

# THEY ASKED WHY AND GOD ANSWERED THEM

**Bible people who asked God why  
and the answers they received  
with an emphasis on why there is suffering  
if God is all good and all-powerful.**

**BY DR MARK C ROSER**



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Endnotes provided for references are found in the  
back of the book.

## **DEDICATION**

They Asked Why is Dedicated to Ethan Aaron Roser.  
You took me beyond what I knew to feel the Father's heart.  
He used you to change me in ways I could not imagine.  
May I never stop changing until I see you again in glory.  
May I never stop asking for a thousand, thousand Ethans  
that would know and love God like you did.

***“See, it stands written before me:  
I will not keep silent.”***  
*(Isaiah 65:6 NIV).*

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## INTRODUCTION

# WHY ASK WHY?

Larry King, a CNN talk show host, posed a favorite question during his interviews with famous people: “Why?”

He always honed in on that question to get to the heart of a person’s story. “You changed your career!” Larry would ask, “Why?” The *why* question not only kept the conversation moving, but it also provided details on hidden reasons behind the facts.

Journalists know that every story is based on five W questions: who, what, when, where, and why. No story is complete without answers to these questions. Like the tragic news of yet another mass shooting: Who was the shooter? What happened? When and where did it happen? How many were murdered? WHY?

“Why?” is the most elusive question of the five. Consider a recent headline: “Searching for a Motive: Police, FBI descend on home of suspected Texas shooter where he reportedly lived with parents.” The *why* question can lead to a host of other questions: Did the shooter target people they knew or shoot total strangers? Was it an act of terrorism? It takes time to get answers to “why?” It is easy to draw wrong conclusions, but invariably, we want to know “Why?” Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines *why* as “for what cause, reason, or purpose.”

## WHY ASK WHY?

From infancy, answers to why questions empowered you to understand what you experienced. “Why did Mom look at me that way?” “Why should I do that?” “Why did that happen to me?” Although not always consciously asked, why was a main avenue of learning and managing your various relationships and experiences. Later in life, many experience huge why questions: “Why is there something rather than nothing?” “Why am I here?” “Why do people suffer?”

The big questions of life have always drawn my attention. They helped bring me to faith in Christ when I was nineteen years old. They also helped me grow in my faith and motivated me to obtain a doctorate in Biblical Studies. They propelled me to write books on “What is the purpose of life?” “What can the Devil do, and why?” “What will happen when the world ends?”

If you don’t understand the reason for something, you’re not sure how to think about it or how to respond. “Why am I going through this?” can be a nagging, unsettling question.

On the Saturday afternoon of April 22, 2017, the question of why became intensely personal and inescapable. I received a call that my youngest son, Ethan, was in an accident. An errant hammer, thrown during a track and field event, hit him in the head. The officer told me, “Your son didn’t make it to the hospital!”

After that call, I lay on the floor, weeping. “God, why allow me to be hurt like this?” For over twenty-two years in the wilds of Africa, God had always protected my family. I knew He could have easily prevented the accident. Nothing is too hard for him. I believe this so deeply that I wrote a book discussing our experiences with God’s Sovereignty during the Zimbabwe crisis.



My heart was shattered, and I said, “Lord, this boy would have served you for decades.” Ethan had already led several of his friends to Christ, and he possessed the full skill set to be an outstanding minister. He had every reason to live. I needed to know God’s reason for allowing Ethan’s life to be cut short.

My “why?” question was fueled not only by the fact that Ethan was deeply committed to Christ, but he was unusually trouble free, and happy. He was studying for the ministry and had an amazing, bubbly personality. He was nineteen years old.

The added irony was the random nature of the accident, which the media called “a freak accident.” The national media had picked up the story of the accident. It resonated with people because of Ethan’s testimony and the nature of the accident. It was also national news because the accident happened at a premier Christian college to a missionary family who had served God for decades in Africa. My family and I were all interviewed. Millions of people heard of Ethan’s life, faith, and tragic death.

That first week after that phone call, I started writing. It was a way to drain my ocean of pain and process my loss. I described my raw feelings as I journaled my internal dialogue with God in *Blindsided: A Journey from Tragic Loss to Triumphant Love*. Like millions before me, I sought to understand why God allows such tragedies. And why, My boy? Why now? Why in this way?

When I began my deep dive into why, I had no idea how God would answer my question. It was a unique journey of discovery, a tangible tapestry of things I could see and touch, things Ethan wrote to God, words I had written to him, and events far beyond my ability to orchestrate. Looking back, I see that God carried me along to write *Blindsided* for reasons greater than my grief. By the time I finished the book, my wife summed up our yearlong journey saying, “God has had an ongoing conversation with us.”

Right after COVID, I finished writing and marketed *Blindsided* via a video trailer that raised the question of why God allows such losses. Millions viewed it on Facebook. Thousands responded with posts of their own, which granted me a unique opportunity to see a vast sea of pain beneath the surface of our comfortable culture. It was as if deep was calling to deep.

Multitudes admitted that they had asked the same “why?” question: “I asked God that question when our four-year-old grandson was air flighted to Children’s Hospital.... He had a brain tumor.... He loved God. He talked about Jesus all the time. He could read and loved Bible stories. He loved going to church. He was extremely smart and loved everyone. I asked God why?”

It is not only the death of a loved one that provokes the “why?” question, but a host of other losses: “I was kidnapped off my university campus, robbed, and raped. I spent the last three months searching my heart as to why God would let this happen to me.” Can you feel her pain and identify with her question?

Many posts revealed that time does not diminish the loss, nor does it always heal: “Fifty years ago, our first-born son, twenty years old, was studying for the ministry in Bible College when a semi-truck ran a stop sign at 70 mph. Both he and his fellow student were killed instantly. He had a strong Christian testimony and was a talented singer and musician.”

The *Blindsided* promotional video claimed that God had answered my “why?” question. The Facebook responses to my claim revealed several insights, but what baffled me the most was that eight out of ten Christians believe God does not answer our “why?” questions. Many believed it was even wrong to ask:

- “I learned a long time ago to never question God.”
- “My church upbringing taught you not to ask why.”
- “I myself have never asked God why he does what he does, and I don’t see myself now asking him, Why?”

- “We must bite our tongue.”
- “Questioning why is contrary to our faith in God.”
- “It is futile to ask why!”

Having cataloged the Facebook responses, here is a shortlist of the top reasons given as to why you should not ask God “why?”:

- “Asking God why is akin to blaming Him.”
- “It is the Devil, not God, who is responsible for these things.”
- “We will only know when we get to Heaven.”
- “God knows what’s best for you.”
- “We will never truly know why God allows bad things to happen to good people.”
- “We must just trust God in all things!”

Some offered reasons why God isn’t giving answers to our questions:

- “It would be too painful.”
- “You couldn’t understand it if he did.”
- “It would not help you.”
- “Answers don’t bring the person back.”

From the responses, it seems that people believe: “God is not telling, so don’t ask.” I call this the Christian version of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” and I get it. Don’t go there, and advise others not to go there, because if you do, you will get stuck in a place of hurt. Your grief will be endless.

A percentage of Facebook responders admitted that they were stuck:

- “I have asked that question every day since May 2020.”
- “I wonder why all the time. Why my baby had to die?”
- “My thirteen-year-old daughter asks me these questions all the time.”

Worse still, Facebook users warned that asking why may give way to unbelief. Perhaps you will end up bitter toward God. You could even become like an angry devil and curse God.

There were, however, more pragmatic responses. Some acknowledged the need to ask, but they didn't believe God gives a reason:

- “God knows we are going to question him because we are human and frail with limited understanding and see through a dark glass.”
- “He remembers that we are dust.”
- “He knows what we're thinking, and he isn't offended or surprised when we ask why.”

Then there was an individual who claimed that God answered their why: “When my son died suddenly while on Spring break, God answered my cry and questions! It was a supernatural rescue for both my son and my family. He even gave me Scripture to show what happened and why.... He assured me that my son was with him because he called on Jesus! We were transformed by his death into new Spirit-filled people, never to be the same.”

I found that the “why, God?” question touches a deep nerve in people, a nerve that runs through the body of believers. Little did I realize, however, that most people have grave misunderstandings of what the Bible teaches about asking God why, and that what they believe does not help them in their loss.

Why? Because believers silently struggle with painful losses, and many fall away from faith because they've been told there are no answers. This response is unhelpful because the number one question that keeps unbelievers in unbelief is “why all the suffering?” It is also the number one reason people lose faith.

How should believers respond to this elephant in the room? Does the Bible fail to provide answers? Is the faith of Christ silent on the topic? Don't all world religions seek to answer this question?

I would not choose to write on the “why, God?” question. When I wrote *Blindsided*, that was it. In time, though, I realized the need

for a book that addresses this confusing subject because the Bible clearly speaks to our “why?” questions! In fact, the word why appears over five hundred times on its pages. Those in the Bible who sought to follow God often asked it. We can learn a lot from them, and what they recorded in the Bible promises to help us cooperate with God’s purposes.

*“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach you, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope” (Romans 15:4).*

*They Asked Why And God Answered Them* considers every place in the Bible where the word why appears. For example, Rebecca, Isaac’s wife, asked God why she experienced a troublesome pregnancy. *“But the children struggled together within her; and she said, ‘If all is well, why am I like this?’ So she went to inquire of the Lord” (Genesis 25:22).*

God answered Rebecca. *“And the Lord said to her: ‘Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger.’ So when her days were fulfilled for her to give birth, indeed there were twins in her womb” (Genesis 25:23–24).*

*They Asked Why* focuses on eight specific Biblical characters who asked God big “why?” questions. Each chapter deals with a different person in the Bible and examines the answers they received with an emphasis on the reasons for human suffering. Readers will learn many helpful lessons from the characters’ questions. You will also see that the Bible provides both general and specific answers to “why?” questions. At the end of each chapter, I highlight clear-cut “Principles of Asking Why,” exploring how the characters’ experiences and these principles might help you and I with our specific “why?” questions.

There are others, recorded in Scripture, besides these seven men, who had questions for God. A chapter on Abraham could've been included, and we will refer to him and others who had questions for God and see how the Lord answered them.

*They Asked Why And God Answered Them* offers inspired answers to life's most difficult questions, which brings up a final, vital point less we start on the wrong foot. The answers that these Bible characters received concerning suffering were God given. They were not men figuring out God's purpose in allowing evil and suffering. The Bible makes it clear that God's thoughts are beyond man's ability to comprehend, and unless God reveals his thoughts, we cannot know them (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:34).

Scripture, however, is equally clear that God has the ability to make his mind and words known to men (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). The very existence of the Bible proves that reality. The Book of Isaiah has been called a mini Bible because it has sixty-six chapters like the sixty-six Bible books, and it contains all the major themes of Scripture, including the truth that God speaks, even though men do not always hear him. *"Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will repay— Even repay into their bosom... Because, when I called, you did not answer; When I spoke, you did not hear...It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer and while they are still speaking, I will hear"* (Isaiah 65: 6, 12, 24).

We affirm that God has not changed. He continues to speak and reveal his words and purposes to his children. Jesus said, "My sheep hear my voice" (John 10:27).

We encourage you to use this book in a small group study. At the end of each chapter, there are seven *Small Group Discussion Questions*. These questions will help you interact and apply the content of the chapter. If the book is used by a study group, we can ship them at a bulk discount per copy.

CHAPTER ONE

# **MOSES** WHY IN THE BEGINNING

Because life elicits questions which lead to answers  
and stimulate growth in your understanding of God, people,  
the world you live in, and His redemptive ways.

Websites that answer your W questions the who, what, when, where, and why enjoy many hits. Everything from experts to whoever wants to venture an answer powers these queries. But sites that handle “why?” questions often disclose debates. Just Google “Why is there something rather than nothing?” Page after page of URLs come up. Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia, appears first: “This is a question about the reason for basic existence which has been raised or commented on by a range of philosophers and physicists.”

I’m not sure why Wikipedia has no reference to religionists, but Moses is the best person to start with on the question of existence. In the book of Genesis, Moses provides the most accepted answer to that basic “why?” *“In the beginning God created the Heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1)*. Like Moses, half the people alive today believe in a creator God, even in places where there are no Bibles. *“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead” (Romans 1:20)*.

You and I are hard-wired to know right from wrong, to see beauty and design, to feel awe and wonder, and ultimately, to seek the reason for things. Genesis teaches that God made us that way in his own image and likeness. The word *genesis* means beginning, and all the major teachings of the Bible, from creation to redemption, from the justifying faith of Abraham to the redemptive suffering of the promised Messianic Seed, have their roots in the first book of the Bible. Seeing how “why” questions are used by Moses in the Torah will help you understand what Scripture teaches elsewhere on this topic.

In Genesis, the question of why is often asked. In fact, Moses enters the Biblical narrative when he stops and asks “why?” *“Then Moses said, ‘I will now turn aside and see this great sight, why the bush is not consumed’” (Exodus 3:3)*.



Dry bushes in the wilderness heat up under the hot sun and burst into fiery flames. They are quickly consumed into oblivion. Moses had seen this happen many times on that mountainside. His whole life, he had started fires and watched how they burned twigs: to cook, to stay warm, and to get rid of the garbage. So, a bush on fire that did not burn up was hard to ignore! Moses had to find out why.

*“When he turned aside to see that great sight, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” (Exodus 3:4).*

A holy fire appeared to Moses on Mount Horeb, and in an upper room, a similar divine fire appeared to the first group of Jesus’s followers. The latter got the attention of a multitude in Jerusalem as they heard in their native languages the marvelous works of God. *“So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’ Others mocking said, ‘They are full of new wine’” (Acts 2:3-13).*

Whole nations, not just individuals, can observe these deific occurrences. Yet, they are mostly subtle, unspectacular, and appear as coincidences. For example, consider the coincidental deaths of Thomas Jefferson and John Adams on July 4, 1826. The pair died fifty years to the day after each had signed the Declaration of Independence. They died in different places and from different causes. Add to this quirk occurrence that the U.S. president at the time was Adams’s son John Quincy.

### LIFE INVARIABLY ELICITS QUESTIONS

God has a way of getting your attention. You experience something outside the norm, something unusual, or something where an unseen hand is apparent. Call it serendipity. Call it what you want. Something strange, something other-worldly, happens. It’s God’s calling card; it bears his fingerprints. It stirs you to

ask why and to seek answers that God alone can truly answer, answers that will keep you from scoffing at what is holy, like some did on that first Pentecost!

- **You ask others “why?” to know their motives and purposes.**

You can ask God “why?” just like you might ask others why they do what they do. You see this kind of asking often in Genesis.

*“Pharaoh called Abram and said, ‘What is this you have done to me? Why did you not tell me that she was your wife? Why did you say, ‘She is my sister’? I might have taken her as my wife. Now therefore, here is your wife; take her and go your way” (Genesis 12:18-19; 29:25).*

You especially want to know why when you witness strong emotions in others. *“So he asked Pharaoh’s officers who were with him in the custody of his lord’s house, saying, ‘Why do you look so sad today?’” (Genesis 40:7; 43:6; 44:4-7).*

“Why did you say that?” “Why did you do that?” Starting in Genesis and throughout the Bible, people ask why. Even God asks people why. *“The Lord said to Abraham, ‘Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I surely bear a child, since I am old?’” (Genesis 18:13).*

When God asks a question, however, it is not to get information or gain an insight. He already knows why, but he asks so that you might get in touch with what is happening in your heart or with the seriousness of the moment. *“So the Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?’” (Genesis 4:6).*

- **God wants you to ask Him the “whys?” of your experiences.**

In Moses’ inspired account of the patriarchs’ lives, he doesn’t hesitate to record their “why?” questions for God. Before Isaac was born, Abraham asked God why he had no heir. Also, Jacob wondered why *“everything is against me?!” (Genesis 15:1-5; 42:1-36).*

Moses followed the example of his forefathers and asked God why he didn't do what he had promised. Here's the storyline. God told Moses that he appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, and he hadn't forgotten his covenant to give them the land of Canaan. He heard the groaning of the children of Israel and saw how the Egyptians enslaved them. God promised to rescue them with an outstretched arm. But from the time God reiterated his promise to deliver them, their bondage went from bad to worse. The Egyptians increased the Israelites' workload and started beating their workers. *"So Moses returned to the Lord and said, 'Lord, why have You brought trouble on this people? Why is it You have sent me?'"* (Exodus 5:22).

- **The "Why?" question helps you learn God's ways.**

Moses is a great example of a person growing closer to God and learning his ways because he asked God why. He was not afraid to ask God why he had not fulfilled his promise to rescue Israel and why God had sent him. It was a bold but legit question!

Have you ever been there? God promises healing, but you or your loved one gets sicker.... You believe God called you to start your business, but there's one setback after another.... God calls you to peace in a vital relationship, maybe at work or in your marriage, but strife is a daily reality.... You might have your list of "why?" questions. At times, Bible promises, and heartfelt dreams appear to fail like they did with Moses and the Israelites. It is part of the faith landscape if you are going to walk with God. It's important to know that many of the heroes of our faith "died not having received the promises" (Hebrews 11:13). WHY?

#### RETURN OF THAT INITIAL GOD MOMENT

God gives Moses a clear answer as to why he hasn't delivered Israel yet. *"You shall know that I am the Lord"* (Exodus 6:7).