

forced partners in his creation. But for us to love absolutely requires us to have freewill. Love cannot be forced and robotic. But freewill has a downside. It means people can simply dump God's plan, preferring to be destructive rather than creative, choosing to hate rather than love.



If you have children. Letting them go out to learn the lessons of life, for their life to be more abundant, is the job of a parent, but it is painful for them and us to let them go and it hurts to see them hurt. Keep them under wraps and they will not be abundant - freedom and freewill enables them to be great, if they choose. But it is all a perilous business.

Jesus told us to call God 'Dad' because of this parallel with parents and children.

Creation and freewill only come with substantial risk. Earthquakes, mud slides, hurricanes, volcanoes are all killers but, are part of the absolutely necessary fabric of any creation and particularly of the Earth that sustains us. Without background radiation, for example, there would have been no DNA change, no evolution and no life, yet that same radiation is a cause and sometimes a cure for cancer.

Creation and freewill were extraordinary options for God to choose, God knew they would be painful and costly, but the choice was stark: an eternal nothingness - or life and love?



Like any father, our God of love does not sit by and ignore pain. Christians are convinced that God came to us in Jesus and went through horrific torture both before and on the cross for us - it was his choice. He cried at the grave of Lazarus, was deeply moved, to heal, restore and value people, to get alongside the poor and vulnerable. It is no accident that Jesus was born in the dirt of a stable. In the most real way possible God suffers with us and for us.

God keeps the show on the road!

So because of love, the all-powerful God simply can't counter every random tragedy with another miracle. To do so would be to dump creation as we know it or to cancel freewill - which cancels love. Oh yes, God is constantly miracle-making, constantly tweaking the whole cosmos but within self-imposed limits. But ultimately God can't intervene with miracles every time something goes awry.

So can God do nothing?

I believe that God wishes abundant life for us all; he wants us to live forever. It sounds heartless to say God can stop something, but this time chooses not to, and hopeless to say God can't. But God is neither hopeless nor heartless, but struggling within the reality of creation, to do best possible for each of us.

Exodus 20:24, ²Heb 7:27, ³2 Cor 5:19
⁴Rom 6:23, ⁵Ezek 18:2



Why did God let it happen?

Just before I took the funeral of a baby boy who had died in the night, someone told me how much that death had shaken their faith, and another asked me what had that little baby done wrong?

Maybe you are asking why something is happening to you, to someone you love, or to people you see on the news. This is an all-too-short, single-sheet reply to that cot death. But it does relate to many similar questions. Do come and talk.



Did the baby die because he sinned?

No, absolutely not. Religion, for millennia, has tried to answer why things happen in a variety of horrible ways. The girl who asked me what had the baby done wrong was voicing an ancient religious view that is still around today.

The God I believe in is not a vicious and wrathful God, but a caring, loving and merciful God. The New Testament of the Bible is about Jesus coming and overturning that old perception of God. Instead of the ancient notion that sins can only be removed by some gory sacrifice of some

bird or animal¹, Jesus acts through a whole drama where he, himself becomes the 'full and final' sacrifice² for the sins of the world. He rejects the notion of God zapping those who sin. We all sin and positively turning away from that is what Jesus preached. His life was about



reconciling this sinful world to God³, a life of forgiveness and mercy being stronger than judgement and wrath. God is not in the business of taking away the life of a baby because of that baby's so-called sin.

Don't get me wrong. Sin can be a factor in death⁴. Choose to be a gangster, and your own life is likely to be lived in jeopardy. Abuse your body with drugs and you are likely to die young. This is our own activity, not the activity of God. It is a real consequence of the kind of life we lead.



But a baby - is not yet in the business of sin.

Did God want the baby in heaven?



Human life is so valuable. Nothing we can ever do matches God's effort in creating a cosmos, and in it our own world, which can sustain human life. Four billion years of evolution from single celled organisms is a massive investment of love. God loves so much that to randomly whisk away a baby, leaving

impossibly grieving lives, is not what God is about. So no, I do not believe that is not what happened.

Was it my fault then?



Almost certainly not. That is a guilt journey lots of people take. Unless you have been particularly reckless, there is no chance that the death was caused, directly or indirectly by you. And let's be clear that the 'sins of the fathers do not get punished, by God, in their offspring'⁵.

Of course recklessness does occur. If parenting is marred by alcoholism or drug addiction, normal rational thinking is sometimes lacking, and in those moments a child can become neglected to the point of death. Thankfully such cases are few and far between.

So why did the baby die?

Firstly there is a physical answer - you find it on the death certificate, on patients' notes. We all know it is risky being a human in the world. Life is mysterious and fragile. Whilst we like to think we are in control of everything going on about us and in us, we are absolutely not. But Christians do tend to think that if we are not in control, then God must be in control. So why did God let the baby die?

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And the spiritual answer ... WHY?

Let's think this through. Christians believe that creation was a choice God made because God's nature is creative love.

That choice, we know, was full of risk, joy and hope. Like the birth of a child, suddenly we care and love so much for a new human being outside of ourselves that it changes what we do. There is no way we would consciously undermine their development, and because of that, our own world is suddenly more constrained. In a sense, we live for them.

The choice God made, to create, immediately and forever limited God's options.

What I mean is, God can't reverse that creation - undo evolution - re-engineer the universe - change the way physics works, cancelling it all. It would be completely contrary to God's nature of creative love. OK ... yes God could and does do miracles, but constantly undermining creation loses the very substance he loves. It cannot be what God is about. By creating, God cuts his own power.

And not only creation...

And also by giving us freewill, God limits his options further. He hands over control. He could have made us into remotely-controlled robots he could have steered us all the time into being

