebo or a pill or good advice. He gave us himself. He came. He entered space and time and suffering. He came, like a lover. Love seeks above all intimacy, presence, togetherness.*

Kreeft continues:

*Remove Jesus and the knowledge of God is questionable. If the knowledge of God is questionable, trusting this unknown God becomes questionable...Suffering is the evidence against God, the reason not to trust him. Jesus is the evidence for God, the reason to trust him.*

It is significant that Jesus rose from the dead with a body that still bore the marks of his sufferings in his hands, his feet and his side. Throughout all eternity he will bear those scars. It is because of them that you and I may, if we choose, share that eternity with him as "**co-heirs**" of his glory (Romans 8:17).

*Standing somewhere in the shadows you'll find Jesus;  
He's a friend who always cares and understands;  
Standing somewhere in the shadows you will find him,  
And you'll know him by the nail prints in his hands.*

### **The transformation of suffering**

Because of his death for our sins and his resurrection, Jesus is now able to offer us forgiveness and reconciliation to God. If we turn to him in trust and submission he comes by the Holy Spirit to live within us. His purpose is to transform us into the kind of people he wants us to be and to fit us for God's service. Often he will use suffering in our lives to achieve this purpose.

Some Roman Catholics use the term "redemptive suffering." Mary Craig had four sons, two of which were born with severe abnormalities, one with disfiguring and incapacitating Hohler's syndrome, and one with Down's syndrome. In her book, significantly entitled *Blessings*, she says:

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<sup>1</sup> I have deal with this more fully in the booklet, *Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead?*

*...the value of suffering does not lie in the pain of it...but in what the sufferer makes of it...It is in sorrow that we discover the things which really matter; in sorrow that we discover ourselves.*

She speaks of “the redemptive power of suffering.” The word “redeem” means “to set someone free by paying a price.” In the Bible the word is used of people or things. However, if we can think in terms of Jesus paying the price to set us free from the negative consequences of suffering then maybe it is also a useful term to use in this context. He can set us free from bitterness, rebellion, a sense of hopelessness or uselessness and other negative attitudes that often come with suffering. He can bring good out of the worst experiences. He is able to teach us the truth of Paul’s word, **“in all things God works for the good of those who love him”** (Romans 8:28).

The Bible indicates that suffering *can* at times be the direct result of our sins. However, it is unique in teaching how God uses suffering for his own glory and ultimately for ours too. This is where the emphasis is in the New Testament. It is interesting to note the number of occasions when suffering and glory are mentioned together. True happiness results from being a certain kind of person, not from being in a certain set of circumstances. God loves us enough to persist in moulding our character, often through trials, and even when we would rather remain in our immaturity. C. S. Lewis said in *The Problem of Pain*:

*When we want to be something other than the thing that God wants us to be, we must be wanting what, in fact, will not make us happy...whether we like it or not, God intends to give us what we need, not what we now think we want. Once more, we are embarrassed by the intolerable compliment, by too much love, not too little.*

It was this understanding and faith that enabled Helen Keller, blind and deaf from early childhood, to say, “I thank God for my handicaps, for through them I have found myself, my work, and my God.”

Dr. Edward Wilson, who died with Scott on the journey back from the South Pole, left this testimony behind him:

*This I know is God’s own truth, that pains and troubles and trials and sorrows and disappointments are either one thing or another. To all who love God they are love tokens from him. To all who do not love God and do not want to love him they are merely a nuisance. Every single pain that we feel is known to God because it is the most loving touch of his hand.*

Jesus did not come to make a way out, but a way through. He came not to make life easy, but to make people great. Life can be like a grindstone for

some, but whether it grinds or polishes is up to us. George Macdonald adds a thoughtful insight when he says:

*The Son of God suffered unto the death, not that we might not suffer, but that our suffering might be like his.*

### **Bible passages on suffering**

There are a number of passages in the Bible that deal with God's purposes in allowing suffering and trials. If you read them through you will find them associated with such things as:

- developing humility;
- helping us sort out the best values and priorities;
- being taught the value of submission to God;
- learning obedience to God's word;
- learning patient endurance;
- developing character;
- producing hope;
- learning to depend on the resources Jesus supplies;
- experiencing God's enabling grace;
- being privileged to share in Christ's sufferings;
- growing in holiness;
- developing a strong faith;
- learning the truth that if we have God we have all that is necessary for full maturity—all that God wants us to be.

Some of the most significant of these passages are: Deuteronomy 8:2,3; the book of Job; Psalm 119:67,71,75; John 9:1-3; Romans 5:3-5; 8:18, 35-39; 2 Corinthians 1:3-11; 4:7-12; 12:7-10; Philippians 1:19-24, 29; 3:10; 2 Timothy 2:3; Hebrews 5:8; 12:4-11; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6,7; 4:12,13,19; Revelation 21:4. The great theme of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians is how God can reveal his power and grace *through* our human frailties and weaknesses, and our suffering. It is a book worthy of study.

The Bible passages I have quoted above deal exclusively with God's purposes in allowing his own people to experience suffering. The Bible also gives many examples of God permitting suffering in the lives of those who are in rebellion against him so that they will turn to him. It was the suffering of the Prodigal Son in the pig-pen that caused him to return to his waiting father. 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.*

Throughout my years of ministry I have often seen folk come to faith in Christ as the result of some personal suffering or tragedy. In some instances I am sure they would not have found that faith otherwise.

The Bible declares that exclusion from God's presence, and the consequent loss of everything good, is the ultimate end for those who choose to reject God. If this is so, then permitting us to suffer may be the kindest thing that God could do. Sadly we may refuse to listen to his voice and become hardened or bitter.

A moving story of a Christian who experienced suffering comes from the pen of John Wimber, told in an article in *Christianity Today*. Wimber has a ministry that has touched thousands of people around the world. He tells of a Christian man whose life was completely reshaped by personal tragedy.

One afternoon, while baby-sitting for a family a few houses from his home, this man's teenage daughter was brutally murdered by a young man who attempted to rape her. At the end of the day, utterly desolate, the father went back to his house and gathered his family together to pray. He bowed his head and said, "Father, I don't understand. But I trust you."

Over the months and years that followed he experienced a profound motivation to make Christ known. The story of his daughter's murder, the pursuit of her killer, the trial, and the father's forgiveness of the young man were front-page news for months in the Los Angeles area. People knew about him and were willing to listen to him. Through his testimony to Christ, hundreds of people came to faith in Jesus.

Some years later, his only son, a 22-year-old, just graduated from college—a wonderful Christian, a fine athlete, a brilliant student—was in an auto accident and his skull was crushed. Today this father cares for his big, handsome boy, who functions with significant handicaps and must be watched at all times. However, the mysterious working of God's purposes, which would have driven many into unbelief, has driven this man on. He continued to pray "Father, I don't understand, but I trust you." He continues to lead people to Christ. Wimber says:

*I am one of them. One evening years ago I knelt in this man's living room, and he prayed for me as I turned my life over to Christ. Something that was in this man's life was placed on me...God blessed me and gave me great opportunity. I carry in my being the mantle that was passed on to me by this man.*

*I am sure that if I were designing a programme to prepare an evangelist, I would never come up with anything like that...But God's action in this man's life produced a broken and contrite heart, and a highly motivated personality. He went out and has done the job the Lord gave him from that day forth.*

*If we are going to pursue the things of the Lord, we will often not understand what he is doing...As my friend always used to tell me, "Sometimes God crushes*

*a petal to bring out its essence." Sometimes he offends our minds to reveal our hearts.*

God may not remove our suffering, but he can transform it into something that will bring benefit to us and glory to him—if that is what we desire and if we will trust him to do so.

### **The ultimate removal of suffering**

The victory won by Jesus through his death and resurrection is given in the Bible as the guarantee of his final triumph when he will judge the world and usher in **"a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness"** (2 Peter 3:13). In that day **"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"** (Revelation 21:4). As Philip Yancey, one of today's most helpful writers on the problem of suffering, puts it, "God's miracle of transforming Bad Friday into Easter Sunday will be enlarged to cosmic scale."

How glorious that future will be is beyond our full understanding, though the New Testament gives us some clues if we will but search them out. We need to have long term goals that have as their end view God's ultimate purpose for us in his kingdom. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, executed by the Nazis for his stand against Hitler, wrote from prison, "In view of our supreme purpose, the present difficulties and disappointments seem trivial." For the person who is trusting in Jesus there is *always* light at the end of the tunnel.

A Ugandan Christian, Henry, was on a bus that was attacked by guerrillas. Half his face was blown away. A Christian organisation got him to Montreal where he had many operations. David Watson, an Anglican clergyman, tells of his visit with him. He could not help flinching when he saw the mask that was once a face. But Henry's eyes still sparkled. He was unable to speak, but he wrote on paper for David, "God never promises us an easy time. Just a safe arrival." Thank God that we have that assurance. As St. Clement of Alexandria put it, Christ has turned all our sunsets into dawn.

### **Conclusion**

Charles Colson was one of President Nixon's staff who went to prison over the Watergate Scandal. Shortly before going to prison he became a Christian through the witness of a Christian friend in the U. S. Senate. While in prison his faith matured and when he came out he founded the organisation Christian Prison Fellowship, which ministers to prisoners

world-wide. In an article in *Christianity Today* he tells of visiting a prison in Brazil called Humaita.

Twenty years ago this prison, in the city of Sao Jose dos Campos, was turned over to two Christian laymen. The prison has only two full-time staff; the rest of the work is done by inmates. Every prisoner is assigned an inmate to whom he is accountable. In addition, every prisoner is assigned a volunteer family from the outside that works with him during his term and after his release. Every prisoner joins a chapel programme, or else takes a course in character development.

Colson says:

*When I visited Humaita, I found the inmates smiling—particularly the murderer who held the keys, opened the gates, and let me in. Wherever I walked I saw men at peace. I saw clean living areas, people working industriously. The walls were decorated with biblical sayings from Psalms and Proverbs. Humaita has an astonishing record. Its inmate's rate for recidivism [repeated crimes on release] is 4 percent, compared to 75 percent in the rest of Brazil and the United States. How is all this possible?*

*I saw the answer when my guide escorted me to the notorious punishment cell once used for torture. Today, he told me, that cell houses only a single inmate. As we reached the end of a long concrete corridor and he put the key into the lock, he paused and asked, "Are you sure you want to go in?"*

*"Of course," I replied impatiently. "I've been in isolation cells all over the world." Slowly he swung open the massive door, and I saw the prisoner in that punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the Humaita inmates—the prisoner Jesus, hanging on the cross. "He's doing time for all the rest of us," my guide said softly.*

Jesus "did time" for all of us when he paid for our sins on the cross. My question to you is not, "Can you believe in God?" but, "Can you believe in *this* God?" It is not only possible to believe in him. It is also possible to *know* him and to experience his love. If this is what you are looking for you may find it helpful to pray a prayer something like this:

*God, I admit that I am part of this world's problems.*

*I have failed to give you the rightful place in my life and live by your commands. I need your forgiveness.*

*I accept that Jesus suffered for my sins and I gratefully receive his forgiveness and the gift of eternal life.*

*Come into my life.*

*Mould me into the person you want me to be.*

*I accept from your gracious hand whatever experiences of sorrow or joy you may find necessary to strengthen my faith, deepen my character and fit me for my service to you and to others in this world.*

*I look forward to the experience of knowing you fully in that place in your kingdom which you purchased for me at such a cost. Help me to be worthy of it.*

If you make such a commitment, read a modern translation of the New Testament and explore further the secrets there that God wants to reveal to you. Find some mature Christians who can encourage you. My expectation is that as you do you will find bits of the puzzle falling into place. Not all of them will—not in this life. However, you will find a growing confidence that one day all will be revealed to your complete satisfaction and joy. The One who is now becoming part of your life is the One who *does* have all the answers to the mysteries of this amazing world which he created. That includes the mystery of suffering.

### **Good books on the subject of suffering**

*Making Sense Out of Suffering*, by Peter Kreeft (Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1986).

*Where Is God When It Hurts?* by Philip Yancey (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977).

*Disappointment With God*, by Philip Yancey (Marshall Pickering, 1988).

*Why Do People Suffer?* by James Jones (Lion Publishing, Oxford, England; Batavia, Illinois, USA; Sutherland, NSW, Australia, 1993).