



# Bible study: Suffering and Covid-19

Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'

**John 9:3 (ESV)**

## Reflection

We have a very human need to have some sort of explanation for things that baffle us. In social psychology, 'cognitive closure' reflects our human desire for clear answers to things in our world that are confusing and unclear.

As a deadly pandemic rages on, many people search for an answer. If there is a God, then why the Covid-19 virus? Is there any purpose behind this virus?

Many Christians talk about how God must have a reason for all things that happen and how things will surely work out together for the good (cf Romans 8:28). This reflects a firm conviction that even with Covid-19, God is in control and is set to accomplish something through it. Some Christians are a bit more wary of giving an impression that God is behind this pandemic, choosing rather to emphasise that much of the suffering that happens in our world is shrouded in mystery (cf Job 42:3). If so, perhaps, they find a more appropriate response, not in a clear-cut explanation, but through deep cries of lamentation for the pain and grief that the virus has wrought.

Some Christians will want to transform the suffering they see and experience into an opportunity to take responsibility. As Christian author Philip Yancey has put it, the question of 'Where is God when it hurts?' is just another way of asking 'Where is the church, God's people, when people are hurting?'



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And so, many Christians seek to demonstrate God's loving presence in the midst of suffering by being Christ's hands and feet and bringing comfort to those who need it most.

In John 9, we read of the story where Jesus healed a man born blind. In it, he showed how miracles of hope defy the usual categories of religious explanation. In fact, Jesus uncovers for us a far more serious case of blindness. These Pharisees were blinded to the healing presence of Jesus because they were so focussed on their religious rules and formulas. We can easily turn to simple answers (for 'cognitive closure') that may sometimes blind us to the presence and work of God in our midst. This is not to say that there are no helpful answers to be found in God's word, but our hope and trust should not be in any one specific answer to the questions of suffering, but rather in the person and presence of God. Rather than relying on simplified answers to the complexities of suffering and Covid-19, let's pray that we learn to open ourselves to new

ways of seeing God's broken world. May we be open to the mysteries of what God is up to in the world, and may we explore new ways of participating in God's global gospel work of redemption, restoration and reconciliation.

## Reflection questions

1. In the story of John 9, how are the apostles and the Pharisees limited in their understanding of why people are afflicted of sickness and suffering in general?
2. How about you? What is your usual explanation for why people suffer calamities and other disasters in life?
3. Are there other stories, biblical passages or themes that can help in getting a fuller picture of what the Bible teaches about suffering and the goodness of God?
4. Where do you notice the active healing presence of God in the midst of this current Covid-19 pandemic? Where do you see signs of life, restoration, redemption or hope?

## Prayer

*Lord, may we have the eyes to see that which breaks your heart and may we have the heart to seize that which will open our eyes. Let the suffering of your Son, Jesus, be our comfort as we share in the suffering of others. Amen.*