



Pandemics, Plagues, and Natural Disasters: What is God Saying to Us? helps explain the role of God in suffering. Dr. Erwin Lutzer examines how God uses tragedies throughout the Bible to speak to His people, and that, ultimately, God always has our wellbeing in mind even when He doesn't relieve our immediate pain.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

[MOODY PUBLISHERS](#) [APPLE BOOKS](#)[AMAZON](#)[TARGET](#)[GOOGLE PLAY](#)[CHRISTIANBOOK.COM](#) [BARNES & NOBLE](#)

CONTENTS

1. The Crisis That Changed Everything	9
2. The Silence of God	23
3. God Says, "I Am in Charge, Trust Me."	39
4. God Says, "There Are Lessons You Should Learn."	63
5. God Says, "You Live in a World That Is Under Judgment."	81
6. God Says, "The Worst Is Yet to Come."	93
7. God Says, "I Have Provided a Way of Escape."	109
8. We Say, "We Will Witness with Works and Words."	123
9. We Say, "Lord, We Believe; Help Our Unbelief!"	137
Epilogue: A Mother Who Was Ready for the Big One	159
Acknowledgments	167
Notes	169

THE CRISIS THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

COVID-19 is the pandemic that changed everything. The “new normal” will not be the same as the “old normal.” For years to come we will talk about BC (Before COVID) and AC (After COVID). *Normal* may never come back.

This virus, originating in Wuhan, China, soon spread around the globe. In a matter of months, the United States led the other countries in having the largest number of deaths. In response to the mandates of our political leadership, the nation went into lockdown. Cars lined

up for miles at food banks and unemployment numbers skyrocketed.

Every country of the world experienced hardship and panic.

Reports from India described the horrible plight of day workers, now forced to walk back home without food and water, many dying along the way. The jobs that supplied money for their families ended, leaving them destitute, with grinding poverty, and no means of keeping themselves and their families alive. A friend of mine who lives in India reported that what little money some had was spent in liquor stores, which were deemed “essential businesses” while many other “nonessential businesses” were in lockdown.

Many countries in Europe suffered greatly. England was effectively shut down, even as the country’s own prime minister contracted the virus and thanked the medical community for saving his life. I have friends in Albania who said that they were not permitted to leave their homes without tapping an app on their smartphones and getting permission. Church members along with other people from the community were delivering whatever available food there was to those who were starving. Yes,

at the writing of this, things are changing, restrictions are being relaxed, but slowly.

Name the country, and COVID-19 was wreaking havoc there. All tried to respond as best they could. Throughout the world, each death—whether of a parent, grandparent, brother, or sister—represented a family. Here in the United States, relatives were often denied close contact with the dying; many, especially of the older generation, died alone, unable to say goodbye to their loved ones.

As if there wasn't enough grief in our country, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, dozens of tornadoes swept through some of our southern states, destroying neighborhoods, flattening homes, and killing dozens. In some instances, a parent was killed and their children lived; many families suffered losses of one kind or another along with their livelihoods. All the while COVID-19 added to their woes and held entire communities in fear.

As parents throughout the country lost their jobs and desperately began the search for unemployment benefits, they wondered what they should tell their children. Would there be food on the table? Tens of thousands, and eventually millions, were tested to see if they had the

virus. Thankfully, most did not, but those who did felt as if COVID-19 was a death sentence. And for some, it was.

Churches transitioned from actual meetings to “virtual services” online. Giving decreased in some churches, and some Christian ministries haven’t survived. My greatest heartbreak is for those international gospel preaching ministries that are almost totally dependent on American funds. Fear has caused many Christians to pull back their giving; some because of genuine financial need, others because of our tendency to hoard our assets, keeping more than we need.

As states “opened up,” businesses reopened with new restrictions, new policies, and continuing fears. Never before has a powerful economy been shut down in a matter of weeks. The economy is not like a light switch that can be turned off and flipped right back on again. We have lost our confidence in a predictable economic future.

The crisis brought to the fore the divisions within our country. Our states announced that only essential businesses were to remain open. These decisions, we were told, were based on science. So if you lived in Illinois as I do, “science” decreed that liquor and marijuana stores were “essential” but clothing stores were not. “Science”

decreed that elective surgery (even serious operations) were to be postponed, but abortion clinics were “essential” and could remain open.

The United States Congress directed the Federal Reserve to create trillions of dollars; and this was done by *fiat*, that is, the money was created electronically to flood the banks with liquidity.¹ Such bailouts have created a whole new sense of government dependency and entitlement. People will continue to expect free money, given that it can be created so easily.

With the loss of livelihood, and with families sheltering in place, more children were being abused. It has been projected the crisis could increase “deaths of despair,” that is deaths from suicide, drug overdose, alcoholism, and the like.² These factors already had been killing hundreds of thousands of Americans each year, but COVID-19 threatened to compound these frightening trends.

At no other time in history has a modern industrialized economy essentially shut down, not because of a recession or mismanagement, but by government order. I’m convinced that the economic ripples will continue long after the health scare has passed. With millions unemployed and thousands of businesses reopening, it will take time,

perhaps years, to rebuild. I believe several lingering effects will be a challenge for the church. How we respond will impact our future ministries both here and abroad.

As one person put it, COVID-19 is a watershed moment; not just a blizzard with a beginning and an end, but the beginning of a mini-ice age. Yes, eventually all of this might be put behind us, but the generational effects will remain. And so will the unanswered questions.

And it is not just COVID-19. While this epidemic was spreading around the world, a plague of grasshoppers had descended on East Africa. “Two new generations of locusts are set to descend on East Africa again—400 times stronger” is the headline of an April article in Quartz Africa that describes the horror of massive swarms blocking the light of the sun like a biblical plague. Hundreds of billions of these pests attacked crops in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. These ravenous creatures eat their own weight per day, destroying the food crops in these countries. No doubt thousands of people, including children, will starve as a result of this plague.³

Where is God in all of this?

Christians are attempting to understand this phenomenon from a God-centered point of view. Many cautioned

that such things as pandemics, plagues, and natural disasters are not to be seen as something that God was orchestrating but rather just the result of a fallen world. Consequently, disease is a part of the curse. God is able to stop it, of course, but it's happening quite independently of His will and purpose. Some false prophets assured us that our suffering would be brief because they had authority over it.

This is a time when we have to think more deeply about our role as believers in a frightened and hurting world. Believing as we do in a good and sovereign God, we have to respond to questions that arise about God's relationship to the suffering of the human beings He created for His glory. And how can we help pick up the pieces of our fragmented culture?

QUESTIONS THAT NEED ANSWERS

Believers—and even non-believers—are asking a lot of questions: What is God's relationship to all of this? Did He cause these diseases and disasters, or is He just an interested observer? Is He orchestrating it? Is this a judgment from God? What kind of a God would allow such

calamities to happen? Sure, we are a sinful people, but do we deserve *this*?

Also, is God obligated to deliver Christians from these disasters? If we “just trust God” as some admonish us to do, does that mean that we will get through this and come out “stronger than ever before” as they promise?

Glib answers to such questions are hurtful, not helpful. Sometimes we just need to sit beside those who grieve, letting them know we care, rather than talking to them dispassionately about God’s promises and purposes. Better to say nothing than to say something that appears to trivialize the horror. There is a grief that is too deep for words, too deep for explanations, and yes, too deep for human comfort.

But yet, it’s difficult for us to dismiss our questions. We want to ask whether the horrific events we have witnessed are compatible with the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible. Do not natural disasters and pandemics challenge the limits of our faith in a good and caring God? Can we watch a special report about orphaned children and keep our faith intact?

Who of us has not wondered at the seeming indifference of God toward this planet with its woes, its injus-

tices, and its suffering? In the face of indescribable human grief, God's silence appears deafening. Or has He spoken and we've just not listened?

One observer, commenting back in 2005 on the deadly Hurricane Katrina that slammed into New Orleans, spoke for many when he said, "If this world is the product of intelligent design, then the designer has some explaining to do." Of course, many of us believe that the Designer does *not* owe us an explanation—but yet, if we believe He has revealed Himself through the Scriptures, we are permitted some insight into His ways and purposes in the world.

Only the Bible can help us answer these questions.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOK

In the following pages I will discuss God's relationship to pandemics, plagues, and natural disasters. I believe that realistic answers have to be given that will ground our faith in our sovereign Lord even in a time of fear and grief—or I should say *especially* in a time of fear and grief.

Although God appears to be silent, I want to point out that He has actually spoken through the Scriptures, and furthermore, His promises are to be believed. God has

entered into our world through His Word and through the Word made flesh. We have reasons to trust. We desperately need to have a fresh vision of God.

But I believe our faith must not just be the kind we often hear about from well-intentioned pastors who tell us that if we just “trust,” everything will work out fine. The impression is given, if not explicitly stated, that if we trust, we will get our job back; if we trust, we will be able to make our house payments; if we trust, we will be healthy and recover from whatever ails us. I think that kind of assurance can actually do more harm than good. If things don’t work out—and often they don’t—we can become cynical. “So this is where trust leads us?” we say in the face of unanswered prayer . . . in the face of setbacks and continuing health and economic needs.

As we shall see later in this book, we need a hope that is not dependent on whether things work out, or whether the pain ends, or whether we see the answers to our prayers. Trust in God, yes; but trust in Him even in the face of setbacks, discouragement, and unending grief.

You will see that the apparent silence of God should not be interpreted as the indifference of God. God has not promised that we will be free from the pain of this

world, but that His presence will be with us all the way to the finish line. And beyond.

My intention is not to pry into God's diary and pretend that I can see all of His purposes; indeed, there are plenty of His purposes in these disasters that will never be known to us. Ultimately, only God knows all the whys and wherefores. The older I get, the more I marvel at how mysterious God really is. Indeed, that is precisely why faith in God is so precious to Him; it is difficult to believe, but we should trust Him—we must trust Him.

Yes, I believe that God has spoken, and we must listen. Not to have all of our questions answered, but to have our faith assured. And to know that the world is not out of control.

After having read this book, if you, like Job, are encouraged to worship God despite mysteries and unanswered questions, I shall be abundantly satisfied.

A TIME TO GRIEVE

Before we delve into doctrinal waters, let us take time to simply grieve for the suffering of this present world. Let us grieve for those who have lost family members and

loved ones who have succumbed to death for whatever reason. Let us grieve for the children in Kenya who will starve to death because of the locusts that have eaten their crops; let us grieve for the children left without their parents because of tornadoes and hurricanes. Let us grieve for the suffering of this planet and for the people next door who have no dependable income and face a fearful future.

Then let us turn our grief into helpfulness, doing all we can to encourage, to bless, to give money, and to risk our own selves for the sake of others. God has not left us here simply to separate ourselves from the pain around us. We are to extend ourselves to a hurting world.

If we are redeemed, we should look like our Redeemer. He wept over Jerusalem, and we should weep over the grief of this world—especially over the world's lack of genuine hope. Millions are facing death and deep suffering without any reason to believe that a day is coming when the crooked will be made straight and the suffering will have been worth the wait.

Let's take a moment to feel the pain of those who grieve.

In an article titled "Leading Beyond the Blizzard: Why Every Organization Is Now a Startup," the authors say:

Christian creativity begins with grief—the grief of a world gone wrong. It enfolds it in lament—the loud cry of Good Friday, the silence of Holy Saturday—and still comes to the tomb early Sunday morning. We are burying and saying goodbye to so much in these days, and around the world people are burying and saying goodbye to those they loved. But we do not grieve without hope. If we grieve with Jesus, and make room for others to grieve, we can hope to be visited by the Comforter, the Spirit who breathed over creation before it was even formed. And that Spirit will guide us in the choices we have to make, even on the hardest days that are ahead.⁴

John Keats wrote, “Is there another life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be, we cannot be created for this sort of suffering.”⁵

And now we turn to the problem of the silence of God.

Interested in the whole book?
Select your preferred book seller:

MOODY PUBLISHERS 

AMAZON 

APPLE BOOKS 

GOOGLE PLAY 

TARGET 

BARNES & NOBLE 

CHRISTIANBOOK.COM 
