

# Why Doesn't God Do Something?

by Vance Havner

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*God's ways are not always easy to understand, but He is working all things together for good, even in the midst of suffering and injustice.*

**Duration:** 32:42

**Scripture:** Job 23:3

**Topics:** "Sovereignty Of God", "Trust in God's Plan", "Suffering"

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## Description

Vance Havner addresses the profound question of why God seems silent in the face of suffering and tragedy, drawing parallels to the cries of Job and the psalmists. He reflects on personal experiences of despair and the mystery of life's inequities, emphasizing that while we may not understand God's ways, we can trust in His ultimate purpose. Havner points to the crucifixion of Christ as the ultimate answer to our suffering, where God Himself experienced abandonment, providing hope and reconciliation for humanity. He encourages believers to hold onto faith amidst unanswered questions, reminding them that God is present and working even when we cannot see it. Ultimately, he reassures that all things will be made right in God's timing.

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## Transcript

We see in the tragedy, and the misery, and the mystery, and the inequities, and the inequities of life, so much of it just doesn't add up in our little computers. And we find ourselves saying, Job, oh, that I knew where I might find thee. Behold, I go forward, but he's not there, and backward, but I cannot precede him.

On the left hand, where he doth work, but he hideth himself. On the right hand, and I cannot see him. For like the psalmist, O God, why hast thou cast us off? Why doth thine anger smoke against the sheep in thy pasture? For like Jeremiah, why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuseth to be healed? For thou be altogether unto me as waters that fail.

That sounds natural to our own experiences. I remember that when my wife was quite ill, and I spent so much time in the hospital, the doctor said, you go out and preach. You mustn't stay here so much.

We'll take care of her. And I went to a town in North Carolina, and I remember when I walked in that Holiday Inn hotel, and put down my bags, how low I was in spirits. But the Gideon Bible was left open for some reason.

I'm not much on this stuff, and the Bible will open, and it'll open every time, the right verse, the situation. But this time, it wasn't coincidence, it was providence. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? And why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God, I will yet praise him who is the light of my countenance, and my God.

Psalms 42 and 43, they're in a place in the Bible where you're learning the two verses like that right close together, and on the same page practically. So God spoke to me, and I called up that wonderful friend of mine, old Bertha Smith. Ninety-four oaks, five miles every day.

Ex-missionary to China for years and years. Over there through all the Japanese invasion and the communist takeover. A remarkable woman, if there ever was one.

I said, Miss Bertha, pray for me. And she did, right over the telephone, of course. Wonderful person.

She means business with God. I said one time to her, Miss Bertha, I'm not feeling well this morning. Oh, commit it to the Lord, commit it to the Lord, she said.

I said, and I will tell that woman I feel bad again. You can get a bit of sympathy in the world. It's all over on the road, lots of things to do anyhow.

So I should have learned it. But if you have visited the hospital for retarded, abnormal children, their little bodies twisted and grotesque and sometimes hideous, if you've stood in the room for the aged and beheld those pitiful vegetables kept alive by machines that prolong death and not life, shapeless lumps of flesh unable to live or die, or if you've visited great cemeteries where the bodies of countless soldiers, as I did when I was preaching in Arlington, Virginia, and every day tramped over those acres and acres of cemetery boys who died, some of them in vain boys, facing heaven as though to say, Lord, why? Why me? Why did I have to go? I like to live too. If you've looked on the victims of tornado or flood or fire or the corpses of innocent men and women murdered by maniacs or the haunting faces of alcoholics or drug addicts and the despair of terminal illness, and if you've held a hand all day long of one already dead but kept by a mechanism a sort of a feeble heartbeat on the monitor, as I did all day long, and yet what's the use? Then, if you have faced the ironic enigmas that add up to nothing in your arithmetic, if your dreams have been blasted and your hopes destroyed by the heartless law of cause and effect with no answer from the heavens, you must cry out like the psalmist, my God, why? Why? I was down in South Carolina, a godly preacher, wonderful man.

I was getting ready to take a mission to Brazil, and they gave him a bunch of shots in preparation. I don't know what happened, but they put him in the hospital, and he took his life, and his wife said, it's bad enough to lose him, but why that way? And I said, I don't know, but I'm preaching over here at Gardner Webb College, and you've got a boy over there. Come over, maybe it might be helpful, and I think maybe it was.

Well, I think these unexplainable things. I knew P.B. Chenault, a little Iowa, and he and Mrs. Chenault and the two babies took off for Dallas for a meeting with John R. Rice down there, and after it was over, they started back, and they first had prayer, of course, for a safe journey, and down the road a ways, they stopped the car again and had prayer for a safe journey. Ran into a drunken driver who killed P.B. Chenault and left the wife and the two babies, and they go, how do you put that together? I don't.

We can. Of course, I was staying in the home of a wonderful man who never had married, a fine man of God who, as I understand, later married Mrs. Chenault, and they took the children and went to Africa's mission as well. We never can tell what God's about and all these things, but it does raise a lot of problems.

We make our way through a mess and a mass of unanswered questions with no possible solution until we have better life. Everything's mixed today. One day a precious answer to prayer, and the next day calamity hits you.

One day it's miracle, and the next day it's mystery, and because there's so much misery following the miracle. It's like the weather. I don't know of any other element in all creation that is as perfect an illustration of this as the weather.

There never is much sense to what the weather is going to do next, as far as you and I are concerned, because one night the tender fruit is killed and belated maybe by an early frost. No discernible pattern, because the weather gets fouled up and has been ever since the fall of man, I believe. I don't believe God started it off that way.

When God made everything, he said it was good. Then the devil got into it. Don't ask me to explain how that first bad thought came to Lucifer.

I don't know where the thought came from, and I'm not trying to explain it to you, but let's glory in tribulation, but don't glorify tribulation. Jesus said, this woman whom Satan hath bound, remember that, and Paul said, my thorn in the flesh is the messenger of Satan, and he said in one of his epistles, I wanted to visit you folks, but I couldn't make it, not because, as we preachers say saluciously, sometimes I was providentially detained. He didn't say it that way.

He said, the devil hindered me. So give credit where it belongs. But you don't need to bombard heaven with unanswered whys, because God has gathered up all our agony and all our distress and put it in an all-inclusive why.

Of course, it began with David in the 22nd Psalm. The centuries before Jesus died on the cross, David put into writing a description of the persecution. When you remember that crucifixion was a Roman form of execution, not a Jewish, only divine inspiration can account for the fact that here's a Hebrew writing hundreds of years ahead and giving minute details of a crucifixion, bones out of joint, verse 14, agony, verse 14, 15, thirst, verse 15, pierced hands and feet, verse 16, partial nudity and scorn, 17, 17, casting off, and all of it, a perfect picture of one thing that wouldn't happen for a long, long time yet.

What does all this mean? Well, if Psalm 22 was only the cry of a psalmist and only the cry of a man, oh, miserable and wretched, or of all mankind through all the centuries, we wouldn't be out of the woods yet. Caress thou not that we perish. Why doesn't God do something? All things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.

There's nothing to it, the world says, just cause and effect. Why doesn't God break through and intervene and interfere? If he's omniscient, he knows about it. If he's omnipotent, he can do something about it.

If he's omnipresent, he's everywhere. My friend, God has done something about it. And in Psalm 22, if we had to stop there and couldn't go any further, life would be only a tale told by a fool, full of sound and fury and signifying nothing.

The joke of a meaningless faith, we'd be the victims of a demonic faith and of a monster. Humanity would be a mass of impure carbohydrates headed for oblivion, but centuries after the psalmist wrote it, it was screamed out, screamed out in Aramaic on the cross of Calvary by the Son of God, my God, my God, why? Not why am I suffering so? That was bad enough. Crucifixion is the most awful way to leave this world possible.

But why have you, why hast thou, not Father this time, but God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? God turned off the light, and there ended the most awful six hours in human history from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Everything turned black in the middle of the day. I think the cattle must have come home, and the birds must have gone to roost. God turned off the light, and his Son died.

And for that awful moment, a God who cannot look upon sin, looked the other way while his Son drank the last dregs of that cup, the sins of all mankind, with that cry upon his lips, and he did it that God might be just and to justify, that the judgment seat might become the mercy seat, that God might be propitiated and sinners might be reconciled. Well might the Son in darkness hide and shed his glories in when Christ, the mighty Maker, died for men, the creature of sin? That's why it was. Hell is separation from God, you know.

And for a moment, my Lord, was separated from God. There was that momentary experience of what will be eternal for those who know not God. What an hour this was.

No wonder Martin Luther went without food as he studied it, and went about prancing back and forth saying, God forsaken of God, who can understand it? There's a tradition. God's in these witnessed the darkness in Egypt, and said either the deity himself suffers at this moment, or sympathizes with one who does. And there at the cross of all people, while the religious crowd were saying, if you're the Son of God, come down from the cross.

The people who had read the Scriptures and prayed in public, tigers and everything else, if you're the Son of God, come down from the cross. All that crowd there. And here stood an old Roman centurion, never had been to a Bible meeting in his life.

Didn't know anything about it. This must be the Son of God. I tell you, they had a strange crowd there then.

We've dressed up Calvary today in a theological gobbledygook and sentimentality, so as not to offend the fastidious tastes of some Sunday morning benchwarmers, who go on to be disturbed by a gory reference to a bruised and beaten and bleeding Savior, with his beard pulled out and his face covered with blood and spittle. There's nothing elegant about it. We don't try to make it pretty, we shouldn't.

I have an artist friend in Maryland who specializes in drawing pictures, as best he can, trying to, of the suffering of Christ. He doesn't like some of these even famous pictures of Jesus that they look like as though he was just suffering a minor inconvenience. He wasn't hurting much in some of them, and he can't see it that way.

Man suffered as only God can suffer. It wasn't the physical suffering alone, although that's beyond words, but he poured out his soul unto death. Some time ago, two preachers were talking.

One said to the other, man, I sweated blood over that. The other preacher said, don't let me ever hear you say that again. You don't know what it means to sweat blood over anything, but my Lord does.

James Robinson, the evangelist, sent me a picture that he sends out to his TV watchers, and it's not a pretty picture. I hang it over my desk. It's a terrible picture.

I didn't even put it in the frame. I want it to stay as ugly as it can, because he's there in the garden, and you see the disciples sleeping over here, and there he hangs on to a rock. Up there you can see the coming crucifixion up there in the sky.

Agony, agony, agony. I try to keep that in my mind when I'm studying. You see, Jesus didn't have to die, one way you look at it.

We have to, the seeds of sin and death, but Jesus never sinned, so he had no wages to pay. He didn't owe any debt along that line. He didn't have anything to pay.

He could lay it down and take it up again. You can't do that. You can kill yourself, but you can't take it up again.

You put yourself out of business, you're out of business, friend. You can't think of anything. And when the women were weeping as he ascended that hill, there's a text.

I never heard anybody preach to women on that, but I wonder why, because weep not for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. I feel like today when women are so excited about all the other things, I want to stand up somewhere and say, I'll tell you something to cry about. Weep for yourselves and for your children.

They need weeping for it. There's never before. My Lord wasn't dependent on this earth for his health.

He wasn't a helpless victim of a mob. He said in effect to those women, I'm climbing this hill on purpose. I'm not going because I can't help myself.

I could call down 12 angels, 12 legions of angels, he said to the apostles, a legion for each apostle if I wanted to. Said the Pilate, you couldn't do a thing, you wouldn't have any power unless it were given you from above. I don't need somebody crying for me.

He went up to die on purpose, and that's the strangest death I ever heard of. He took care of a lot of business, hanging out on the cross, made arrangements for his mother to have a place to live, bought a ticket to paradise for that old dying thief, checked him in, a lot of things. Now, then finally he said, Lord, into thy hands can I come in this bed.

Now, no man ever lived like that, no man ever died like that. But he did have to die. He had to die because only one who was God and man both could meet the demands of God's righteousness on one hand and identify humanity on the other.

And when he said, my God, my God, something happened the next few minutes, he said, it's finished. Thank God it was finished, and thank God it is finished. And Hudson Taylor, as a boy, was aroused spiritually, lying up in the hayloft, reading the book that had him at this, a lot about it is finished.

He said to himself, as a boy, well, if it's finished, there's nothing I can do. If it's finished, all I can do is accept it. It takes some people a long time to find that out.

And he became a great missionary. It answers that question. But I know what you're saying this morning.

But we still have sin and disease and death and heartbreak and suffering and sorrow. Yes. But they buried him and he rose again and he's coming back again, and one of these days he's going to redeem creation, this present creation, before the new heavens and the new earth.

I believe he's going to make this world over. He's not going to let the devil get away with all that mischief that he's wrought through the fall. Oh, his visage was so marred when they laid him away.

He didn't look like a man. That's what you gather out of Isaiah 52, 14. I stood with my wife down at Charles and took a picture of her out there on the battery at the waterfront.

And we didn't finish the roll. And a year and a half later, when she'd gone to heaven, I thought of it and finished the roll, and there she stood. And I said, well, just as that roll has lain in the darkness of that camera for a year and a half, so her body lies in a little Quaker graveyard.

But one of these days, the great photographer is going to turn negative into positive. When he does, corruption will be in corruption, mortal immortal, death swallowed up in victory. Let me say to you folks that you've got to worry maybe a why that bothers you.

The Purpose of God is a book with three chapters. The original purpose of God, the present purpose of God, and the ultimate purpose of God. Please remember, you can't understand things now you're in the middle of the book.

Did you ever understand any book by reading the middle of it first? It's got to finish. We see as in a mirror, and they had some terrible mirrors back in those days, as in an enigma. That's your Greek word.

You've got an enigma on your hands. You're in the middle of the book. I used to read novels as a boy, always read the last page first, see what happened to the hero, see how he came out, when you see that old villain disposed of, and it all happened, but I was in a hurry to get over there.

But all things are working together for good. God makes some things happen. He lets some things happen, but nothing just happens.

Nothing. Christians are not immune to accidents and diseases and disasters. I mean, Camille, that awful tornado struck some years ago.

A little later, I was in that on the Gulf Coast meeting, and the one man said, everything I had in this world just vanished, disappeared. I don't know where it went. And I was down at Tekoa Falls not long after the dam broke.

Of course, that was an accident. But a young man that had lunch with me one day, his brother, he said, I heard it coming. You didn't have long to wait, because that awful flood swept his brother away and took him.

Those things you don't answer with some sweet little remark. They go too deep into the heart of the thing. But they work together for good, and sometimes we can't add them up with our little computers.

We simply have to call it unfinished business, until we have more light on the subject. And like that poor fellow I told you about, I tell about him a lot, because he just answered this question. That seasick guy, about leaning over the rail, breakfast gone, lunch gone, supper gone.

One of these cheerful mortals who always shows up at the wrong time, came along and said, shut up. Seasickness never killed anybody. He said, don't tell me that.

It's the hope of dying that's kept me alive this long. So I tell you, it's the hope of dying keeps me going sometimes, brother, if you know what I mean. And my Bible says, and the first thing I think of sometimes when I look in the looking glass at this mug of mine, it doth not yet appear, or it shall be.

I say, Lord, you are right. You got to do something on this. You got to work a change here somewhere.

And I think about that little modernist preacher who didn't believe he ought to use that word salvation anymore. Thought we'd worn it out. Wanted to call it salvage.

Now wasn't that a bright idea? Salvage something, salvage the same old rag. But salvation's a brand new job. I don't want to be towed into heaven behind a wrecking crew.

I want to go in brand new. Thank the Lord. But we are wearing out.

I think of that little boy, seven years old. He'd been out in the sun too long. He's peeling off.

He's washing. Just look, six years old and wearing out already. Well, you are.

You are wearing out already. And I don't want to discourage you, but I hear so much about terminal cases, friend. Do you realize you're a terminal case, you say? You can terminate, aren't you? I don't want you to go out of here feeling worse than you did when you came in.

But we're all terminal cases, and they may last longer than you will, some of those folks. So let's get the record straight here. And I'm waiting until, until the day of Jesus Christ, until heed of hindrance taken out of the way, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in, until all things are put under his feet, until all enemies are made his footstool.

Sometimes somebody asks you what time it is. Tell them, until. I got a letter from a dear brother who heard this some time ago, and he signed it, not yours truly, but until.

That's a good way to sign a letter, indeed. Oh, they asked me up to Hampton Institute in Virginia, that wonderful black college, the best, greatest one they had. They wanted me to preach to between four and five hundred black preachers.

I nearly preached myself to death. I'm telling you, I said, if I could get white folks to back me up like you're backing me up, I might be a pretty fair preacher. And you know, then they all stood, that great congregation of folks, and sang, farther along we'll never go back.

I just sat there and patted one foot and bawled over it. I didn't cry, I bawled. I said, bless God, this crowd's going somewhere, and I'm going with them.

Going somewhere, that's the only way out of all this. And when that day comes, all our lives will be taken care of. But don't bring more trouble on yourself than you're going to come anyhow.

Don't make it too hard on yourself. I think about that dear old lady who was here, and they said, honey, we've done all for you. You can't, you're just going to have trust the Lord.

She said, my soul has it come to that. A lot of people feel that way about it. The last resort, God's not a last resort, He's your first resort.

Start with Him. Remember thy Creator in the days that are you. Start with God.

Don't wait till you're hitting a jam. He'll be merciful to you if you run to Him even in a jam. But don't let it take that to run you to the Lord.

We let life's petty little disappointments get us down. Some folks go around like a man trying to kill mosquitoes with a sledgehammer. That's not the way to kill mosquitoes.

You erect the glass, break out all the windows, and start up the furniture. You don't do it that way. And when you meet real trouble, you're worn out, you've worn yourself out, you can't meet a line because you've been killing all these grasshoppers and all the insects with a sledgehammer, you're not ready.

Don't waste too much time on things that don't matter. I went over here this morning for breakfast. I'm fond of that oatmeal they have with brown sugar.

I went along one foot saying brown sugar, the other said oatmeal. Got over there and they'd run out of brown sugar. It takes a lot to get over not having brown sugar.

But I said, now you learn the lesson. Don't let the little disappointments of life clobber you. Don't let them do that.

But there's another side, and we've already been dwelling on it. You read in the paper on the front page this morning about that man, almost nine, and the little 11-year-old girl that found her body, they think. It's so difficult to be precise that it's been there so long.

And he's still trying to say God will take care of it. But I read that and that's got hold of me. I'm afraid it's her body.

And he seems to have some knowledge about the Lord. God granted him to face it in time and make the most of it. I'm continually hearing from folks who when I read what they're going through, I get ashamed of myself.

They never grumbled about anything. So my friends, we'll understand it further along, but wait till then to understand it. And you know that all things work together for good to them that love God.

Remember there's an unseen eye watching you, but there's an unseen hand leading you. You're not aware of it sometimes. I look back now over all these years, and things that I thought were a mistake, some of them, some things that didn't make a bit of sense in this world.

Now it has sort of come together. I can already begin to make some sense out of it. And Spurgeon said, when you can't trace God's hand, you can trust God's heart.

And that'll, that'll answer the problem in the long run. I think of that dear son of the Lord who was quite ill, and almost time to go home. And he always wanted a vacant chair by the side of the bed.

And he said, well, he said, that's the Lord's chair. He said, I like to think of him as sitting there. And I talked to him some.

And then one day he went home, and the nurse said, I happened to be out for a few moments. When he came back in, he was gone. Everything was pretty much like it was, except there was one hand out on the chair.

That's a good way. Don't you sometimes have a spell where you say, Lord, take all of us to heaven in our sleep? I think of that old Pappy Reveal. You were Indiana folks.

You knew Daddy Pappy Reveal, Evansville Rescue Mission. There was one for you. He wasn't an educated man.

He was a cripple, but he could get any preacher he wanted, from Billy Sunday to Billy Graham, to come there and it is worth going just to be with Pappy. He had a strange way of getting things from God. I couldn't find an apartment in Greensboro.

And I said, Pappy, I can't find anywhere to move into my life. So let's go out in the woods and pray about it. And I found Jesus fell like he usually does on his knees.

And our Lord said, just fell on his knees in the apartment, and so on, and so on, and the next week my mother-in-law called my mom and said, I've got that apartment you've been wanting, and I lived in it 14 years. I've been praying for it too, but had to get around to Pappy somehow, I think, before anything started happening. He said, I want to make a quick getaway when I go.

God gave it to him. He was shaving in bed, a cripple that he was, and his wife came in the breakfast and he shaved one side of his face and laid the razor down and went on to heaven. That's a good way to go.

A good way to go. And when you know there's a hand leading you, you're prepared. So I won't tell us in a little bit the same before we go.

You can come on up. I got through sooner than I thought I would, and that's unusual. But friends, if you have a why that you don't have the answer to, remember that Jesus said to his disciples when they had the blues, he said, now I'm coming back, and in that day you will ask me nothing.

See what I mean? I've got a stack of why's this high I want to ask. I think when he shows up in all his glory and I get one good look at him, I said, Lord, excuse me for ever thinking about a why. Throw him away.

He's coming. You're going to get a good look at him and hope he doesn't knock you out like he did John that time on Padma. But you'll recover all right.

He'll be there and you'll say, fear not, I told you I was here before there ever was anything to be scared of. Now be here after everything you're scared of is gone. I'm here too.

Does Jesus care? Does he really? Now this man with the little girl gone, I know that you can say, well God, where were you? And I'm not here to answer those things for I don't know the answers. Now in my hour of deepest grief when I was all cold and neat as I'd get alongside the railroad track, not a good place to walk, but I can sing there and nobody can hear me. One of my favorite songs, oh yes, he cares.

I know he cares. I don't know why this happens to everything, but I know he cares. So you fellas come on and sing.

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