

Answering a 7 year old's questions

I received an email from the parent of a seven year old, saying that their child had been asking some big questions which they wanted help in answering. The questions got me thinking, and since you may know of other children who may be asking similar questions, here is a copy of my answer:

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Hi there 7 year old! (sorry, I don't know your name). My name is Graeme. I learned about God when I was about the age you are now, and when I was nine years old I gave my life to Jesus. Ever since then I have been getting to know him better and living for him. For quite a number of years I have been helping boys and girls to get to know Jesus better, to grow in understanding the Bible, and to be ready for all that God wants them to do.

I had an email from your parent saying that you were looking for the answers to some big questions and they have passed on three of your questions to see what answer I would give to them. I hope that you find my answers helpful. If some of the things that I say make you think of other questions, I would be glad to try to answer them too. First of all I want to say that I think that your questions are really good questions. That is because they are questions about discovering what God is like and how we can know him better. I think that it is good that you want to know the answers to such important questions, because knowing the answers will not only help you, but might be a help to others friends that you know who have the same sort of questions.

Your 3 questions: 1. Why does God hurt people with disease and car accidents and other things? 2. Where is God and why can't I see him? 3. Why is the Devil bad?

So on to question 1

"Why does God hurt people with disease and car accidents and other things?"

The short answer is that God doesn't do those things. To explain that answer will take a bit longer because it leads on to other questions like: What is God like? Why do hurtful things happen? What does God do about such things? Why does God allow some hurtful things to happen? Does God ever hurt people?

What is God like?

Writing about God in the Bible (in the book called 1John), John, a disciple of Jesus says that "God is light and there is not darkness at all in him". That means that he is pure and that there is nothing evil or bad in him.

He also says, "God is love" which means that God never does anything which is not loving. The way that we know what God is like is in knowing Jesus and what he is like.

In the part of the Bible, Colossians chapter 1 verse 15, it says that Jesus is "the visible likeness of the invisible God" which means that we can see in Jesus exactly what God is like.

Did Jesus go around hurting people? No! He went around doing good.

Did Jesus give people disease? No! He healed people of every kind of disease and sickness and trouble.

Did Jesus make bad things happen to people? No! Instead, where bad things had happened in people's lives, he changed things and made good things happen.

To understand why there is so much suffering we need to see what Jesus said (in John chapter 10 verse 10) "The thief comes only in order to steal, kill and destroy. I have come that you might have life, life in all its fullness."

Is Jesus the thief? No!

Has he come to steal, kill or destroy? No, he has come to put right all these things.

Whatever is true about Jesus is also true about God.

We can see how God wants things to be in the part of the Bible where it describes what it will be like in heaven, when God has everything just as he wants it to be. Revelation chapter 21 verses 3 and 4: "God himself will be with them, and he will be their God. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more grief or crying or pain."

Why do hurtful things happen?

There are a number of different reasons, and when something hurtful happens we will not know completely all that has led up to it happening.

Some hurtful things happen because the Devil is doing it. He is the thief that Jesus spoke about. He does everything he can to steal, kill and destroy, and to stop people enjoying all that God has for them.

Some hurtful things happen because people choose to do them, or because they do not care enough about others to prevent or stop those things happening.

Some hurtful things happen because we live in a world which has lots of things in it which can be harmful, and which may hurt us without anyone having done anything wrong.

What does God do about it?

Jesus came to rescue us from anything that would spoil our lives and to bring us into the enjoyment of all the good things that God wants for us. Jesus' plan is to make up completely for any hurt, loss or damage that has happened in our lives by what we have done, by what others have done to us, by what the Devil has done, or by other things that have happened in our lives.

When we read about Jesus in the Bible we can see all the different ways he does this.

The Holy Spirit is Jesus' gift to every Christian. The Holy Spirit will teach us how to live in God's ways and so avoid many hurts that are caused by living in wrong ways. The Holy Spirit will protect us from harm, and give us the strength to put up with difficult and hurtful times. The Holy Spirit will give us the power to help people in the ways that Jesus helped them.

Christians are part of God's answer to things that hurt people. They can bring Jesus' love and care for people who are hurting. They can fight against things that are done which can harm and hurt others.

Why does God allow hurtful things to happen?

Even though God does not cause bad things to happen, he does not stop all bad things from happening. Why?

Some suffering is a natural part of the world we live in. If we stay outside in bright sunshine for too long, we will get sunburnt - and that hurts. There may be all kinds of reasons why we were in the sunshine without the right protection, but we could not expect the sun to turn off after a little while just so that we don't get hurt.

There are different kinds of "allowing".

Some things God allows to happen because they are good and he wants them to happen.

Some things God allows even though it is not what he wants to happen. Jesus taught us to pray "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" which means "May what you want be done on earth as it is in heaven". That shows that there are things happening which are not what God wants and which he wants to see changed. Because he loves people and respects them, he does not force them to do what he wants, but he allows them to choose what they want to do. When they do the wrong things, it makes God sad.

The biggest example of this was in allowing Jesus to be mistreated and nailed to the cross. God did not want Jesus to be hurt, but God allowed it to happen because Jesus suffering was part of his big plan to save lots of people from having to suffer.

God sometimes allows some hurtful things which we may not understand to happen because he has a bigger plan which will mean that the suffering has been worth it.

When hurtful things happen for whatever reason, God wants to take care of people who have suffered and bring them healing and blessing.

Does God ever hurt people?

Yes, he sometimes does, not because he doesn't love but because he does, like a father with a child.

If you fall a scrape your knee and there is dirt in it, your parent may hurt you when they are cleaning the dirt out of the wound - that's a hurt that they don't want to give you, but which will help you not to get infected and be even more sore for longer.

If you are about to run on to a road when there is a car coming, your parent may hurt your arm by grabbing you quickly to stop you getting run over. The hurt arm is better than being hit by the car!

If you are doing something harmful, then your parent may punish you in some way that you think is hurtful, and you may not like it at the time, but they are doing it because they love you and because they want you to learn to live in the best way - which means that it will save you having a lot of hurt later in life.

God deals with his children like that - sometimes it can be a bit painful, but as it says in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 10, "God does it for our own good, so that we may share his holiness."

Sometimes God will also deal harshly with people who are getting in the way of others enjoying his kingdom. Jesus said hurtful things to the Pharisees, who were religious leaders who were making it difficult for people to know God as he really is. Jesus said that if people like them got in the way of children enjoying his kingdom, it would be better for them if they had a stone tied round their neck and they were thrown into the sea! He didn't say that is what would happen to them, but by saying it, he was showing how much he loves children like you. He is against anyone who would get in the way of you knowing him.

Now for your second question -

Where is God and why can't I see him?

Let's start with the first part - Where is God? God is amazing and there are three answers which are all true!

1. God is in heaven - Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father who is in heaven."
2. God is everywhere - Psalm 139 says some good things about this. It says:

"Where could I go to escape from you? Where could I get away from your presence? If I went up to heaven, you would be there. If I lay down in the world of the dead, you would be there. If I flew away beyond the east, or lived in the furthest place in the west, you would be there to lead me."

3. God is in a special way with everyone who loves Jesus. He gives us the Holy Spirit who is God with us. Jesus said in John chapter 14 verse 16, that the Holy Spirit will stay with us for ever, and he described it as "my Father and I will come and live with them."

4. Sometimes God can make himself known in a special way so that it clear that he is there, either with a person on their own, or with a group of people, or in a particular place.

Now the second part - **"Why can't I see him?"**

That makes me want to ask you a question - Why do you ask? Would you like to see him? I think that you would probably say, "Yes" to that question.

So then I have to think, "Why would you want to see him?" - and I can think of three answers that you or someone else might give, so I will try to answer all three.

1. I want to see God to know that there is a God.

The answer given in Romans chapter 1 verse 20, says that we don't need to see God to know that he exists. It says that ever since God created the world, his power and him being God is seen in everything that God has made.

2. I want to see God to know what he is like. As I said in answer to another question, Jesus came to show us exactly what God is like. When one of his disciples asked him, "Show us the Father, that is all we need", Jesus said, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" meaning that if you know Jesus and you know what he is like, then you know exactly what God is like, so we don't need to see him.

3. I want to see God to know that he is with me. We don't need to see God to know that he is with us. He has different ways of helping us to know that he is with us. When we give our lives to Jesus he gives us the Holy Spirit who helps us to feel and know that God is with us. When we read the Bible and ask God to speak to us through it, he can show us how the words in the Bible are what he is saying to us. When we pray he sometimes answers our prayers in ways that we know he is with us. When we are together with other Christians, and sometimes on our own, sometimes God lets us feel his nearness in special ways.

There are other reasons why we can't see God -

1. If we were to see God in all his power it would be very frightening, and we would not be able to take it all in. In the Bible, even when angels appeared to people it usually gave them a big fright. But once all the wrong things of this world and this life are past, and God changes us to be ready for heaven, we will see him then - and it won't be frightening, it will be wonderful!

2. God doesn't force himself on people, he lets them choose whether they want to know him or not. So he is not there for everyone to see. He is out of sight, and many people live as if he wasn't there, but he is always very near, and those who want him will always be able to find him and know that he is there.

Your third question:

Why is the Devil bad?

The Devil is bad because he has chosen to be bad.

Because God is a God of love he does not force or control anyone. He allows them to choose. He wants them to live in his way and to know him, but he does not make them do it.

The Devil is an angel who decided to choose his own way rather than God's way. The Devil's way is a way of forcing and controlling and trying to stop and fight against God's kingdom.

We all have the same choice that the Devil had. God does not force us or control us. God shows us what he is like, he shows us his love for us and allows us to choose. Because when people were created they chose the Devil's way rather than God's way, God made a way for everything to be put right and for the Devil's plans to be defeated. That plan happened through Jesus. He won completely against the Devil, and if we trust Jesus he will give us the power to not let the Devil spoil our lives, but to enjoy the adventure of living for Jesus and his kingdom.

If you have any other tough questions from children, I would be glad to hear from you to attempt a useful answer to them. Email them to me, Graeme Young, email@youngresources.co.uk