

SUMMARY

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN

by C. S. Lewis

- Key Insights
- Best Quotes
- Study Questions

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Main Idea	3
Key Insights	
Key Insight 1	5
Key Insight 2	7
Key Insight 3	9
Chapter Summaries	
Chapter 1	10
Chapter 2	12
Chapter 3	14
Chapter 4	16
Chapter 5	18
Chapter 6	20
Chapter 7	22
Chapter 8	24
Chapter 9	26
Chapter 10	28
Conclusion	30
About Accelerate	32

The Problem of Pain



MAIN IDEA

The problem of pain is one that has plagued humanity for ages. We have a hard time reconciling a loving God with the pain and suffering that we see in the world around us. This is one of the main reasons people give as to why they don't believe in God. However, this book is perhaps one of the strongest replies to this question.

The apologetic that C.S. Lewis sets forth in this work is one that is often referred to as a “free-will theodicy.” Proponents of this view believe that the reason that God allowed pain and suffering into his creation is so that God would not violate the freedom of his creatures. God made mankind with the capacity to choose between moral good and evil, and God did not

intervene to prevent evil from taking place because that would violate the freedom of his creatures. Now that evil does exist, however, God is working to bring about the restoration of his creation.

C.S. Lewis also highlights the nature and purpose of pain in a powerful way in this book. He shows how God can and does often use pain and suffering in the lives of believers to make them more like Jesus Christ and to remind us of our total dependence upon the Lord. He also shows how the concepts of eternal destiny play into the question of evil, such as heaven and hell.

The main idea of *The Problem of Pain* is that although pain and evil are not in God's plan or will, God uses them for His glory and for the good of his people.



Destroying Self-Insufficiency

God uses pain in our lives to make us realize that we need Him.

The greatest strength of the book is its insight into the nature of pain and the role that it plays. The more appropriate title for this book would be “The Purpose of Pain” because one of the major themes in *The Problem of Pain* is the way in which God uses pain to accomplish His purpose of drawing people to Himself. One way that Lewis says that God uses pain to draw men unto Himself is by destroying a person’s sense of self-sufficiency. Lewis wrote that “we regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it’s there for emergencies but he hopes he’ll never have to use it.” God knows that as long as people believe that their lives are fine without Him, they will continue to ignore Him. That is why God uses pain as His “megaphone” to rouse apathetic people from their slumber and to reveal to them their need for God. In this way, pain and suffering are not expressions of God’s judgment but rather God’s grace. If God never allowed

pain in our lives, we would never know that we needed Him. Sometimes, we should thank God for the horrible things that happen to us that cause us to loosen our grip on this world and cling more tightly to Him.



Pain Brings Sanctification

God uses pain in the lives of believers to make them more like Jesus.

“If God is love,” Lewis writes, “He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness.” Many people in Lewis’ day, and in the current evangelical culture, regard the love of God as a vague sentimentalism. As Lewis put it, “we want, in fact, not so much a Father in heaven but a grandfather in heaven- a senile benevolence who, as they say, ‘liked to see young people enjoying themselves.’” True love is committed to obtaining the highest possible good for its object. If God is holy and loving, sin is evil and harmful, and God loves a man, then God will stop at nothing to make that man holy and remove his sinfulness. Lewis wrote that “love, in its own nature, demands the perfecting of the beloved.” This process is undeniably painful. Yet, Christ calls His followers to take up their cross and follow Him because He loves them. The pain that Christians experience in becoming like Christ is like Eustace’s experience in Lewis’ *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. Aslan’s removal of his dragon skin “hurt worse than anything

I've ever felt." It was only through this painful experience that Aslan made Eustace into the person He intended him to be. Likewise, it is in the furnace of pain that Christ sanctifies His people and makes them into the people He intends for them to be. This is the ultimate purpose of pain. This is, in my view, the highlight of The Problem of Pain and the profound insight that makes the book worth reading



The Nature of Hell

Those who are in hell want to be there.

The chapter on hell is powerful, dark, and haunting. But, the end of the chapter contains insights that might change how you think about hell. Believers today often get this mental image of lost people in hell full of regret and wishing that they had a second chance to accept Christ and turn from their sin. However, this thinking presupposes that those who are in hell are granted a mindset of repentance. There is nowhere in Scripture that suggests that this will be the case. To the contrary, in Jesus' parable about the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, the rich man in hell is still only concerned with himself and doesn't show an ounce of remorse for what he has done. C.S. Lewis makes the statement in this chapter that the door to hell is "locked from the inside." Just as heaven is the final step in sanctification, perhaps hell is the final step in becoming that which is totally opposed to the character of God. People in hell will still hate God and, even in the face of infinite suffering, would prefer to remain in hell than go to heaven where God is.

CHAPTER

1

Introduction

The first chapter lays the foundation for the argument that Lewis will be making throughout the rest of the book. Lewis makes the startling assertion that Christianity “creates, rather than solves, the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our own daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that the ultimate reality is righteous and loving.”

Without the Christian worldview, there would be no problem of pain.

66 KEY QUOTES

- “Christianity is not the conclusion of a philosophical debate on the origins of the universe; it is a catastrophic historical event.” (14)
- “Christianity “creates, rather than solves, the problem of pain, for pain would be no problem unless, side by side with our own daily experience of this painful world, we had received what we think a good assurance that the ultimate reality is righteous and loving.” (14)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Is Christianity a set of ideas, or is it rooted in history?
- In what way does Christianity “create” the problem of pain?

CHAPTER

2

Divine Omnipotence

God is omnipotent, or all-powerful. Lewis defines this as “His “power to do all that is intrinsically possible.” This is important for the problem of pain because, if God is all-powerful, he should have the ability to do something about the pain and suffering in the world if he chooses to. Since God is all-powerful and chooses not to intervene in the pain and suffering in the world, what does this say about the character of God?

66 KEY QUOTES

- “The freedom of God consists in the fact that no cause other than Himself produces His acts and no external object impedes them.” (27)
- “If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty, He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore, God lacks either goodness, or power, or both. This is the problem of pain.” (16)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Is God all-powerful? Where does the Bible teach this?
- What are the implications of God’s omnipotence for the problem of evil?

CHAPTER

3

Divine Goodness

Christians claim that God is good and loving. However, how can we reconcile God's love with the evil we see in the world? We see God's love in the fact that He is using the pain and evil in the world for a good purpose. He is using it to destroy the self-sufficiency that many people feel in their lives, and He is using it to shape and mold believers more into the image of Christ. True love always demands the perfecting of the beloved. But the point is, seeing how to apply truth to unique situations.

KEY QUOTES

- “You asked for a loving God; you have one.” (39)
- “Love may, indeed, love the beloved when her beauty is lost: but not because it is lost. Love may forgive all infirmities and love in spite of them: But love cannot cease to will their removal.” (39)
- “The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves is only insoluble as long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word “love.” (40)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Does God’s love mean that God would never want anything bad to happen to me?
- Could God use pain in my life for a good reason?

CHAPTER

4

Human Wickedness

According to Lewis, “a recovery of the old sense of sin is essential to Christianity.” In order to understand why evil exists, one must understand that human beings are sinners that have rebelled against their Creator. Outside of a solid doctrine of the sinfulness of man, the evil in the world is indeed inexplicable. Many modern people recoil at the thought of man as intrinsically sinful, until they face a guilt inside of them that they can’t explain away.

KEY QUOTES

- “A recovery of the old sense of sin is essential to Christianity.” (50)
- “We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin.” (54)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How does the understanding that we are sinners make sense of the problem of evil?
- Why are people so offended at the idea that human beings are sinful?

CHAPTER

5**The Fall of Man**

Christianity teaches that human beings are sinners. However, we also believe that there was a particular event in time in which human beings fell into sin. Lewis argues for an evolutionary understanding of creation and the fall of man. The sin that led to the fall of man was a prideful self-sufficiency in which man sought to replace God.

KEY QUOTES

- “Man is now a horror to God and to himself.” (63)
- “From the moment a creature becomes aware of God as God and of itself as self, the terrible alternative of choosing God or self as the centre is opened to it.” (70)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Was the fall literal or metaphorical?
- What was the sin that led to the fall?

CHAPTER

6

Human Pain

Pain is an interesting thing. It insists on being attended to, as Lewis wrote. The remarkable thing about pain is that it always gets our attention. God often uses pain for this purpose. He uses pain to “wake us up” from the apathy of our lives and causes us to look to Him.

66 KEY QUOTES

- God “whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” (91)
- “My true good is in another world and my true treasure is Christ.” (107)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Which impulses do you suppress out of fear of how others will perceive you?
- Are you being “true to yourself” by suppressing them?

CHAPTER

7

Human Pain, Continued

Painful experiences are good for the sufferer because they lead them to submission to the will of God, and they are good for the observer because of the compassion aroused in them and the acts of mercy to which it leads. God is sovereign over all things, so everything will ultimately serve His will and plan.

KEY QUOTES

- “Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.” (116)
- “For you will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however you act, but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John.” (111).

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How can evil people be accomplishing God’s will?
- Is it possible that painful experiences could be causing me to look to a different world?

CHAPTER

8

Hell

Hell wasn't made for men. It isn't parallel to heaven; it is the darkness outside. To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth, but to enter hell is to be banished from humanity. Hell is a horrible place that many modern people cannot believe in. However, the biblical evidence is so clear that we cannot be faithful to scripture while denying the existence of a real hell.

KEY QUOTES

- “Hell “was not made for men. It is in no sense parallel to heaven. It is the darkness outside” (129)
- “To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth; to enter hell is to be banished from humanity” (128)
- “This chapter is not about your wife or son, nor about Nero or Judas Iscariot; it is about you and me.” (131)
- “The doors of hell are locked on the inside.” (130)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- Why is it so difficult to believe in hell?
- Are people in hell still rebellious to God, or are they remorseful?

CHAPTER

9

Animal Pain

This chapter examines the pain that animals feel rather than the pain of humans, which has been the subject of the book thus far. We don't know specifically how animals suffer in relation to human suffering. The origin of animal suffering was traditionally thought to be the fall of man, but Lewis does not hold to this view because he believes that animals lived, suffered, and died before men were created.

KEY QUOTES

- “Beasts are incapable either of sin or virtue: therefore they can neither deserve pain nor be improved by it.” (132)
- “The origin of animal suffering could be traced, by earlier generations, to the Fall of man-the whole world was infected by the uncreating rebellion of Adam. This is now impossible, for we have good reason to believe that animals existed long before men.” (137)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How is animal pain different from human pain?
- When did animals begin to feel pain and die?

CHAPTER

10**Heaven**

The joy of heaven is the ultimate consolation for all pain experienced on earth. The present sufferings that God’s people experience “are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). Even though the pain and suffering of this world can be great, Jesus is going to come again to make all things new. This is our ultimate consolation and hope.

KEY QUOTES

- “It is safe to tell the pure in heart that they shall see God, for only the pure in heart want to.”(149)
- “Love, by definition, seeks to enjoy its object.” (149)
- “Your place in heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone because you were made for it-made for it stitch by stitch as a glove is made for a hand.” (152)

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

- How does belief in heaven impact how you live today?
- Do you desire God, or just God’s benefits?



CONCLUSION

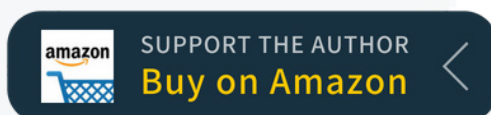
Does C.S. Lewis solve the problem of pain in his book? No. It is not possible that any finite mind could exhaustively understand the purposes of God for creating the world as He has. However, the value of this book lies in the encouragement that it offers to sufferers that their suffering is not meaningless. Despite the significant theological problems with this book, I believe that *The Problem of Pain* is worthy of being read and pondered by all Christians. Lewis' rhetorical ability and mastery of the English language shines forth in this beautifully written work. True to his vintage style, it is readable, clear, and filled with memorable quotes. There is a reason why this book is still being read over 75 years since its publication. Lewis' insights in the nature and purpose of pain and suffering are relevant to Christians in every generation.

In this fine book, the following insights were prominent.

1 **Destroying Self-Sufficiency**
God uses pain in our lives to make us realize that we need Him.

2 **Pain Brings Sanctification**
God uses pain in the lives of believers to make them more like Jesus.

3 **The Nature of Hell**
Those who are in hell want to be there.



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