

# The Encourager

Helping People Live Courageously

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## Why? The Search for Answers

by Jan Dravecky

*When I lay these questions before God I get . . . a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze. As though He shook His head not in refusal but waiving the question. Like, "Peace child; you don't understand."*

C. S. LEWIS, A GRIEF OBSERVED

For every person who has ever asked the question *why*? it seems there are a dozen voices that speak out to hush the questioner. Yet for many of us, whether we voice it or not, the pain and suffering of living with cancer draws the nagging *why*? out into the open.

Few of us ask many questions when life is going well. But when life doesn't go the way we think it should, when a tragedy befalls us or our loved ones, or when we can't make sense out of what is happening, the question *why*? often pops to the surface.

Our questioning may come in different ways. Sometimes *why*? is asked in an effort to grasp onto a true and stable anchor point in the midst of uncertainty. Sometimes *why*? is asked with the hope that a specific answer will be given. Sometimes *why*? is demanded out of anger. Sometimes *why*? is whispered by a pain-filled heart that longs for a reason to go on.

Of course, not all of us have to question *why*? when we face circumstances

that are beyond our control or understanding. When my husband, Dave, had cancer, he had a remarkable peace. For the most part, he accepted what was happening to him and had very little need to ask *why*? I, on the other hand, was troubled because I didn't understand why things were the way they were. I didn't know why we were suffering, especially when people told us that because we were Christians we shouldn't be suffering. I wanted to have answers!

My questions led me on a path of discovery that forever changed my life and deepened my faith. Like a tree in drought, I was forced to sink my roots down deep to find water. And I found it in the word of God. I found truths in the pages of the Bible that set me free. I'd like to share a few of those truths with you:

☞ **It's okay to ask questions, to search for answers, to seek to understand God and His character.**

Matthew 7:7, 8 says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will

find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened."

☞ **Suffering is part of life.**

This truth is found in John 16:33: "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

☞ **God promises that He will never leave us, even in our suffering.**

Hebrews 13:5 reminds us to "... be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

☞ **Suffering refines our character.**

The beneficial results of suffering are explained for us in Romans 5:3-5: "But we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suf-

– Continued from Page 1 –

fering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.”

☞ **Our pain is not without purpose.**

In Romans 8:28 and 29 we read, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. . . . to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”

The Bible’s truths confirmed what Dave and I were experiencing. They answered some (but not all) of our questions. They gave us tremendous hope.

God’s promises of faithfulness were also true. He never left us (despite how it felt at times). He did transform us (despite our resistance at times). And you are now reading a part of the purpose of our suffering and my questioning. Because he kept His promises then, I know He’ll keep them today and for all of eternity.

I am now content when I come across a situation I don’t understand, when I have questions but no immediate answers. When the winds of adversity blow, I don’t panic. By asking *why?* and searching for answers, I drew closer to the One with the answers. And there, like C. S. Lewis, I found peace. I have learned to be content to hear God say, “Peace, child. You don’t understand. Yet . . . .”

*Now we see  
but a poor reflection  
as in a mirror;  
then we shall see  
face to face.  
Now I know in part;  
then I shall know fully,  
even as I am fully known.*

1 CORINTHIANS 13:12



## When the Answer Is Too Difficult to Bear



**W**hen she was a young girl, Corrie ten Boom once asked her father a difficult question, the answer for which she would not be able to understand and the reality of which she would not be able to bear. In her book, *The Hiding Place*, she describes his answer:

*He turned to look at me, as he always did when answering a question, but to my surprise he said nothing. At last he stood up, lifted his traveling case from the rack over our heads, and set it on the floor.*

*“Will you carry it off the train, Corrie?” he said.*

*I stood up and tugged at it. It was crammed with the watches and spare parts he had purchased that morning.*

*“It’s too heavy,” I said.*

*“Yes,” he said. “And it would be a pretty poor father who would ask his little girl to carry such a load. It’s the same way, Corrie, with knowledge. Some knowledge is too heavy for children. When you are older and stronger you can bear it. For now you must trust me to carry it for you.”*

*And I was satisfied. More than satisfied—wonderfully at peace. There were answers to this and all my hard questions—for now I was content to leave them in my father’s keeping.*

pg 26,27.

# Wrestling with Why?

by Mark Harris



*We felt certain that Matt would be healed and would live to be a testimony of God's miraculous power. But it didn't happen that way. And we wondered why?*

It all began on a bright, sunny, Tennessee day on the campus of Lee College where Matt and I were students. We had been best of friends for several years and, in fact, were part of a close-knit group of guys called "the brotherhood." That morning, Matt asked if I would run him to the doctor's office. He'd had a nagging cough for several weeks and wanted to get some medicine to shake it. Neither of us had any idea that that visit to the doctor would lead to a series of tests and x-rays that would eventually diagnose Matt as having cancer.

The whole college rallied around Matt. He eventually had to go home to Virginia to get the medical treatment and attention he needed. We were all thrilled when Matt arrived back on campus the next semester, full of life and with no trace of cancer in his body. Since we were both ministry majors, we got part-time jobs at a local church. He worked as a youth pastor, I worked as the minister of music, and we had the time of our lives.

In 1986, I graduated Lee and went on the road singing contemporary Christian music. Matt eventually became a youth pastor at one of the cornerstone churches in the denomination in which we had both grown up.

One day on the road, I received an urgent phone call from one of my college buddies: "Matt has cancer again—a different kind." I was shocked. Matt battled the cancer and it eventually went into remission. Once again Matt overcame a life-threatening disease.

Several years passed, and once again I received a phone call with a message about Matt: his cancer was out of remission. For many months, Matt battled the disease, and, at the end of 1993, he exited this world and went home to a place that he'd sung, talked, and preached about many times throughout his life.



***Although I still wonder why, I have finally accepted the fact that I don't have to understand everything.***

During the ten years Matt battled the cancer, none of us believed the end result would be death. Because of our faith in God, we felt certain that Matt would be healed and would live to be a testimony of God's miraculous power. But it didn't happen that way. And we wondered *why*?

We still wonder *why*?

A strong, young Christian couple prays for a baby only to have the life of that innocent child taken in a drive-by shooting—and they wonder *why*? A Christian husband sits at a table and stares off into oblivion because his wife has just come and told him she doesn't want to be married anymore. And he wonders *why*? A fifty-five-year-old man has given his life to his company only to be told he is no longer needed. He can't help but ask *why*? A loving mother dies leaving two pre-teen

daughters without a mom. They now must face the complexities of being teenagers without their mother there. They look up to the heavens and ask *why*?

Why? We scramble and shuffle through our human reasoning, searching for a neat, clean answer. Why? We grow insecure because the God in whom we have placed all of our faith seems to have let us all down. Why? We struggle to see how "all things work together for the good," and our hearts scream *why*?

Why? Why? Why? That's exactly what I thought as I stood in the cemetery that December afternoon staring at the grave of my friend.

It has been several years since Matt went home to be with the Lord. Because Matt was such an inspiration to so many of us who knew him, he is still missed. Although I still wonder why, I have finally accepted the fact that I don't have to understand everything.

But I do understand that God has called us to trust Him, regardless of the circumstances. I do understand that God is at work—always. And I do understand that when I don't know the answer to *why*, I do know the answer to *who*. And that answer is God!

When life is simple, I will hold to His hand. When life is complicated, I will hold to His hand. And someday, I will do more than hold His hand; I will leave this world to be with Him, as Matt did that dark December Day.

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## When a Friend Asks

# Why?

by Kim Jones

**D**uring the birth of our first child, some forty hours into labor, I wanted to hit my husband. Not gently, either. I wanted to blacken his eyes. Every kind, encouraging word he spoke only infuriated me further. Relax? Sure, give me more pain medicine! Calm down? Easy for you to say! My husband didn't get it. He couldn't.

And there was no escaping the pain. The drugs only took the edge off. They didn't stop the labor pains from coming with increasing frequency and intensity. I was on the pain train and there was no depot in sight.

Even though the doctors promised that the pain wouldn't go on forever, that this baby would eventually make an appearance, I was reconciled to the fact that I would forever waddle like a penguin and wear pastel colored tents. I had lost all hope.

So had Colleen.\* Her bone marrow transplant had failed. The tumors were returning. The pain now required around-the-clock medication. Even that wasn't adequate. And through it all, God was mysteriously silent.

"How could a loving God separate me from my children, Kim?" she wailed. "Who will raise them? They need me!"

Not wanting to risk blackened eyes, I listened, but I did not speak.

There are other—mostly quiet—things

I do to care for my friend.

☞ I stay in close contact with her. I let her know she has not been abandoned in her pain.

☞ I let her scream when the pain gets overwhelming. Sometimes I even scream with her.

☞ I offer her ice chips and back rubs, but no "answers."

☞ When she is too angry with God to ask Him for help, I ask for her.

And when that still, small voice stirs my heart—and only then—I share the hope of what is yet to come.

"But my heaven is here," she protests, "with my children, my family."


And before her words even register, I hear myself saying, "If this is heaven, then why is your heart broken? Why are there tears and good-byes? This is not what God has in mind for His children, Colleen. Pain and suffering are not found in heaven. God has something much, much more wonderful in store for us."

Colleen knows that the end result of what she is enduring will be wonderful. She knows that one day her pain will be over and her questions will fall silently unspoken. She will stand before God, the



answer. But until that day, as a representative of God, the Great Physician, I continue to stand by her bedside. I continue to rub her back. I continue to move my feet swiftly to meet her needs. And when she asks where God was in the midst of her suffering, I hope He will say to her, "In the heart of your friend."



Forty-eight long hours after the first pains began, our beautiful baby girl was born. She is now seventeen. I would endure every moment of pain all over again just to have her—even for a day. But I haven't forgotten the pain. I'm reminded of it whenever I stand beside those who are enduring the worst suffering this world has to offer. I know I do not stand there alone. I hope they know it, too. 

\*not her real name.



# Why?

## When Answers Aren't Enough

Only months after burying her husband Richard, and days after burying Nicholle, their fourteen-year-old daughter, LezLee Guy received a call from one of her daughter's close friends. The teenager shared how several of their mutual friends had drawn closer to God--some had even recommitted their lives to Christ--as a result of Nicholle's tragic death. Her daughter's friend was trying desperately to encourage LezLee, to find something redeeming out of such an overwhelming loss. She was looking hard for answers, for some way to make sense out of what had happened. Although LezLee understood the intent of the call, she remained silent. But inside, her heart screamed out, No amount of good is worth the loss of a child. I don't care if a million people are touched. It's not worth this pain! She quickly ended the call.

The next years were a blur. To cope with the pain of her loss, the unanswered questions, and her disappointment with God, LezLee numbed her broken heart. The pain in her heart was so overwhelming that she simply "shut it off." She let nothing in, and had nothing to let out. It was as if she had no heart. While she was in the hospital recovering from a suicide attempt, LezLee had an EKG. She remembers saying to the nurse, "Is that my heart? I didn't know I had one."




***God didn't give her  
the answers; He gave her  
Himself.***

Would it have been comforting if God had knocked on LezLee's front door, sat down with her, and told her why half of her family was taken from her in such a short time? What if He had explained why she

was raising her son, Rich, alone? Would the answers have eased her pain? "No!" LezLee says emphatically. "I gave up on the why question because it wasn't going to change anything." In fact, LezLee gave up on more than the question. She also gave up on God, the only one who could answer it for her. But God never gave up on her.

There was no defining moment when LezLee began to heal. It happened slowly and gradually. It is still happening.

Her healing came not from having the answers, but from unexpected moments when God's love for her so filled her heart that she experienced a joy she had never before known. God didn't give her the answers; He gave her Himself. In those wonderful moments, God met her deepest needs and gave her a tremendous gift—hope. If being in His presence for only a moment was so wonderful, then she knew that her husband and daughter were blessed beyond comprehension. She knew they were waiting for the rest of their family to join them.

Recently, LezLee was invited to address a youth group about the topic of pain and suffering. She accepted the invitation immediately and remarked, "If even one teenager's life is impacted and changed by my story, then it will have all been worth it!" To traverse the gulf from "a million lives wouldn't be worth the pain" to "if even one" is a miraculous journey for a wounded and questioning heart. It is a journey of healing that LezLee attributes to God's love, not His answers. Her favorite Bible verse, Romans 8:38, 39 expresses her conviction perfectly. 



***For I am  
convinced that neither  
death nor life,  
neither angels nor  
demons, neither the  
present nor the future,  
nor any powers, neither  
height nor depth,  
nor anything else in all  
creation, will be able to  
separate us from the love  
of God that is in Christ  
Jesus our Lord.***

ROMANS 8:38-39

# The Why? of Suffering

**S**uffering is a mysterious and unwelcome intruder. No one wants it. No one fully understands it. It prompts the question why? like little else. And for those who believe in a loving God, suffering is particularly perplexing.

**“Why does a good God allow bad things to happen?” we ask. “Why does a loving God allow His children to suffer?” we cry. These questions have plagued humanity for millennia. We hear them daily at the Outreach of Hope. Although while on earth we may never fully understand the reasons for our particular suffering, the Bible, the Word of God, provides some insight into the causes of human suffering. Perhaps, if you or a loved one are suffering and wondering why, these truths will provide some understanding and hope.**

**Suffering can be a consequence of living in a fallen world.** Our world was created to function perfectly, without disease, destruction, or disaster. But sin marred the perfection that God created, bringing difficulty and decay to every aspect of life on earth:

*For the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.*

ROMANS 8:20-22

But even as we suffer the consequences of sin, hope remains: “creation itself will be liberated.” God’s children can look forward to the day when “never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. . . and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:16, 17).

**Suffering can be a direct result of evil.** Satan has power to bring suffering to people, and he uses it. Consider the testimony of the apostle Paul who wrote:

*To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.*

2 CORINTHIANS 12:7

As severe as the suffering brought about by evil may be, we can take comfort in the fact that it is limited by God and will one day be done away with forever.

The story of Job is that of a righteous and good man who suffered terribly at the hand of Satan. In the Bible we read that Satan “afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head” (Job 2:7). But before Satan was allowed to inflict evil on Job, he had to get permission from God (Job 2:6). And God allowed this injustice only to prove a cosmic point. Satan had challenged God’s character by asserting that Job served God only because God had blessed Job’s life. But Job clung faithfully to God even when Satan was allowed to take away every one of the blessings God had bestowed. And at the end of the story, after Job had proven God’s point, the blessings were restored to him. In fact, “the Lord blessed the latter part of Job’s life more than the first” (Job 42:12).

**Suffering can result from the actions of others.** Drunk drivers, irresponsible friends, corrupt leaders—all of these can cause innocent people to suffer. The Bible provides numerous examples of righteous men who suffered at the hands of others. Joseph, for example, endured many years of suffering because his jealous brothers sold him into slavery (Genesis 37-45). And David, whom God loved and had chosen to be king of Israel, had to run for his life and live in hiding because of King Saul’s all-consuming jealousy:

*While David was playing the harp, Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape.*

1 SAMUEL 19: 9, 10

There is comfort in knowing that God will use anything—even the wickedness of mankind—to fulfill His purposes. Joseph, although he suffered greatly, chose to honor God even when he was a slave. His actions eventually led to a position of leadership in the nation of his captivity, a position that enabled him to save his entire family from starvation. David’s years of hiding in the Judean wilderness to escape from bloodthirsty Saul prepared him to rule the nation of Israel. The cries of David’s heart in the midst of that painful journey have given us more than half of the book of Psalms. Both Joseph and David realized that although others meant to harm them, God used their difficulties to work for good.

# Broadening Our Perspective

**Suffering can be the result of our own actions.** As difficult as it can be to face our failures, the manner in which we live and care for ourselves may cause us to suffer:

*Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities.*

PSALM 107:17

In this area particularly, we need to guard against self-deception: “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction.” But there is also a promise of hope: “the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life” (Galatians 6:7, 8). Although the result of our actions may remain while we are on this earth, those who choose to be the children of God can ask for and will receive forgiveness for their rebellious ways. They will receive eternal life in return.

**At times, suffering comes from the hand of God.** C. S. Lewis has described pain as “God’s megaphone to a deaf world.” Pain forces us to live in reality, to deal with issues we would rather ignore, to shift our focus off the concerns of life on earth and onto things eternal. Pain forces us to ask the question, “Is this all there is?”

It can be difficult to accept God in this role unless we remember that He is a loving parent who is determined to bring us to maturity. He will use suffering in his children’s lives in the same way that a sculptor uses a chisel. As the craftsman of the human soul, God knows best which edges need to be smoothed and where fine lines must be etched to bring out the true beauty of His creation. He loves us too much to allow us to remain trapped in our rough, stony state. Thus, He may use pain and suffering to shape our lives and transform our character:

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?*

HEBREWS 12:7

God not only uses suffering to train us, He uses it to accomplish His perfect purpose, to draw us into relationship with Him, and to display His glory to others:

*As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”*

*“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.”*

JOHN 9:1-3

**Sometimes the cause of our suffering remains unknown.** Even after carefully searching the Scriptures, we may not discover the specific reason for our suffering. Or, we may discover the source of our pain but not understand why God allowed it. Our prayer is that your search for answers to the question why? and your desire to find meaning in the midst of suffering leads you to God Himself. It is far more important to know Him than to draw the “right” conclusions about human suffering or to have the “right” theology. Answers are for the head, but only God’s love can heal a wounded heart. Our hope for you is that although the why? of suffering may remain elusive, that the goodness and love of God, as stated by Jesus, will prevail:

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.*

MATTHEW 11:28, 29

**Somehow, pain and suffering multiplied on earth as a consequence of the abuse of human freedom. . . . Since the Fall the planet and all its inhabitants have been emitting a constant stream of low-frequency distress signals. We now live on a groaning planet.**

Philip Yancey,  
*Where Is God When It Hurts?*

*Editor’s note:* This overview is not intended to be an exhaustive study of the issue of human suffering. For a more in-depth study, consider one of the following resources. These are available at Christian bookstores or through the Outreach of Hope. To order from the Outreach, please specify the abbreviated title (in parenthesis below) in the Special Order section of the response envelope.

*Where Is God When It Hurts?*, Philip Yancey (Where Is God), \$12.

*When God Weeps, Why our Suffering Matters to God*, Joni Eareckson Tada and Steve Estes, (God Weeps), \$ .

*Surprised by Suffering*, R. C. Sproul, (Surprised), \$ .

**A**ll things work for our good.  
 Though sometimes we can't see how they could.  
 Struggles that break our heart in two  
 sometimes blind us to the truth.  
 Our Father knows what's best for us.  
 His ways are not our own.  
 So when your pathway grows dim  
 and you just can't see Him,  
 remember you're never alone.  
 God is too wise to be mistaken,  
 God is too good to be unkind,  
 So when you don't understand,  
 When you don't see His plan  
 When you can't trace His hand,  
 Trust His heart.

*"Trust His Heart"*

by Eddie Carswell & Babbie Mason



*The Encourager* is free, a gift from us to you. Now that you've read it, become an encourager yourself and share this gift with someone you know who needs uplifting. Don't throw the gift away . . . pass it along!

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