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# Suffering...is there a better way?

by James McBride

## *the story so far...*

A long time ago a very rich young prince married a very rich princess. They were very happy. Then the princess met a guru who persuaded her that happiness would result from joining with him. She persuaded her husband to join her - but as a result they lived in squalor for the rest of their lives. Unhappily.

As their children grew they, too, were poor and became street urchins for many, many generations, living off one another's cast-offs, even killing one another. The couple's children filled the face of the earth.

The King was greatly saddened by the decision of the prince and princess, and distressed by their life-style. He saw them as feckless, but still wanted them and their descendants to inherit his massive wealth - but only under certain wise conditions. So he set up a Trust Fund for them.

From time to time he proclaimed throughout his kingdom the terms of the Trust, and throughout the generations his Trustees made them known to the descendants of the prince and princess. Occasionally one or two would accept the terms and they became very rich - and happy. But the vast majority despised the Trustees and thought they were being conned by them. They continued to listen to the guru who had deceived their first parents. As a result they suffered all manner of disease and distress throughout their generations.

Eventually they came almost to the brink of extinction...

In parable, that's the story of mankind!

## **The Human Condition**

Suffering and death - "nature red in tooth and claw" - is the lot of all creation. The innocent lamb is mauled by the marauding fox, Bambi is torn to pieces by the hungry lion. And everywhere man suffers.

Six billion of us inhabit our shrinking planet. We're born, we experience joy and adversity and then we die. Sometimes horribly. Sometimes within days of drawing our first breath. Most of us are always hungry, don't even have access to clean life-giving water and die early.

A minority may live longer - but are increasingly heir to destructive illness. Hospitals overflow with pain and disability, and new diseases emerge to challenge us.

## **Cause and Effect**

Much of our suffering is self-inflicted. Land which once produced abundantly turns to desert through mismanagement. Vast areas are devastated by pollution and greed-driven deforestation. Ignorance of basic hygiene fouls huge cities and gives rise to epidemic infections. Profit motive ignores sound animal husbandry with horrendous effects on human health. Seas once abundantly stored with riches are over-fished, polluted and poisoned - and fish die. Perverted sexual practices and the current alley-cat mentality generate an obnoxious harvest of death-dealing foul STDs, infertility, unwanted and unloved children.

It's all self-inflicted. And we wonder why man suffers?

## **Unique Origin**

But it didn't have to be that way. Man, despite the twisted all-pervasive pseudo-scientific notion to the contrary, is not an animal. Animals act instinctively. They are born, they live out their allotted function and they die - often in the bloodstained teeth of larger predators.

Man is unique. We were not created to die as were the

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sub-human creatures, from microscopic bacteria to 'primates' or elephants, over which we have stewardship.

The 'King' - the Creator, God - created us in His image. Made us with the intention that we would live for ever. Thinking, planning beings with the capacity to relate to our Creator. No animal intelligence has that ability. The 'spirit in man', deriving from the awesome chemical and electrical interaction of our unique hundred billion brain cells, imparts the unparalleled human capacity to worship, to design, to plan, to appreciate - and to choose.

Like any wise manufacturer, God gave His new creation all the instructions needed to maintain life, to avoid destruction and death. Follow the instructions - the divine guidelines, the divine Manual - and live, He said. Adam and Eve could have lived forever!

### Why Suffering?

Why, then, did they - do we - die? Why do we suffer? That 'prince and princess' - our first parents - chose to follow the guidance of a fallen and malevolent spirit-being which was intent on dethroning God and claiming the universe for itself. "Enjoy - you won't die" was its siren call. Taken in by Satan - the first cause of evil - they disobeyed the sovereign will of their Creator and, in time, died just as God had warned them. With awful consequences.

Use a dud fuse in your brand-new computer - it won't work. Misuse it, connect it wrongly, tamper with the program and it will 'crash'. Outside of the benign divine will our first parents lives 'crashed'. Access to 'the Tree of Life' was barred by a God of mercy who didn't wish to see them suffer endlessly in their corrupted state - death for most a happy release (Genesis 3:22).

Divorced from divine guidance - though it was always available for those who wanted it - disobedience became habitual. Murder, with all the heartache that generated, soon followed (ch 4:1-8). It took less than seventeen centuries for all mankind, except for one family, to become incorrigibly corrupt. Even the lower creation was affected (ch 6:1-7). To cut short the suffering God had to wipe the slate clean and begin anew with the one family struggling to follow the right path. The evidence for this rests in the historical records of many nations.

Since then, the pattern has been endlessly repeated. The same corrupted nature reigns in century twenty-one. With the same consequences. *That's* why we suffer.

### Don't blame God!

### God's Remedy

That habitual ingrained habit of disobedience - sin - shackles mankind to a way of life that leads to sickness, confusion, death. Over the millennia the Creator has sent His representatives - culminating in His own Son - to invite us to open that trust fund of eternal life. Few have accepted the invitation. Most have chosen to refuse it.

Given that we are free to choose, God will not coerce us. Patiently He is allowing us to try every humanly-devised option for ushering in man's utopian dream of heaven on earth.

They won't work - though we do keep trying. Only when we are on the brink of worldwide self-destruction will He step in to save the race. Built in to God's plan is the wise provision that none of us suffers more than one lifetime - often mercifully short! Every generation experiences the futility of human solutions divorced from divine wisdom.

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But His 'trust fund' is still there, now, for every individual who wants to tap into it. It's there for you. The riches God has in store are available to you - if you change direction, believe His original offer of living for ever, and enter a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

*There's no other way.*

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