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The Logic of Love

Chapter 16: What Evil Lurks?

*I see the shadow of evil
No matter where I go
It haunts me like a curse
Like there's something I don't know*

*It changes shape so quickly
It's every shade but bright
It has only form, not substance
And gives nothing but a fright.*

*"Your absent mind's forgetting
To turn on your inner light!
Stop your fussing. Just turn it on,"
That's mom—she's always right!*

Chapter 14 (*Is Imperfection A Good Idea?*) addressed the propriety of creating imperfection on purpose. The conclusion was that intentionally creating imperfection is not incongruous with the existence of God because imperfect environments allow for the most profound expressions of love. The previous chapter, *It's Just Not Fair*, exposed how imperfection necessitates the tempering of justice with mercy. These two chapters were about finding meaning and value in the inherent conditions of our environment. This chapter addresses the problem of evil as a personal experience. Here, the focus is on accepting responsibility for our inner life by owning our interpretations of events.

In philosophy the problem of reconciling the existence of evil with the existence of God may be an ageless paradox, but in life it is an ever-present spiritual imperative. Thoughts about evil do not work to invalidate faith nearly so much as the experience of it. The conditions of this world scream for an answer to the question of why an all-powerful and loving God couldn't find a way that works better than this (without undermining our freewill). The level of human atrocity and suffering that has seared the body of human history seems "needless." Needless suffering is evil; a loving, omnipotent God would do better. Ergo, there is no God.

The world is ripe with circumstances that encourage second-guessing the wisdom of God. We do need more creative solutions to life's challenges. But the lack of creativity is a case of personal projection dumped on God. When we cannot imagine how the circumstances of life might work together for a greater good, this becomes a reason to question the existence of God. The problem is looking at the experience of suffering within too short a time frame. All suffering is acceptable if there is sufficient time to make the best of it. Time is not an issue when considering the existence of an eternal God who can provide us with life after death. We can embrace suffering when there is an expectation of future reward. We do this all the time.

Suffering for the sake of a future reward is the mark of maturity. We do this not just in terms of securing the necessities of life, but for the sake of luxuries as well. "If I work enough voluntary overtime now, I'll be able to afford the ski boat I've always wanted." The cost-benefit analysis is highly subjective, of course, as well as what is considered a benefit, but the willingness to embrace opportunities that require a certain degree of suffering is universal.

Our appreciation of how rewards develop out of enduring hardship is not restricted to suffering that

is intentionally inflicted. It is common to look back on unpleasant experiences and marvel at how much was learned from them. This does not mean that we wish such experiences on others. Of course not. However, there is a certain quality of character development that comes from facing hardship with dignity, especially when the suffering is not chosen. When one has the determination to use suffering, past or present, as a vehicle for building a noble character, then the rewards of such character growth are available for the rest of one's life.

The point is not to rehash what was stated earlier on the value of participating in the process of perfection. The issue here is one of owning our interpretations of good and evil and acknowledging that our inability to see how things can work out for the best is a personal limitation. When we take personal responsibility for the definitions of good and evil, and when this is done as a part of faith in God, then adversity that would otherwise tempt us to reject faith becomes an opportunity to examine one's commitment to living faithfully. When trust, hope, and loyalty become expressions of faith, adversity can be savored as an opportunity for the dynamic expression of love. Suffering which tempts the rejection of faith becomes nothing more than a window into one's current status of spiritual growth, a vantage point for assessing how faith can be made more whole. The recognition of incomplete faith is a blessing to those who strive to live a wholehearted, life-long commitment to faith in God.

Counting blessings and searching diligently for the good in all experiences is not a cop-out; it is a living affirmation of trust that the ends not only justify the means, but also glorify them.

The Freewill Love Factor necessitates approaching God through faith. Faith requires an attitude of hope and trust that all things can work together for good. Hope and trust are logical extensions of believing in a God who is benevolent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Yet, hoping and trusting that life will be better in the future does not create an appreciation for the value of the present. Hope and trust may make us feel better, but they do not offer intellectual satisfaction. They do not explain how the process works. This can be understood by appreciating that, as a collective, our experience of love involves issues of both quantity and quality. The sport of diving provides a useful analogy.

A diver may execute a perfect swan dive off the low board and receive a quality value of ten from the judges. The level (quantity) of difficulty, however, may only have a value of one. If the value of the dive is measured by multiplying the quality and quantity, then a perfect swan dive only gets a score of ten. Another diver may try a triple back flip with a full twist off the high board. Let's say the difficulty of this dive has a value of eight. Even a poor-quality dive, one that only scores a three for execution, yields a score of twenty-four for the dive.

Now consider the possibility of a world where everyone just happens to always choose good over evil. Everyone speaks the truth and does the right thing. Life is good, and the quantity of people participating is one hundred percent. But, the strength of character meter (quality) is barely registering. Forgiveness is never necessary because everyone always has a wholesome attitude. Loyalty has never really been tested because no one has the experience of every being betrayed. Altruism is hard to express when everything is fair and everyone cooperates so nicely. This world, where spiritual quantity has been maximized, eliminates the opportunity for the type of high quality spiritual experience that comes only through tribulation.

This, of course, is not an excuse to pray that others screw up so that we can enjoy the rewards of greater personal spiritual growth. However, by recognizing that our individual potentials are augmented by the mistakes of others, we lose the right to complain about how the mistakes of others *unfairly* cause us to suffer. As well, if humanity as a whole eventually ends up with a higher score on the nobility-of-character scale, then God should be off the hook for not creating a better world. Holding love as the highest value leads to the desire to maximize the quantity of people who are doing good. This is how we love humanity as a whole. As individuals (and as a group of individuals), quality achievements compensate for the suffering occasioned by natural forces and the evil acts of others. This trade-off of the quality-quantity issue creates the cosmic balance that justifies the experience of imperfection in all of its forms.

When we consider the possibility that God could provide future benefits to compensate for an initially harsh environment, then we can begin to see how the suffering of this world cannot be a reason for denying the existence of God. On one end of the spectrum, we have the extremely primitive state in which humans first existed; on the other end of the spectrum is the achievement of Utopia. Every step in between these two states must be appreciated as providing the potential for a worthwhile experience, both individually and collectively. This appreciation reflects a reasoned understanding of the trust that is a necessary component of having whole-hearted faith in God. This

perspective works to encourage those with faith in God to savor the particular challenges that come their way and to be all the more grateful for the advances in culture and civilization that are the gift of previous generations.

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