THE SORROWS OF MAN
AN IMAGE OF THE SUFFERING KING

GABRIEL BO

The story goes that in the days of emperor Diocletian, when Christianity in the ancient Roman world was still a crime and entertainment was often cruelty in costume, there was an actor named Genesius. He made his living making fun of Christians.

One night, on a stage prepared for the emperor himself, Genesius stood in a parody of baptism. The script called for mock tears, a fake confession of sin, a priest in costume, and a raucous audience. It was Gnosticism in comedic form, religion as theatre, spirit as plaything, the body as nothing more than a prop for jokes and pleasures.

However, somewhere between the lines, something went wrong. As he mimed the acts of the play, he found that he actually believed the words he was pretending to say. The caricature he'd been hired to perform became his confession. In front of Diocletian and a crowd that wanted satire, he broke character, asked for the grace of Christ in earnest, and confessed faith in the King he'd mocked.

The emperor did not clap.

Genesius was tortured, then executed. Tradition says he declared, before they beheaded him, that there was no king but Christ, and that if he had to die a thousand times for Him, it would not be enough. In the empire's value system, Genesius failed the basic test of "being human." He did not cling to comfort. He did not preserve his life at any cost. He embraced suffering when he could have escaped it. Which raises the uncomfortable question our age keeps circling: What is man, if not a creature built to avoid pain?

THE MODERN PROJECT OF PAINLESSNESS

We live in an age that increasingly defines our humanity by our ability to reduce suffering. From vaccines to antibiotics, from anesthesia to antidepressants, we rightly celebrate the ways we've pushed back disease, trauma, and despair. Nobel Prizes go to those who add a few years to our lives or take the edge off our pain. Philanthropy is measured in metrics of harm avoided. Even self-professed Christians in the halls of power talk about the reduction of pain as the highest good—a kind of secular beatitude: Blessed are those who optimize human flourishing, for theirs is the kingdom of venture capital.

Around this, a new metaphysics quietly forms. Transhumanists dream of uploading consciousness, of editing out disease from our DNA, of smoothing away the rough edges of mortality itself. Others, less technical but equally determined, craft spiritualities that promise inner peace without a cross, healing without repentance, light without the dark weight of sin. And under all of it beats a very old impulse.

The second-century Gnostics, whom the early church fathers labored to refute, believed that the material world was a mistake. The body was a prison; salvation meant escape. The goal was to rise above the bloody tangles of flesh, history, and suffering into a higher spiritual realm. No tears. No scars. No nailed hands. The early church knew instinctively that this was not just a doctrinal error, but it was a deep misunderstanding of what it means to be human. In contrast, others like ascetics and Stoics labored in pain, reacting to nothing. They treated suffering as something to be mastered or numbed, not shared, shouldered, and redeemed. The Christian story—and the story of the Son of Man—refuses both options: it insists that God Himself entered the prison, took on scars, and made even wounded flesh a place where glory can dwell.





MAN AS MORE THAN ANIMAL OR MACHINE

Scripture gives us a different starting point: "What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?" asks the psalmist (Psalm 8:4 ESV). God answers by telling us not that we are brains on sticks or algorithms in meat, but that we are creatures made in His image (Genesis 1:26-27). Dust, yes—but dust breathed into by God.

Animals suffer, but they do not ask why. The extinction of animals is cruel, yet if only the fittest survive, is there anything redeemable in the suffering of animals? Isn't it just a part of nature? To what end is their death purposeful? Machines can be optimized, but they cannot hurt in any morally meaningful sense. Human beings, however, not only feel pain, we interpret it. We look for meaning in it. We rage against it. We write poems about it. We pray.

The Bible insists that this is not an accidental glitch in the design. There is an unsettling line of thought running through its pages: God not only made man, He sovereignly ordained a world in which evil and suffering would be real. He "works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11 ESV), even the things that break us. Joseph can say, after betrayal and prison, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" (Genesis 50:20 ESV). Same event but two intentions. Human malice harmonized with divine purpose. This is where both ancient Gnosticism and modern transhumanism stumble. Both assume that if suffering exists, someone has made a mistake that technology or esoteric knowledge must correct. The Lord says something harder and more hopeful: our suffering is not a coding error, but a context. And that context is not endless. Scripture frames suffering as labor pains, real, severe, and temporary, because God intends not only redemption through the cross, but restoration through resurrection.

THE GOD WHO SUFFERS ON PURPOSE

To Christians, the center of history is not a lab, nor a mystic ascent. It is the cross. Isaiah saw it long before it took place: a servant of the Lord who would be "despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"; one who would be "pierced for our transgressions" and "crushed for our iniquities," so that "with his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:3-5 ESV). The New Testament insists that this is Jesus of Nazareth, God in flesh, suffering not by accident but by appointment. The cross is the worst evil the world has ever seen. The murder of the only innocent man, the execution of the Son of God, and yet, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," was crucified "by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23 ESV). Again, two intentions: human hands, divine plan. Because the Father's answer to that darkest hour was not merely consolation but resurrection. The public vindication of the Son, the declaration that the cross was not defeat but victory.

If we ask, "Why would a good God allow suffering?", the Christian faith dares to answer, not with an abstract syllogism, but with a Person: He allows it in order to enter it, to bear it, to transform it. The God of the Bible does not watch our pain from a distance. He takes it into Himself. The God of the universe intimately rides the full arc of human agony—betrayal, injustice, physical torment, abandonment—and then walks out of the tomb carrying scars that never quite fade. The scars remain, but the sentence of death does not. Resurrection is God's insistence that suffering will be judged, overturned, and finally undone.

From there, the pattern spreads. Job, stripped of health, family, and reputation, gets no neat philosophical explanation for his losses. Instead, he is confronted with God's vastness and says, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you" (Job 42:5). Suffering doesn't answer all his questions; it reorders them. Joseph's dungeon becomes the doorway to his calling. Paul's catalogue of beatings, shipwrecks, and sleepless nights becomes the backdrop for that strange confession: "When I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:10). His "thorn in the flesh" is called a "messenger of Satan," yet he also knows it was "given" to him—given, paradoxically, to keep him humble and usable. The Lord's word to him still echoes: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Like Paul, Job, and Joseph, our sufferings should recenter our focus on the resurrection hope, that God who raised Christ will also raise His people, and no loss if final.

In each case, suffering is not a random intrusion into the story. It is the furnace in which human beings are refined into the likeness of Christ. Like silver, the heat

The Christian story says something more profound: We are called neither to worship suffering nor to flee it at any cost, but to follow Christ through it.

molds us into metal that is stronger and cleanses us of our impurities to better reflect the God that suffered alongside us.

AGAINST THE PHILOSOPHY FOR ESCAPE

This is why Christianity cannot join the chorus that sings the abolition of suffering as the highest good. The Christian is not anti-medicine, anti-technology, or pro-misery. We bandage wounds, build hospitals, develop antibiotics, and pray for healing. We are commanded to relieve suffering where we can; love of neighbor demands no less. But we dare not make painlessness our god.

When transhumanism promises to edit out every frailty, it also threatens to edit out the very conditions in which we learn patience, compassion, dependence, and courage. When a therapeutic spirituality treats suffering as an illusion to be transcended rather than a reality to be borne, it edges back toward Gnostic contempt for the body and the created world. The Christian story says something more profound: We are called neither to worship suffering nor to flee it at any cost, but to follow Christ through it. We do not suffer as Stoics, gritting our teeth to prove our strength. We do not suffer as escapists, pretending that pain is unreal, awaiting for an exit or rapture to heaven. We suffer as children who know that their Father is both sovereign and good, even when His purposes are obscure. "Not only that," writes Paul, "but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Romans 5:3-4 ESV). That is not masochism, and it isn't a philosophy that puffs up our own chests in the wake of hardship. It is an overwhelming trust that the Ruler of the stars, the King of the galaxies, the Ruler of our sins, the Good Shepherd who guards His sheep, and a Faithful Father is also in control of our lives—albeit at times that might not be fully comfortable.

MAN IS THE ONE WHO CRIES "THERE IS NO KING BUT CHRIST"

Genesius was, in one sense, an unlikely theologian: an actor in a satire, a cultural insider paid to perform contempt. Yet when he broke the script and confessed Christ in front of the emperor, he answered the question "What is man?" more deeply than the philosophers of his day. Man, in the Christian vision, is not merely a bundle of nerves seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. He is not merely a potential upload waiting for a cleaner platform. He is a worshiping creature whose deepest dignity lies not in his ability to feel less, but in his willingness to entrust even his suffering to a crucified and risen King.

We are, at our truest, those who can say with Job, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him" (Job 13:15 ESV); with Paul, "I am well content with weaknesses, insults, hardships… for Christ's sake" (2 Corinthians 12:10 ESV); with the Lord Himself, "Not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42 ESV).

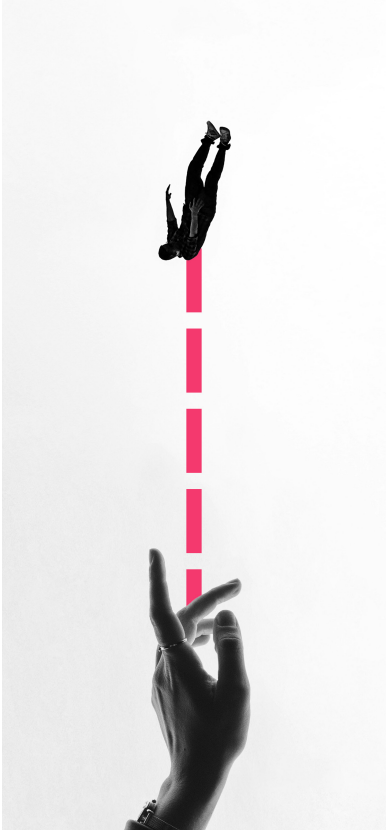
To be a Christian—and, in a very real sense, to be fully human—is to recognize that our tears are not meaningless, that our scars are not wasted, that our frailty is not an embarrassment to be hidden from God, but the very place where His glory often burns brightest.

The world around us will keep designing new ways to numb pain, to outrun age, to paper over the old question of why we suffer at all. The church's strange, stubborn answer will remain: The Lord made man, and He has ordained that even evil and anguish are woven into a larger good—His glory and our joy in Him. So we take our place with a martyred actor, with jailed apostles, with weary saints, and confess: there is no king but Christ. We still pray for healing. We still build hospitals. But we no longer believe that avoiding suffering is the meaning of life.

To be a bird gives no reason for the evils of poaching. For the machine, there is no sadness in the death of a motherboard. The uniqueness of man is not just the dirt that made our physical composition nor the chemical and neurological perception of this created and painful reality. We are men because of the Creator we were mirrored after—the God who felt the pain of His dying Son, turned away as Jesus bore our sins, and rejoiced when we heard, "It is finished" (John 19:30 ESV).

Genesius' story reminds me also of the story of another suffering artist, Horatio Spafford. After losing his four daughters in a shipwreck while his wife alone survived, he sailed to meet her and, passing near the place where their ship had sunk, penned the words: "When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul." His hymn was not born out of denial, but out of the defiant peace of a man who knew that even in the deepest pain, God remained good. It is the steadiness of a man who believed God would one day set the world right—through the same power that raised His only Son from the dead. No matter how advanced a computer's neural networks become or how much data we train the machines that would house our minds, what makes us man is the spirit Spafford embodied, a spirit of worship amidst irrational tragedy.

The story of man is no mere theatrical rendition. It isn't a play hosted for the amusement of a cruel and apathetic emperor in the sky. Man is different because it is only us that receive not just the weight but also the product of the Lord's grace. We do not only gaze at a crucified King; we follow a risen one—and that is why suffering can be faced without worshiping it, and endured without pretending it is ultimate. So when the curtains finally fall, our sonship in Christ is what allows us to rejoice in the suffering, to unreservedly sing "It is well with our souls." ❖



Gabriel is a Junior studying computer science with a concentration in machine learning and computer systems, but he loves to write, not just about AI research, but the love he's seen from the Lord. Gabriel is a ML researcher in SAIL and is an avid cooker, movie streamer, and IM soccer/football player. He is a member at Redeemer Bible Fellowship in Mountain View and is an active member and leader in Christian Union and Veritas.