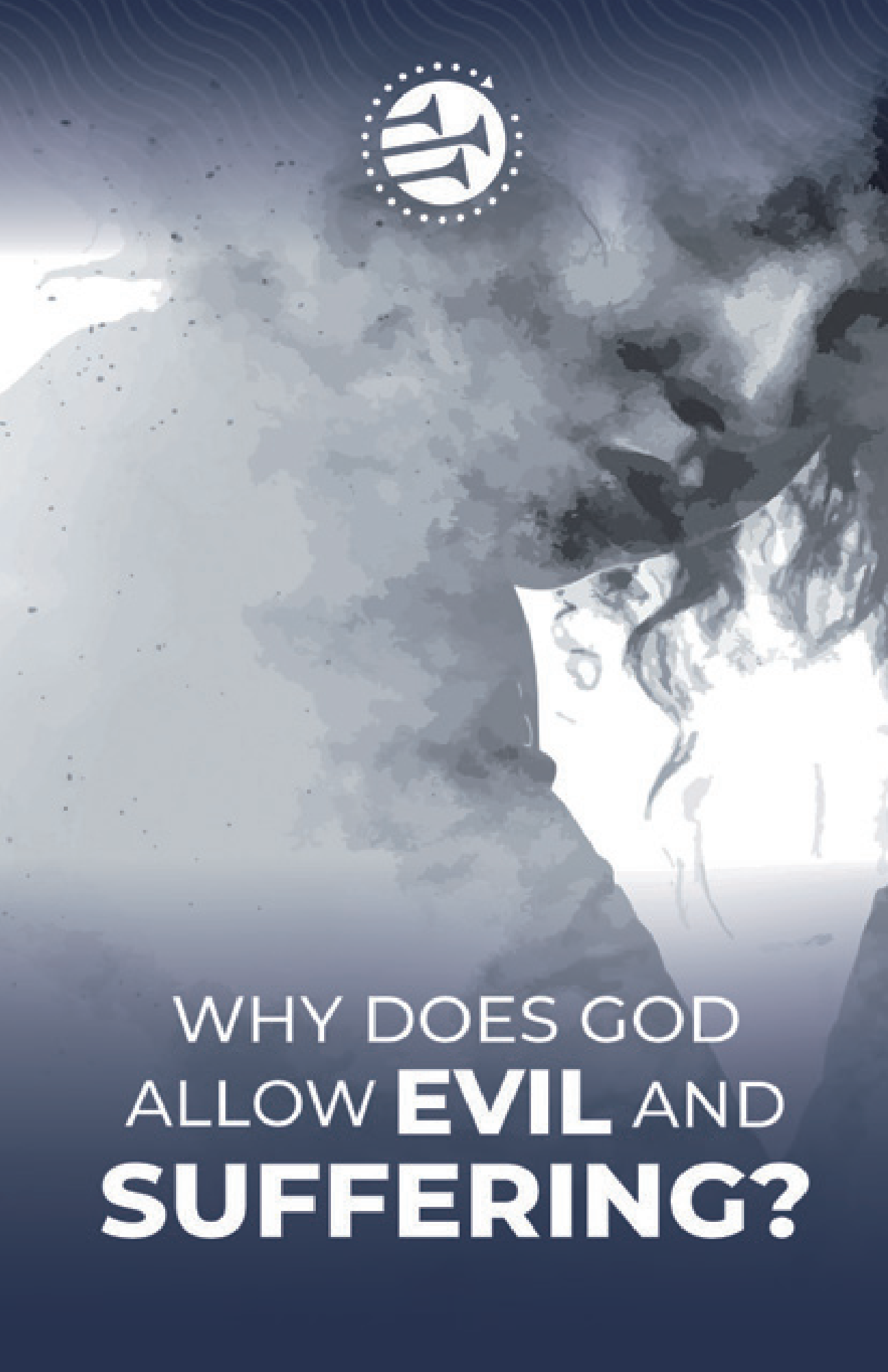

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW **EVIL** AND **SUFFERING?**

There isn't a day that goes by that we don't come face-to-face with some evil or injustice. Someone's teenage daughter is in critical condition after an accident involving a drunk driver. An innocent child is abducted from school. A mother of four is diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. Perhaps you've been the victim of one of these tragic scenarios, and you're struggling to make sense of it all. Why do these terrible things happen? And if God exists, why doesn't He stop them?

The problem of evil and suffering has led many to doubt the existence of a loving and powerful God. Indeed, if such a God exists, wouldn't He bring an end to this suffering?

The conclusion that many have reached seems self-evident: Either God is *willing* to prevent bad things from happening, but *can't*, in which case He isn't as powerful as He is said to be. Or He *is* able to prevent bad things from happening, but is *unwilling* to do so, in which case He isn't as loving as we've been told.

As cut-and-dried as this may seem, there is a third option that is often overlooked: God *is* indeed as *loving* and as *powerful* as the Bible says He is, *and* His love keeps Him from putting an immediate end to evil.

"That's impossible!" you might say. "If He were loving, He would do something!"

But let's think this through. Evil is not merely random. The car that injured that teenage girl didn't drive itself. That driver made a personal choice to drink, get drunk, and drive. It's easy for you and me to say, "God shouldn't have *allowed* those people to make those poor choices." Or, to go a step further, "God shouldn't have *created people* who would make poor choices."

God Is Love

Not so fast! The Bible tells us "God is love" (1 John 4:16). This means that love motivates everything He does. The Bible also says that God "created man in His own image" (Genesis 1:27). That is, He made humans to love as He loves. However, without choice, there can be no such thing as love. For love to be love, it must be freely given.

Think of it this way—if you could "program" your friends or children or significant other to always say, "I love you," would that *really* be the same thing as loving you? Of course not! And why not? Because it would be *forced* instead of *freely given*. To love or not to love *requires choice*.

So if God is truly a God of love, and He created a universe filled with beings who are capable of love, it follows that He must also allow choice. In fact, He must *safeguard* the freedom to choose at all costs because without choice, there can be no love.

Among the beings God made, a majestic angel named Lucifer chose to rebel against God and His love (Isaiah 14:12–14; Revelation 12:7–9). He sinned against God by breaking God's law, the law of love (Romans 13:8–10; 1 John 3:4, 8), and enticed the first humans to do the same. As a result, sin and all its evil consequences spread throughout the world (Romans 3:23; 5:12). And humanity's continued choices to sin perpetuate that evil and suffering today.

So now God faces this dilemma: How can He put an end to evil without taking away the freedom of His creatures to choose? He can't just "zap" everyone who chooses to do evil, including Lucifer himself. If rebellion were met with instant destruction, every created being would serve God out of fear instead of love. And He can't *force* obedience because love can't be forced. His only alternative—the only truly loving thing to do—is to allow evil to run its course. All must be able to see the real results of sin and the

true nature of love in order to intelligently *choose* whom to serve.

Two Warring Principles

You and I are living out the consequences of these two warring principles, and we are experiencing firsthand the results of rebellion against God.

Sin destroys everything good. It harms children sitting in classrooms. It shatters families. And its damage extends beyond human behavior. When sin entered the world, all creation was affected so that "the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now" (Romans 8:22). That is why sickness and disease can strike even when no one is to blame. A mother of four can receive a devastating cancer diagnosis. Cells mutate. Bodies fail. The earth itself convulses. Not every wound can be traced to someone's decision, but every wound reflects a world that is no longer as God made it. Sin brings sickness, heartache, suffering, and death.

Love, on the other hand, is willing to suffer. Love is willing to sacrifice. And ultimately, love is willing to die in order to remove evil once and for all. This is precisely what the Bible says God did for you and me through His Son, Jesus Christ. He loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for our sins so we could

have eternal life in a world without evil (John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:3). Through the sacrifice of Jesus, God revealed both the full horror of sin and the full power of self-sacrificing love. This is the only way God will be able to destroy evil and suffering while at the same time preserving our freedom to choose.

God Suffers with Us

At this moment, our world is still a battlefield between good and evil. At times, we suffer because of our own choices. At other times, we suffer because of the choices of others, or simply because we live in a world broken by sin. It doesn't seem fair.

But the story isn't over yet. God has already put His plan into action to get rid of evil. And even as He works to end our suffering, He doesn't remain indifferent to it. According to the Bible, He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15, KJV). The God of the Bible suffers when we suffer. "In all their affliction *He was afflicted*" (Isaiah 63:9). The greatest evidence of God's love in the face of our pain is that He shares it. He came into our world and voluntarily experienced our suffering. He took the penalty for sin that we deserve. And by His death on the cross, He pledged Himself to put an end to evil.

After His death and resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven, where He now intercedes for us. He will come again to bring salvation to those who trust Him (Hebrews 9:24–28). Those who accept His salvation will live eternally with Him in a world without evil.

All Things New

Whatever comes your way, two things will always remain true. First, God is love, and He loves *you* personally. Second, He will one day make every wrong right and heal every wound this world has caused. "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

That day is coming. But you are living in this one. Everyone wants a world without pain; the harder question is whether you will trust Him with the pain that hasn't lifted yet. He isn't asking you to pretend it doesn't hurt. He's asking you to bring it to Him. Tell Him where it hurts. He is making all things new . . . and until that day comes, you do not have to carry your pain alone.

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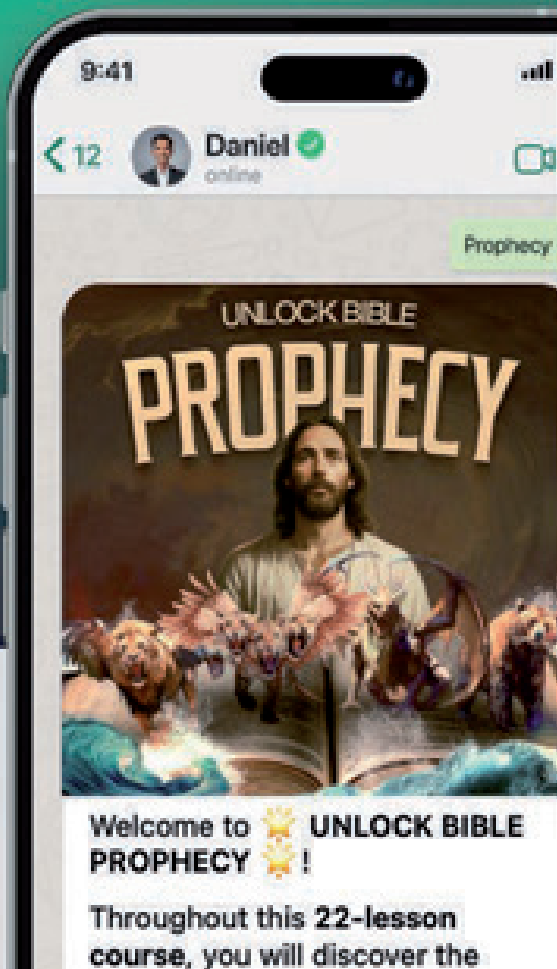

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