

For God so Loved
[John 3: 14-21](#), [Romans 8:31-39](#)
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May 4, 2025

God is Love. All throughout the Bible, from cover to cover, we are told again and again that God is love. We see it in Genesis when God calls Abraham and we see it in Revelation when God rescues his people and creates a new heaven and a new earth, and everywhere in between, every prophet and poet and evangelist, they all keep telling us over and over again, God is Love, God is Love.

And yet we know the world is broken. We know that we are broken. And some of that brokenness is from our sin. Sometimes this world is damaged because we're the ones who damaged it. But we also know that the world is broken in some fundamental ways, not because of anything anyone has done, but just because that's the way it is. Earthquakes and Hurricanes and tragic accidents, these are things that happen all the time. We live in a dangerous world, we believe God made this world for us, and yet we also know that God is Love.

And it would be easier to make sense of this if God wasn't Love. If God was indifferent to us, if he didn't really care about us, then all the pain and anguish we encounter in life could be written off as the cruel whims of an arbitrary deity out to get us. Those things would still hurt – they would still happen, and they would still be terrible, but they wouldn't leave us with this

uncertainty. If God is truly Love, why is there so much pain and brokenness in this world? If God is love, why is life so hard?

And if we're going to answer that question, we have to really take a close, hard look at what we mean when we use the word Love. I think most of the time, when we talk about love, our minds have been shaped by all the Hollywood romances and tabloid relationships and we think that Love is how you feel towards another person – it is having these warm thoughts and happy feelings towards someone. And that is not love – at least, not the kind of love we're talking about when we say that God is Love. That kind of love is something different, something more – it isn't a feeling, it is an action, it is a conscious decision, and the will to carry that decision out to its fullest conclusion. Love is deciding to act for the good, the deepest good, of someone else, no matter what the cost. That's the kind of love we're talking about when we say that God is Love – we are declaring that God's identity is inseparable from his decision to act only and always for the deepest good of others.

And if that's true – if God is defined by that commitment to doing good towards all those he loves – then that just brings us back to that original question – why all the pain? Why all the death? If God Loves us, and Love means acting for the good of someone else, why aren't our lives filled with nothing but Good things? Why can't he just arrange things so that we never need to experience grief and sorrow and heartache and loss? Why create a

world full of such danger and risk and potential disaster? If God is acting for our good, why can't we see it all the time?

And I think part of the answer to that question is that we don't always see all the good, and when we do, we don't acknowledge where it came from. Most of the good things we enjoy every day are enjoyed without our ever considering where they came from. You're breathing oxygen right now, and you have been for quite some time, and you probably don't really notice it most of the time, but it's fantastic stuff. There's really nothing that we've ever done that makes us deserving of the lives we enjoy. You didn't have anything to do with your own creation – it happened because of something your parents did around nine months before you were born, and many cases, you weren't really part of the plan at the time. Our lives and everything in them, it's all a gift, every second of every day is one more second that we can't possibly earn or deserve or repay, but we take them for granted, or even worse, we think they're ours. We think that our money is ours because we worked for it, forgetting that the body and mind that we used while working, and the time that we had to work, and the universe with all its complex laws and principles that enabled us to do that work, we didn't create any of those things, they're all gifts from God, and so everything we derive from the use of all of those things are still not our own, they still belong to God. So yes, God is acting for our good at every second of every day, but most of the time, we just don't notice it.

And yet – that still doesn't explain the pain and the brokenness that fills this world. Even with all the blessings that God gives us, we still want more. We want God to protect us from harm, not just some of the time, but all of the time, and if he loves us, and he has the power to do it, then why not? Why not keep all his children safe at every moment? If God has the power, and if he's going to all this trouble to supply our needs and give us so many blessings, why do people still suffer? Why does disaster still strike?

So we have to go back to the meaning of love – love is deciding to act for the deepest good of someone else, no matter what the cost, and that means that in order to understand God's love for us, we need to identify what our deepest need truly is. And the truth is, I don't think it's safety. I don't think it's protection from harm. Everything we see from God in the Bible tells us that our deepest need isn't a long life and health and wealth and comfort, as wonderful as all those things are. There is a deeper good right at the very heart of our existence, and that is that we need to be with God. We need to be in relationship with God, with our creator. The most fundamental, basic need, the deepest good imaginable for all humanity is to know God fully, even as we are fully known. God is the fuel that we were designed to run on, God is the fire that is meant to burn within us. Without God, we are empty, and we are lost, and so the perfect sign of God's love, above all else, is that he makes it possible for us to know him, God makes it possible for us to be in relationship with him. God shows his love for us by coming to us in Jesus Christ, by revealing himself to us as one of us, as a human being who is the

Son of God. This is how God is love – for God so loved the world that he sent us his son. God sent us Jesus Christ so that our deepest good, our deepest need could be satisfied.

And yet we still wonder. Yes, God has provided for our deepest good by entering into this world and reconciling us with our Creator through the life and death of Jesus Christ, and for that we are deeply grateful, we praise him for his grace and love for us, but we still wonder: now that we've been reconciled to God, now that we're in relationship with him, now that our deepest good has been provided for in Jesus Christ, why can't he give us all those other goods as well? Why not give us all long lives and perfect health and a comfortable existence at the same time? Can't we have it all? Is that too much to ask?

And in some cases, the problem is that when we are given all those lesser things, health, long life, earthly comforts, that we grow too easily satisfied with those lesser things, and so we grow complacent. We start to think that those things are the ultimate good in the world, and we forget that we were created for more than that. We forget that our true purpose is to know God as we are known by him. But if we're not careful, that truth can lead us to think that every tragedy is meant to be a reminder to force us back to God, that every bad thing that happens is something God caused in order to wake us up and force us to follow him again. And I don't think that's true. I don't think God is sitting at a switchboard, monitoring our levels of commitment to him, and when we aren't loving him enough or giving him

enough attention he flips a switch and someone we love dies and that's supposed to bring us back to him. I don't think that's how God works. When we say that something terrible that happens is God's will, I don't think it always means that God personally decided that that thing was going to happen and inflicted it on us for a particular purpose. We say that God's will is done even in those terrible circumstances because we believe it is God's will that this world is the way it is. We believe that it is God's will that this world is a world full of danger and risk and the potential for tragedy. Our world is not perfect, it is not safe, and that in itself should be a constant reminder that our highest good cannot be found within this world, it can only be found in our creator, in the love we encounter in Jesus Christ. God created a world where it is possible for us to experience tragedy, and pain, and yes, death. But it is also a world where it is possible for us to experience joy, and love, and it is a world where in the midst of our pain, in the midst of our brokenness, our deepest, ultimate good can still be fulfilled in the love of Jesus Christ. Because the true miracle of the incarnation, the true gift of Love God gives us is that when God decides to act to supply our deepest good, regardless of the cost to himself, he does exactly that. God knows that what we truly need is his presence, his power, his goodness with us wherever we are, and he meets that need not by plucking us out of this broken world and carrying us to where he is, no. God meets that need by entering into this broken world and coming to us where we are. In Jesus Christ, God enters in to the brokenness, in to the tragedy, in to even death on a cross, so that even

when we suffer, even then our deepest good is being supplied, because God meets with us there, God suffers with us, God cries the same tears we cry, every pain that strikes our hearts strikes infinitely deeper into his divine heart. In his first letter to the church, John tells us that “this is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us.” He loved us enough to meet us where we are, to come to us as we are, and to suffer everything this world could throw at him so that we are never, never, never alone.

And of course, it doesn't end there. The love of God doesn't end there, it doesn't end with us weeping together in the darkness, it doesn't end with God and humanity sitting in the dust and ashes of a broken world. We have God's promise that he will make all things new, that he will make all things right, that he will take every broken and twisted and ruined atom of this universe and redeem and restore and resurrect this world into a new heaven and a new earth. For God so loved this world that he sent his only son so all those who belong to him will not perish but will have eternal life. Through the danger and risk of this world, our God promises he will never leave us alone, and he will not let sorrow and death have the victory over us. Pain may touch our hearts, but it cannot overwhelm us, it cannot triumph over us, because we will not perish: in Jesus Christ our deepest Good will be satisfied for all eternity. In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us, through him who died for us. God is Love. We see that love in Jesus Christ. His love will carry us through every sorrow, it will carry us into

eternity, and nothing in this world can ever separate us from that love, from the love of God we find in Jesus Christ. Thanks be to God. Amen.