

OpenTheo

God Didn't Save Me from My Childhood Trauma

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how to respond to someone who rejects God because he didn't save her from her childhood trauma when she prayed for help and whether it's wrong to respond to the psalm that says, "What can man do to me," by thinking, "They can do a lot!"

* Can you help me respond to someone who rejects God because he didn't save her from her childhood trauma when she prayed for help?

* Is it a sin that when I read the psalm that says, "What can man do to me," my response is to think, "They can do a lot—rape, torture, kill, abuse, manipulate, and intimidate."

Transcript

Welcome listeners. Hopefully you're looking for the hashtag-STRask podcast because that is what you have found and that is what you're listening to. I'm Amy Hall and this is Greg Koukl and we are going to answer some questions today that are sent in by listeners.

So if you have a question, we'd love to hear from you. You can send it on X with the hashtag-STRask. We can go to our website at STR.org. All right, Greg, this source question comes from Ken Black.

My daughter-in-law rejects God because she says that God didn't save me from my childhood trauma when I prayed for help. Can you please help me with my response to her? Well, these are really hard things to respond to. Partly because they are based on kind of an absurd assumption and the assumption is that they don't know that if God were real that he would never let anything happen in our lives that we didn't want to have happen.

I guess that's the simplest way to put it. And something happened in her life that she didn't want to have happen and bore maybe painful fruit in her life later on. And therefore, God must not exist because he would have prevented that.

Now, this is just wrong thinking. And I mean, I have somebody in my extended family who is not a Christian because her grandfather died when she was a little girl. And God took her grandfather from her when she was a little girl.

Therefore, there is no God. I mean, when you think about it in those terms, it's kind of crazy. I mean, she expects her grandfather to live forever.

Nobody lives forever. Everybody dies. Death rate is still a hundred percent.

So this is based on God. It's based on an emotional response. And the emotional responses are the emotional issues are the hardest to deal with because they're not rational.

They're based on some experience that had an effect on them. And sometimes it's very difficult to get past that. I mean, I don't have a clever way of offering that, but except for, I mean, my impulse would be to go to the broader issue, the idea that's underlying the emotional pain and the rejection.

Well, it's underlying the rejection. The emotional pain is based on the bad experience. But I will say, and we've talked about this in previous shows, that if there is no God, then what can we say about the bad experience other than you didn't like it? The emotional pain was not a result of an evil act by someone because there's no basis on which to call that act evil.

You can legitimately complain, this is something that was awful that I experienced, but you can't say anything. You can't really make moral assessments of it. And our temptation is always to make moral assessments because generally moral assessments are appropriate in those kinds of circumstances.

This person did something wrong to me. It injured me. God didn't keep me, keep him from doing that or her from doing that.

Therefore, there was no God. Okay, well, if there is no God, I kind of, in some ways, I'm sympathetic to the objection. But if there is no God, then what happened to you wasn't wrong.

It's just stuff that hurt you and you didn't like. Why are you attributing a moral quality to it when your response to it puts you in a worldview where you're not allowed to do that? It doesn't make any sense. So that's one aspect of it.

And I think that that would be the way I would be inclined to deal with this kind of challenge by trying to tease out some of these notions, but using questions. So, and I actually, on this particular thing, I have a dialogue in street smarts regarding evil. So, you don't believe in God because of that evil? Yes.

Well, okay, I get it. But now let's just say, right, there is no God. Do those things still happen? Did that thing still happen to you? Yes.

Was it still evil? Well, yes. Well, now I'm confused because it seems to be now the worldview that you've adopted makes it impossible for you to call that evil. So what do you make of that in your new worldview? See, this makes the point that you might be characterized by what's the alternative? There's always an alternative.

If you leave one thing and deny God's existence, then you have to affirm his non-existence. But affirming his non-existence is a package that has a whole bunch of stuff that comes along with it. The other line I would maybe pursue is your expectations.

Did God, did you expect that if there really is a God, he is going to protect you and everybody in the world from any evil consequences? Now, if a person says is kind of, and that's by the way, underlying this concern, if they affirm it in some way, well, then how would he do that? Because the fact is each of us has done evil in other people's lives that they are suffering from. Either greater or little, but it's still, so if he's going to protect that other person from our evil, then how is he going to do that? Is he going to stop us or prevent us from doing the things that we freely want to do that bring us pleasure but hurt other people? And see, this is the bigger picture that I think we want to at least try to help a person get thinking about. But I think this is a tough nut to crack because the emotional investment is so strong.

But I think these are the questions that could be asked. Maybe simply the question, what's the alternative? Okay, so what's the alternative? That there is no God. All right, well, there are ramifications to that.

And what would you have had God do? Well, he should have stopped that person from doing evil to me and hurting me. Does that, you want to be consistent on that? What do you mean? Well, should he also prevent you from doing anything evil to other people or bad or hurtful or whatever, even if it gives you pleasure? Should he stop you from doing that? Or should he just stop the people that hurt you and not the people you hurt, not you when you hurt others? I mean, these are fair questions and maybe it gets people thinking about things that they maybe hadn't considered before, and that will begin to inform the emotional response. And incidentally, even though there are kind of this, might call them intellectual concerns and then emotional elements, they are not hermetically sealed.

The emotional responses are based on presumptions we've made about facts. And if our presumptions are wrong, then our emotional reactions are going to be based on a mistake, a mistaken idea or thinking. And when the thinking is corrected, sometimes, oftentimes, the emotional circumstances are altered.

I mean, think of that very quickly. People who had abuse of parents or abuse of some

measure. And then you learn a little bit about the history of your parents.

And then you realize what they had gone to when they were children and it helps explain why they were the way they were to you. And there are times when that will have a salutary effect on your feelings about them. Oh, now I see something you didn't see before.

Now I understand. So I don't want to suggest that the thoughtful assessment or addressing the wrong ideas that underlie the emotional response is a mistake. I'm just saying that they're two different things.

And oftentimes, if you have an opportunity to carefully address those underlying assumptions, and the carefulest way I know is to ask questions to kind of slowly get there, then I think that that's an opportunity for making a difference. There's a three-step thing I put. It's a VHS.

I'm trying to think of the acronym. But it's basically you sympathize and you comfort and then you redirect. It's the idea.

So the first thing you do is not try to redirect their thinking. Rather, you sympathize with them. You understand how I get it.

And then you maybe comfort them and then redirect. Give them something to think about that might redirect their feelings. The difficulty is that, of course, even for Christians, our emotions aren't always determined by our intellectual answers.

Of course, that's the only way we can go about changing the emotional response. But I think there's something God has to do also in somebody's heart, because I think about there are all sorts of things that we end up having to learn by experience. Because I can learn all about God's proof that he loves me or dying on the cross and all these things.

And I can keep reminding myself of those things. But when something bad happens, your emotional response can immediately be, oh, God hates me or God doesn't love me. We run to those emotional responses or maybe God doesn't exist.

I mean, even Christians will do that if they're disappointed by something that's happened or something tragic or terrible has happened. And we have to figure out if our intellectual ideas have made it into our hearts. And I think God does that over time.

In fact, I just read John Newton's spiritual autobiography. And I can't remember if it was in that. I read a couple of things by him.

But in one of those things, he was saying, God, we learn these things by experience. We think we know them, but you learn by experience. And so as apologists, that can be frustrating because we want to convince people.

But just be aware that the personal experience of that is it could take a long time for the words that you say to make it into their hearts. So don't be too discouraged if just giving an answer doesn't work. But in this case, I think you have to clarify why she has rejected God because I think there are two possibilities.

Does she think he isn't there or does she think he isn't good? Yeah. And I suspect it's a little bit of both because as you say, if you think he isn't there, well, this doesn't prove anything. Look at all the suffering of the people in the Bible.

Look at the suffering of Jesus. God existed. And he allowed that to happen.

Stephen was stoned. John the Baptist was beheaded. Lazarus died.

I mean, look at all these things that happened. So that doesn't prove he doesn't exist. So I think that's where the discussion will shift to goodness.

And this is where, again, you, again, you can point to Jesus. He suffered terribly. And we know for a fact the father loves him.

And we know for a fact that Jesus did it for ultimate joy. Okay. So all those things we know about Jesus suffering.

So what we can do is acknowledge that the trauma is terrible. But then you can possibly ask, what if there is something that is greater than that trauma that is better than that trauma is terrible? That this is working towards. What if there is something that is so far beyond as terrible as this is so far beyond in the other direction that it would just blow you away? Would you want to know about that and be a part of that? Instead of just looking at the terrible part, why not look at this joy that Jesus was looking ahead to as he was in his suffering? For the joy set before him.

This is Hebrews 12, right? And this is where you could possibly point her to people who have suffered. And Johnny Erickson Tada always springs to mind because here's somebody who was paralyzed when she was, I think, 19. And it's, you know, decades later she's been through terrible chronic pain.

She's had cancer. She's been in a wheelchair. She has to deal with all of these things.

And she says she would not trade her wheelchair because of how she came to know God through it and how she sees him working through it and what she's done through it. And all these, this joy that has come out of it, even though she's still suffering, she still wouldn't trade it. So what if there is something that is better than you're suffering and it is actually worth your suffering? Nobody would, I wouldn't look at Johnny Erickson Tada and say, oh, that's worth the suffering.

But she knows something I don't know. And she knows it because of her suffering. So I

think giving people examples, I'm trying to think if there's someone else who comes to mind.

Well, I'll give you a literary example. Daniel is a Daniel DeFoe who wrote Robinson Crusoe. I read this a number of years ago because I was tipped off by an article and first things about it that really piqued my curiosity.

So I read the on abridged edition. I talked to somebody last week and said, oh, yeah, I read Robinson Crusoe. Was it abridged or on abridged? I said, he said, no, it was abridged.

So it's shortened down. And when they abridged it, they take all the spiritual stuff out. I said, Robinson Crusoe is a Christian-tracked novel, basically.

And in this novel, the reason he, here's a guy with shipwrecked. Okay. And then he's on the island for 17 years by himself.

And then he sees a footprint on the other side. And that's the cannibals. And that's the Friday thing.

And he rescues Friday and all this other stuff. Well, it turns out that the way Crusoe understands the tragedy of a shipwreck where everybody died but him. And he's left all alone on a deserted island as he realizes this was God's way of intervening in his sinful lifestyle so that he would come to his senses and turn to God.

And that's exactly what happened. And then Crusoe, on the anniversary of his shipwreck, he would devote the day to prayer and fasting in thanksgiving to God that he rescued him from this lifestyle that was destroying him through the shipwreck, through the shipwreck. And so, I mean, there's a lot more going on in that novel how it's basically a be fruitful multiply and subdue how he takes this place and turns it into a habitable paradise kind of for him.

And then encounters this other guy who he rescues and brings to Christ, you know, Friday. And so, but that's an example. That's a literary example.

And what Du Bois trying to communicate is that we don't know God's purposes and the hardship that he allows to come to our life. In the case of Johnny Tada, she can look back and then see the consequences. This is true much of the time for us.

In a historical look back over our shoulder, we see how God took this thing. It was so awful for us. And he turned it into something really amazing.

I talked to a gal a number of years ago who lost her husband in a tragic circumstance. But what God did in her life afterwards within the next couple of years, even though she deeply loved her husband, it was a terrible loss for her, she made the same comment. I

wouldn't trade what happened to me.

I wouldn't turn the clock back and change things because of the way God used that in my life. So this is a whole other aspect that is that actually is more available, I think, to more mature Christians who can actually look back and see, well, I know what happened then. And maybe this is the same kind of thing now.

But it is a piece of the answer. Well, the nice thing is because especially if you're not a Christian, you may not have thought about what good could possibly have come from it. And she might not see anything good that has come from it.

And this is where we have to turn to something objective. And I always point here because this is the simplest way to see who God is. Because if your question is, is God good, all you have to do is look at the cross.

That is where he objectively proved his justice and his grace, his love for us, his willingness to suffer for us, his love for enemies even. What we see there, we see his power, we see all these different aspects of who God is. If you can point her to that objective reality of who God is, I think that is what we all need to hang on to when we're going through these things.

By the way, that acronym was VCR, VCR, validate, comfort, and redirect. That order, that's great. Validate, comfort, and redirect.

Don't start with redirecting. Yeah, that's good. Alright, let's take a question from Rebecca Dyer.

When I read the Psalms and he says, what can man do to me while he's praising God, my heart says they can do a lot. They can rape, torture, kill, abuse, manipulate, intimidate. I don't think my response should be this, but it is.

Is it sin that my mind has this response? No, I don't think that's sin at all. It's an honest response. If you couldn't be candid about that, you'd be lying.

And it's interesting in the first Peter passage, it talks about defending your faith. In that passage, chapter 3, it's talking about blessing your enemies. And Peter says something to the effect of, you know, bless the curse, etc, etc.

You were created to receive a blessing, you're to give a blessing. And by the way, who is there to hurt you if you're committed to doing good? Then he says, but even if you do suffer for goodness' sake, which first Peter has a lot to say about that, sanctify Christ, the Lord, you know how always being willing to give an answer, make a defense for everyone who asks you to give an answer for the hope within you. Pretty well known.

First of all, apologize. Yeah, with gentleness and reverence. So he is acknowledging, you

know, generally speaking, when you're good to other people, they're going to be good back to you, but not always.

And I think to transfer this concept to David, generally speaking, when we are right before God, we are avoiding all kinds of mishap that are the consequence of our stupid decisions or sinful decisions. Okay. So, but even so, there are, as Rebecca mentioned, there are things that happen that aren't good.

So what we see here is an expression of God's providence over us through David, but not a guarantee that nothing bad is ever going to happen. Part of what we're talking about here is that even the bad things that do happen, God can providentially use for something really good down the line, and we actually have an explicit promise to that effect in Romans 8, for we know that God causes all things to work together for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose for those whom he foreknew, he predestined to become conformed to the image of his son. Now, by the way, when you read the whole thing, you realize the way in which God's going to use it for good is to conform our characters to the person of Christ, not to, you know, we lose one job, we're going to have a better job later, lose a girl, we're going to have a prettier girl down the line, you know, that's not the way that works out, but it is sometimes the way Christians understand it.

So there's a historical element that's here, that's similar to questions we've answered before. David has given a general statement about God's providence. Ultimately, evil will not prevail.

Ultimately, evil will not prevail. Who can bring a charge against God's elect? There you go, back to Romans 8. Yeah, it's our safety in God that he's talking about there, no matter what happens here. Right.

But I would say, I think the reason why she's having this response is because she is in step two of these three steps I see Christians go through all the time. And it has to do with our view of suffering. And the first step is, I think most people start off, at least in this country, they start off with the idea that even if they're not articulating this in their minds, but they feel like, hey, if I do the right things, God's going to protect me from harm.

It's this kind of unspoken assumption. It's in the background. Even if we don't think it's there, it's there.

Because what happens is, then we start to experience bad things in life. The older you get, you can't avoid it. And we start to realize, oh, God's God's not going to protect me from these things.

And that's step two where I think people, they start being afraid because they're not sure

what does it mean to trust God. If I'm not trusting God to protect me, what am I trusting Him for? And that's, and that's where you, again, I think your experience will help you. God works working all things together for good to make us like Christ.

And this is, he does this through suffering. And so then we have to figure out what it means to trust in God's character. But you're still afraid because you know he could, anything could happen to you.

Like she says, like Rebecca says. So I think we're, we're heading is to step three. And this is, this is the hardest one, but I know people make it here.

And this is where Paul was when he says that he knows the secret of living in want, of living in plenty, of living in every, every situation, it's knowing that he can do all things through Christ who strengthens him. Meaning God will give him what he needs to go through any situation. And so now Paul's in a situation where he's not in fear because he's learned that even though these bad things will happen to him, he can trust that God will get him through it.

And that he'll be able to do it. And I think that's, that's the kind of thing that we have to meditate on. And I think that's where we're heading.

And that's where we want to be. But before you're able to get there and figure out what that means and how you get there. And I'm still trying to figure this out.

There's still some, some fear that this kind of loss of control because we, we don't have anyone making sure that nothing ever happens to us. So anyway, do you have any thoughts on that? Great. Well, we have gone over again.

Hopefully people don't mind when we do that. Maybe they just expect it now. Who knows? But thank you so much, Ken and Rebecca.

We appreciate hearing from you. Send us your question. We'd love to hear from you.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Coco for Stand to Reason.