

For Christians, the real question of suffering is 'how,' not 'why'_51704

May 14, 2004

Posted: 5/14/04



For Christians, the real question of suffering is 'how,' not 'why'

By Ken Camp

Managing Editor

ARLINGTON—For Christians, the question of evil and suffering is “how” rather than “why,” panelists told a national leadership conference.

“There is no ultimate answer to the question, 'Why?'" said Milton Ferguson, former president of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

**Newport
Foundation
Conference:**

- [Denison urges Christians to live authentically in postmodern world](#)
- [Mystery of suffering offers no easy answers, speakers say](#)
- [Speakers urge dialogue as key to countering challenge of world religions](#)
- [Survey finds 'moral myopia' in advertising industry](#)
- [Grocery executive, Laity Lodge president named Newport award recipient](#)
- [Creeds should clarify Christian living, not build barriers, speakers stress](#)

But, he added, a biblical worldview provides answers to the more pressing question: “How do I get through this? How do I learn to walk, but with a limp, and how do I learn to sing again with a lump in my throat.”

Ferguson joined Randall Lolley, former president of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Gerald Mann, pastor of Riverbend Church in Austin, in a panel discussion at a national leadership conference on “ultimate questions,” sponsored by the John Newport Foundation.

After years of scholarly inquiry, seeking to reconcile God's goodness and power with the existence of evil and suffering, Ferguson concluded the best answer he found was offered by a poorly educated oil-field driller.

The man attended a country church where Ferguson was pastor during his seminary studies. His daughter asked why she had to suffer from an intensely pain-ful malignancy.

The father replied: “I don't know why you have to hurt so, but I know it doesn't mean God has quit loving you.”

Ferguson acknowledged Christians can mature and learn important lessons from suffering.

But he flatly rejected the idea that God is “punching buttons and pulling levers” to orchestrate suffering as some sort of teaching experience.

“I don't believe God works evil with one hand in order to do good with his other hand,” he said.

Part of the problem in trying to understand the problem is “we'll never be able to put a single face on evil and suffering,” Lolley added.

Pointing to lessons he learned from Newport, who served more than 40 years at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as a philosophy of religion professor and administrator, Lolley said suffering may be punitive,

probationary, disciplinary, revelational, redemptive or demonic. And it is mysterious.

Mann described some of his own experiences with suffering—rearing a deaf daughter and personally struggling with Parkinson's disease.

“Why do good people suffer? It's a good question. We must not tell people not to ask it,” Mann said.

“I have no rational answer. But there is another way of knowing that is trans-rational.”

Ultimately, he concluded, that way of “knowing” is a step of faith.

News of religion, faith, missions, Bible study and Christian ministry among Texas Baptist churches, in the BGCT, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and around the world.