Suffering and the Problem of Pain
Additional Annotated Bibliography


The author argues that there is actually no problem of evil, since evil is required so God can demonstrate His character, including His justice and grace. He appeals especially to the doctrine of election in Romans 9. The book includes an interesting feature: refutation by John Frame, who argues that Jay Adams oversstates his case.


Gregory Boyd espouses open theism, David Hunt simple-foreknowledge, William Lane Craig middle-foreknowledge, and Paul Helm the Augustinian-Calvinist view.


This will be of interest to pastors, teachers, and lay people who wish to pursue the problem of evil at a deep level.


Boyd challenges the traditional doctrine of divine omniscience and sovereignty, saying that God does not know future contingent human choices in advance and therefore cannot prevent certain evils.


Boyd attempts to refute the Calvinistic position.


A solid presentation of God's sovereignty. Bridges appeals to Scripture and quotes Puritan writers.


For those facing difficult times. Deals wonderfully with God's Sovereignty, God's Wisdom, and God's Love. True to typical Bridges form, full of Scripture and devotional warmth. A fine book.


An accomplished singer and songwriter effectively argues for the biblical approach to lament. Deep, engaging and interesting.


Based on a series of four lectures. In this small but significant and wise book, Carson argues that that many see love as God's only attribute. What makes his love difficult is that it coexists with his holiness, sovereignty, and wrath.


A clear and biblical treatment of the problem of evil and suffering written by an outstanding theologian. Excellent. On my short list of essential books on the subject.


Develops the Christian worldview as a whole, including a perspective on the problem of evil.

Most of this book isn’t about the problem of evil (it deals with abortion, homosexuality, and other topics), but the portion that pertains is thoughtful and engaging. Craig represents what is known as the Molinist (middle knowledge) position.


Like the previous book, most of this one isn’t about the problem of evil, but again Craig does a good job with those portions that are.


A guide to literature on the problem of evil. The author’s logic seems stronger in some areas than others. Not a first book to read on this subject, but portions are helpful.


Stephen Davis selected five scholars taking different approaches to theodicy. I’ll mention three: John Borth presents a theodicy of protest in which he states God has a dark side, and is not totally good. John Hick sees God as concerned about “soul making” and unable to stop evil but he retains human free will. Davis himself presents a more classic Christian perspective of the doctrine of sin and Christ’s redemptive work.


An older work of a pastoral nature, biblical and caring, not primarily theological or philosophical.


A concisely written, heartfelt and sometimes excruciating book that documents the death of Didion’s husband and the effect it had on her. Extremely well written, though Christian readers will be sad that Didion did not find hope in the gospel of Christ.


A popularly written treatment of the problem of evil and suffering. Full of illustrations from family and Scripture, it is a good pastoral book, understandable to many who would not wade through the more philosophical and theological books. Its approach is warm and affirming. Those needing the help of a pastor or counselor will benefit from it.


See the entire chapter devoted to this work in my book _If God is Good_. Bottom line, while the book contains good insights here and there, as a whole it is a tragic account of a man who considered himself an evangelical Christian, shared his faith, attended Moody Bible Institute and Wheaton College, and then abandoned his faith due to his inability to come to terms with the problem of evil and suffering.


Elizabeth, who suffered through the death of her missionary martyr husband Jim, and another husband’s death, is honest and biblically rock solid.


First published in 1979, updated and revised in 1993, and again in 2003. Covers various approaches and philosophies concerning the problem of evil. Those looking for a book that is both good theologically and good philosophically should look here.

The book goes into great detail, which well-read philosophy students will appreciate. Feinberg’s biggest contribution to the discussion may be his emphasis that there is no such thing as “the problem of evil,” but in fact there are a number of
distinguishable problems that fall under the umbrella of the problem of evil. He says answers to one problem should not be dismissed because there are other problems they don't answer or address.


A look at some of the lament psalms


A unique voice with some good insights and good theology, offered in a series of brief meditations.


Most of the book covers other issues, but it includes a good section on the problem of evil and suffering. Those into theology and philosophy will find it interesting, but not simple. Though he is Reformed in theology, Frame disagrees with Jay Adams's treatment of the issue in The Great Deception. But admirably, in an appendix he invited Jay Adams to offer an unedited critique of Frame's treatment of his position.


A treatment of the person and works of God by a Reformed scholar. Since God's attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, sovereignty, holiness, goodness, love, and longsuffering all have great bearing on the problem of evil, this fine book equips readers, mostly indirectly, to address it. Similarly, Tozer's The Knowledge of the Holy and Packer's Knowing God do the same, as do the chapters on God's attributes in Wayne Grudem's Systematic Theology.


On my short list of great books on this subject, Ken Gire's book is heartfelt and profound. Holding the reader's hand in the darkness, nothing tries, no easy answers. The analogy of mountain climbing works very well. Gire is a fine writer and thinker. This is a great book for those whose long-term life experiences have left them feeling abandoned by God. Much warmth, understanding, and solace.

Mark H. Gresser, John A. Lynn, John W. Schoenhelt, Don't Blame God! A Biblical Answer to the Problem of Evil, Sin and Suffering (Indianapolis, IN: Christian Educational Services, 1994).

Unfortunately, in spite of its subtitle, the book's premise is not biblical. The book "exposes the myth that God is totally in control of all that happens (which would make Him solely responsible for it) and shows that He and His Son Jesus Christ are doing all they can to intervene in the realm of the Devil and help us." While correctly blaming the devil for hurting us and trying to hurt us, this book misses the sovereign work of an omnipotent God, who is not helpless in the face of Satan's works, and can and ultimately will use even those evil things for His glory and His people's good.


Os is an intellectual, writer, and speaker who served as a young man with Francis Schaeffer. He's always insightful, and this book is no exception. It is a well-written and well-reasoned approach with its own unique and interesting style. He quotes many philosophers and historical figures, and tells many stories from the death camps. It is painfully honest about the horrors of evil, while unapologetically hopeful of the universe's future in Christ's redemptive work. A good book for the well educated unbeliever or believer. Os' grasp of philosophy and history is broad and convincing.

Nancy Guthrie, Holding On to Hope: A Pathway through Suffering to the Heart of God (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002).
After the loss of two children, Nancy wrote honestly and from the heart. Her treatment of the book of Job is excellent. I interviewed her and her husband while writing *If God is Good*, and quoted from them several times. Biblical, and with a big view of God, she never minimizes the reality and depth of suffering.


Interesting insights spread out among some I disagree with. Not my personal favorite, though some love it. Hall evaluates five thinkers on suffering: Harold Kushner, C. S. Lewis, Diogenes Allen, George Bockstoeck, and Leslie Weatherhead.


A university professor, and Eastern Orthodox theologian, wrote this just-over-100-page book. The book took me completely by surprise because it combines depth and brevity, and brings clarity to the philosophical struggles surrounding the problem of evil. Some readers will not appreciate the number of words they’ve never encountered! Sometimes a half dozen of those advanced vocabulary words are on a single page, with some sentences exceeding 100 words. Hart is a scholar who does not put the cookies on the lower shelf, but rewards you for stretching upward to grab some very good ones.


The absolute "must buy" for compatibilists.

**Peter Hicks, The Message of Evil & Suffering** (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press 2007).

After I had read perhaps eighty books on this issue, and thought very little could now be fresh, I read this book. It’s a wealth of insight from a variety of passages, one of the finest overall treatments of the problem of evil and suffering.

**Michael Horton, Too Good to Be True** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

A biblical and insightful work, good for pastors and serious thinking lay people. Takes some shots at prosperity theology that are well deserved. Theologically sound, with a big view of God and His sovereign purposes.


A hospice nurse’s insights on death and dying. Helpful for caregivers. Good theological perspective, perhaps more about being a hospice nurse than will interest some, but many readers will profit.


This book includes fourteen essays by various philosophers, as well as a theologian, and a sociologist. While some of the essays were less relevant to the purposes of my book, there are some rich insights spread throughout the volume that I’m grateful not to have missed. In particular, I recommend the essays by theologian John Schneider on the debate over horrendous evil. Also those by Keith Wytsman on original sin and Laura Wadell on suffering as original experience. Peter van Inwagen, the book’s editor, makes one of the finest brief statements anywhere on the problem of evil.


Excellent book, and excellent chapter on the problem of evil. Keller says, "If you come to recognize the beliefs on which your doubts about Christianity are based, and if you seek as much proof for those beliefs as you seek from Christians for theirs—you will discover that your doubts are not so solid as they first appeared."

Concerning suffering, Keller says, "With time and perspective most of us can see good reasons for at least some of the tragedy and pain that occurs in life. Why couldn’t it be possible that, from God's vantage point, there are good reasons for all of them?"


Among the best of modern, pastoral treatments of the problem of suffering.

In a unique approach, the author covers an interesting collection of sources, including the book of Job, Revelation, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Milton, Voltaire, Hunt, Mary Shelley, Darwin, Jung, Flannery O'Connor, Karl Rahner, Tikhonov's *Eternal Kingdom* and modern geneticists.


I always find Kreeft, a Christian philosopher, interesting. Though I sometimes disagree with his positions as a Roman Catholic, at other times I think he's right on the money. A unique and worthwhile book.


I refer to *If God is Good* to this nearly 140-year-old book, originally written in French, that could in most respects have been written anywhere in the world today. The illustrations differ, but the insights are timeless.


Personal and anguished, this is a gripping journal-like book that captures the reality of grief. As I say in *If God is Good*, this book is commonly cited as evidence that Lewis "lost his faith." In fact, the book clearly shows that Lewis in his wrestling was moving back toward a faith in God refined through his suffering. Hurting people usually reexamine with this book, saying, "I felt the same way." I recently re-read *The Problem of Pain* and *A Grief Observed* back to back. A fascinating experience. The books complement each other beautifully.


I read this book as a brand new Christian in high school, my first Lewis book. Chapters include God's Omniscience, Human Wickedness, Human Pain, and Heaven, as well as Animal Pain. Lewis writes, "I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine that being made perfect through suffering is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design." Deep, witty, unpretentious, refreshing and beautifully written. Yes, while I don't always agree with him, I usually do, and I am an unapologetic fan of C. S. Lewis.

**Herbert Lockyer, Dark Threads the Weaver Needs** (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1979).

A good book from a fine Bible student whose wife suffered a long-term illness.


Lloyd-Jones wrote this book, based on some of his sermons, during World War II. But while war is the overall context, it applies to all suffering. The rare combination of theologian and psychologist, Martyn Lloyd-Jones is deep and insightful, true to Scripture and to the human condition.


This is the story of Virginia Tech student Lauren McCaine who was killed with thirty-one others, at the hands of a gunman. Some of the book is about coping with such a tragedy. It includes excerpts from Lauren's journal, which show a young woman sold out to Christ.


Is God sovereign, even in natural disasters? Why does he allow such tragedies? Lutzer is a pastor and fine Bible student. He addresses God's goodness, purposes, and plans.

**Archibald MacLeish, J. B.** (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1956).

This little book is actually a play written on the life of Job. Its theology is not biblical, yet it is a creative expression of the problem of evil and suffering the Bible often raises. Unfortunately, it doesn't set forth biblical perspectives.

**Marc Mailléfer, God in the Storm** (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).
Personal and pastoral, wise and biblical, a small book with a strong recognition of God’s sovereignty.


A fine book that is honest and logical. Biblical and easy to read. On my short list of books on this subject.


Count the number of books I cite on this list that are published by Crossway. One of my favorite publishers, Crossway can be depended on to have biblically sound materials. This book is substantial reading, but not difficult. The ten contributors speak with honesty and explore biblical and theological issues. Walter Kaiser addresses how suffering is handled in the Old Testament. John Frame’s chapter on the problem of evil is excellent. Later chapters are practical, including John Powlson’s, who is somewhat theological but mostly practical as he deals, in light of his wife’s serious illness, with what is and isn’t helpful in comforting others.


Though it is somewhat dated, I gleaned some good insights from portions of the book.


A well-written apologetic with some strong theological and philosophical support. Nothing shallow about this book, and portions are not suitable for quick reading. Reformed, yet states his case differently than other Reformed writers, including his handling of free will (in *If God is Good*, I call it “meaningful choice”).


Puritan pastor Richard Baxter, author of *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* which I quote from in my book *Heaven*, wrote a wonderful tribute to his beloved wife, and to God’s grace, after her death at age forty-five. He spoke of his grief. J. I. Packer adds his own insights and speaks also of C. S. Lewis’s grieving over his wife Joy, documented in *A Grief Observed*.


This interpretive poem telling the story of Job is insightful and uplifting, exalting God’s sovereignty and grace. The story is complemented by great photography. Also contains a CD in which Piper reads the poem the way he meant it to be read.


God is sovereign, good and merciful. He can use for his glory and our good even the worst of sins. An excellent and thoughtful work.


An exceptional book, coming out of the 2005 Desiring God national conference. Contributors include four good friends, John Piper, Joel Runyon, Tada, Steve Saint, and Justin Taylor. I don’t know personally but very much appreciate Carl Ellis, David Powlson, Dustin Shramek, and Mark Talbot. There is an emphasis on God’s sovereign purpose in suffering, but different aspects are approached in very different styles. Still, the book is unified. The appendix “Don’t Waste Your Cancer” was written by John Piper and David Powlson, both of whom were diagnosed with prostate cancer around the same time.


C. S. Lewis wrote, “Everyone who believes in God at all believes that He knows what you and I are doing to tomorrow.” Since open theism came along, this is no longer the case. Open theists believe God knows everything that can be known, but it is inherently impossible even for God to know future contingent choices of beings with free will. I devote a chapter to open theism in *If God is Good*. It’s an attempt to solve the problem of evil and suffering by getting God off the hook because He doesn’t know in advance the evil choices that will be made and the suffering they will cause. Downsizing God is not the
solution to the problem. The book contains an excellent introduction by Justin Taylor, with contributions by Piper, Grudem, Ware, Talbott, and several others.


This is a little book that offers big comfort. It is John Piper not just as theologian, but as pastor. The stories of John Owen, John Bunyan, William Cowper, and John Newton are poignant. Quotes from Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter remind us that soul-rending depression is nothing new in the church of Jesus Christ. This is a warm, concise and Christ-centered book for all who are facing a dark night of the soul, or who wish to help others who are.


This book has had an extraordinary impact on modern philosophy. It offers a defense against the evidential argument from evil commonly used by atheists. Plantinga doesn’t try to explain God’s reasons, as he might if this were a theology. Rather, he simply and convincingly shows that it is logically compatible for a good God to coexist with evil. Plantinga’s argument is so sound, that while many nontheists philosophers may still believe it is improbable that a good and all-powerful God coexists with evil, they acknowledge it is logically possible. The discussion of different possible worlds and various philosophical ponderings will derail some readers, but I found it interesting. Companions will believe that the author overstates the extent of free will. Still, I think there is some merit in his argument, even if he takes it too far.


A surprisingly insightful book that is far more than a personal experience account of 9/11, though that part is interesting. It speaks of evil’s origin and consequences, and God’s sovereign control and redemptive purposes.


A solid treatment of the classic doctrine of divine providence, and the comfort it brings to God’s children. The book effectively answers the claims of open theism. Spiegel is a philosopher and this is not always easy reading, but it’s worthwhile.


A theologian, Stackhouse explores Scripture and philosophy in regard to the problem of evil, especially radical evil. He writes of a variety of viewpoints represented by Buddha, Confucius, Augustine, Hume, Luther and C. S. Lewis. Instead of asking why, Stackhouse suggests we ask, “Can God be trusted to be good and do good, even when appearances are strongly to the contrary?”


Former award-winning investigative reporter Lee Strobel, a former atheist, raises the eight most convincing arguments against the Christian faith, the most prominent being the problem of evil and suffering. In the chapter on this subject he interviews Peter Kreeft, author of *Making Sense Out of Suffering*. Kreeft does a fine job, and Strobel writes in a compelling way. The whole book is excellent (I often give it away to unbelievers and believers alike).


There are theologically weak points, including the treatment of original sin, but scattered throughout there are good insights, including some in his treatment of so-called gratuitous evil.


A warm and biblically-based response to countless letters from people puzzled about why God permits them and their loved ones to suffer. It was first published in 1978, then updated in 1990. This edition includes sixteen pages of photos and illustrations by Joni.

I interviewed Joni and quote from her often in *If God is Good*, and she is one of a few dozen faithful people the book is dedicated to. She is a dear friend, and my wife and I consider her one of our favorite people. She writes beautifully, with freshness and passion, yet she and Steve stay theologically grounded throughout. This is biblically solid writing with a strong treatment of God's sovereignty and goodness. If someone were to read only two books on the problem of evil and suffering, I would recommend this book along with D. A. Carson's *How Long, O Lord*.


*Hope for the Brokenhearted* is honest. It comes from the heart, where at times pain and faith and doubt have struggled it out inside the author. Grief is a journey, often confusing and sometimes terribly lonely. This book isn't full of easy answers—which is good, since there are none. But it is full of hope and Christ-centered perspective.

**Derek W. H. Thomas, *Calvin's Teaching on Job* (Gnawells: Mentor, 2004)**

Reprint due soon!

**Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000).**

Bruce is a thoughtful scholar who carefully critiques open theism and its view of God. I quote from him in *If God is Good*. The fact that this book is not only endorsed by Packer, Piper, Grudem, and other Calvinists, but Jack Cottrell, an Armenian theologian, speaks convincingly of the fact that open theism is fundamentally incompatible with the historic orthodox Christian doctrine of God's omniscience.

**Bruce A. Ware, *Their God Is Too Small* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003).**

The smaller of two books Bruce has written on open theism, it raises the question of whether someone can trust a "God" who can't know the future choices that his creatures will make. This book is less complete and a bit quieter to read than *God's Lesser Glory*.


I picked up this book while in college, read portions of it, then reread it thirty-three years later while re-examining *If God is Good*. I found parts of it fascinating, including the portion on animal suffering. It's long out of print. Contains antilibertarian statements.

**N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).**

Insight on what there is to disagree with in Wright's book, see D. A. Carson's review that includes both appreciation and criticisms. Dr. Carson's concerns range from the etiological and theological to the "merely annoying":


Addressing the undermining of the doctrine of God's sovereignty, Wright makes a case for the Reformed doctrine of God's sovereignty. Many who affirm that God grants us meaningful choice, as I do, take issue with the notion of free will as it is often presented. Those wondering why Calvinists don't embrace the beliefs of libertarianism will find the answers in this book. Chapter ten is devoted to the problem of evil, which the author claims is not solved by the argument of human free will. While I agree with much in the book, I think the author interprets some biblical passages in light of his theology, rather than in light of their context and apparent straightforward meanings. Not all Calvinists or compatibilists will agree with everything in the book, but it is interesting reading.

**Phillip Yancey, *Disappointment With God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988).**

Phil Yancey does a marvelous job addressing the matter of a God who doesn't always do what we think he's supposed to do. He seems silent and unfair. His book *Where Is God When It Hurts* deals primarily with physical pain, while this one deals with emotional and mental pain. He got many letters from readers of the earlier book wondering "Where is God when it hurts emotionally?" Yancey appeals to the book of Job, handling it with insight and compassion, and draws from many other biblical passages God's attributes. As always, the author tells great stories.

If there has been one modern day classic on the problem of evil and suffering since C. S. Lewis’s *The Problem of Pain,* it may be Philip Yancey’s *Where Is God When It Hurts?*, especially if we see it as part one, to which *Disappointment With God* serves as part two. First written in 1975 and revised in 1990. For many years as a pastor, I gave this book to hurting people. Yancey is thoughtful, concise, and never dodges the issues. *Where Is God When It Hurts?* is real literature, with substance, yet simplicity. No formulas, but full of honesty, perspective and hope. Yancey suggests we don’t ask “why” but “What for – To what end?” There’s much insight too for those trying to help others in suffering.


This book asks the “Why?” question about various issues and biblical passages. Why do good people suffer? Why did God judge the Canaanites the way he did?

Wright says, “To me it is a profoundly moving thought that the word that introduces our most tormenting questions – ‘Why’ – was uttered by Jesus on the very cross that was God’s answer to the question that the whole creation poses.”

He says that while we tend to ask “Why,” in Scripture people more often ask “How long?” They didn’t always expect an explanation but pledged with God to intervene and bring a stop to evil and suffering.

The author writes, “I understand enough on the basis of what the Bible tells me to know that I owe everything I am now or ever will be to the love and grace of God supremely poured out at Calvary. But when I probe into why and how that is so, I join the multitudes who recognize depths and mysteries here that lie beyond our own understanding but not beyond our faith, praise and worship.”