



Coexistence

There is probably no more natural reaction to the suffering present in the world than to question why a good God would allow such terrible, evil things to happen. But if we think closely about our own lives, we're forced to admit that there have been times when we've caused suffering, both for ourselves and others. This forces us to confront an alarming reality: in allowing the potential for evil to exist, God is really allowing us to live and receive the opportunity to find redemption. Because instead of waving his hand and wiping out his enemies (and with them, the problem of evil), Jesus chose to coexist with evil in order to redeem humanity and bring glory to God.

Start Talking

Have you ever noticed that children completely fall apart when even the smallest detail doesn't conform to their expectations— say, when a parent takes a particular toy away? Why do you think they react this way?

When was the first time you remember noticing that the world was not necessarily a safe, accommodating place, but actually contained the possibility that bad things could happen?

Looking Back

Last week we discussed the fact that we do not have to know everything— about God, reality, or our own futures— in order to believe Jesus was who he said he was. When it came to putting your fear and doubts aside and living in that reality, how did you do this past week? When was it easiest to believe? When was it most difficult?

Did the realization that you don't have to know everything in order to believe something have any implications for how you interacted with (or even considered) people who do not share your worldview?



What About You?

1. What aspects of the world, or your own experience, make it sometimes difficult to believe that there is a humane, just Creator who cares about people on a personal level?
2. How do you deal with these situations or experiences, when they come up?
3. Have you ever felt, like Martha, forgotten by Jesus?
4. How do you think Christians should interact with God when feeling this way?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passages: John 11: 1-45

1. While Jesus obviously could have made a single days' journey in order to promptly heal Lazarus, he chooses instead to stall. Why does he do this? What do you understand to be the true meaning of his answer for why the sickness occurred?
2. Think of Mary and Martha not as characters in a story, but as real human beings with life experiences every bit as vivid as our own. What sorts of emotional processes and intellectual rationalizations are going through their minds in between their initial decision to send a messenger, and Jesus' eventual arrival? When have you experienced similar situations in your own life?
3. Once Jesus arrives on the scene, what do you make of his unexpected emotional response? Assuming he knows the miraculous sign he is about to perform, why does he nonetheless weep?
4. In troubled seasons of life, it's tempting to cover up our emotions with spiritual sayings and biblical platitudes. Martha even seems to think this is what Jesus is doing when he says her brother will 'rise again.' Do you think such spiritual cliches are primarily helpful, or primarily hurtful? What can we learn about how to respond to suffering from Jesus' behavior during his visit to the tomb?
5. In this passage, the perfection of God and the complete brokenness of the world momentarily coexist. What do you make of this fact? What implications does this have for us?

Putting It All Together

6. In what areas of your own life do you feel yourself being called to believe that Jesus is 'the resurrection and the life,' despite the outward appearance of your circumstances?
7. How can the knowledge that the presence of God does not necessarily bring the immediate eradication of all evil (and the problems it brings with it) change our daily experience?
8. What implications does the knowledge that suffering has a purpose— even if we don't know what it is— have for the way we experience difficult times? How should it change the way we interact with those around us who are hurting?

