

Neighborly Apologetics

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The Problem of Evil & Suffering, Part 1

A Neighborly Apologetics Perspective

(Thumbnail Sketch from Del Tackett's Webinar, [February 7, 2023](#))

In a world marked by profound pain—natural disasters, personal tragedies, moral atrocities—the question of evil and suffering stands as one of the most persistent challenges to faith. Why does a good, all-powerful God allow such horror? For many, this is not an abstract philosophical puzzle but a deeply personal wound that has driven loved ones away from God or hardened hearts against Him. In his February 2023 Neighborly Apologetics webinar, Dr. Del Tackett addresses this issue not as an academic debate to be won, but as a relational opportunity for ordinary Christians to engage neighbors with empathy, truth, and hope.

Tackett begins by framing the entire series within the “royal law” of Scripture: love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:39; Galatians 5:14). True agape love, he explains, is not sentimental emotion but “steadfast sacrificial zeal that seeks the true good, the shalom of another.” Neighbors are not random; they are providentially placed by God. The Engagement Project vision he promotes sees ordinary Christian families as entrusted with the primary work of the kingdom: building deep, patient relationships in their local “Jerusalem,” acting with grace, wisdom, and winsomeness to tear down walls and bear kingdom fruit.

Neighborly apologetics flows naturally from these relationships. When neighbors ask about the hope within believers, Christians must be “prepared to make a defense” (apologia) with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). Speech should be gracious, seasoned with salt, tailored to each person (Colossians 4:5–6). Tackett confesses that much of his earlier Christian life lacked this grace—agenda-driven rather than wisdom-driven. Godly wisdom, like Solomon's request, exists primarily to bless others, enabling believers to love neighbors properly.

Discernment is essential. Tackett's repeated graph illustrates two broad categories: believers and non-believers. Among non-believers, some are open to spiritual discussion while others are firmly closed. Among professing believers, many lack a robust biblical worldview due to deficiencies in modern church teaching. For those with shallow or distorted views, he recommends The Truth Project to build foundations, followed by Engagement materials. Engagement must occur in patient, agenda-free relationships, as illustrated by Rosaria Butterfield's testimony: 500 meals with Ken and Floy Smith before truth-sharing deepened, because Ken shared only as deeply as the relationship could bear.

Academic apologetics—rigorous defenses from Augustine onward—provides essential intellectual groundwork, but neighborly apologetics cannot lead with arguments. In today's culture, relationships must precede questions; believers prepare to answer when curiosity arises.

Tackett lists 13+ topics for the series, starting with evil and suffering. He identifies three forms of the problem:

1. The **logical argument** (Epicurus, ~300 B.C.): If God is omnipotent/omniscient, He could prevent evil; if good/benevolent, He would. Evil exists, so God cannot be both—or does not exist. Tackett doubts neighbors will present this formal version.
2. The **evidential argument**: Pervasive horrific evil (war, disease, poverty, torture) and apparent divine inaction make belief in a caring God difficult. Comedian George Carlin's routine captures this: "If this is the best God can do, I'm not impressed."
3. The **personal argument**—most common and painful: "Where was God when my husband died of cancer despite my prayers?" Bitterness, anger, and rejection follow. Tackett notes many he has known walked away from faith over such experiences.

Engaging someone like "Mrs. Smith"—a bitter widow across the street—requires preparation. Families must first solidify their own biblical understanding before offering comfort. Tackett offers a thumbnail sketch of three truth claims sufficient for believers:

1. **We live in a fallen world; humanity has a fallen nature.** Natural evil (tsunamis, earthquakes, aging, dementia) and moral evil (atrocities like recent Memphis crimes) stem from the fall. Creation itself groans, subjected to frustration, awaiting liberation (Romans 8). The entire cosmos pulls toward decay and death.
2. **God is who He says He is.** Evil distorts perceptions, portraying God as oppressive (as the serpent implied in Eden). Yet Scripture reveals Him as righteous and holy (providing the standard for evil), just (ensuring no evil escapes accountability), merciful, compassionate, loving, always good, and immutable—never capricious. Christ displays this compassion supremely. Job 42 humbles questioners: God's plans cannot be thwarted; human understanding is limited.
3. **Hope awaits in restoration.** God will restore all things, ending evil forever and executing perfect justice. Believers rejoice in sufferings because they produce endurance, character, and hope—God's love poured out through the Spirit (Romans 5:1–5).

From these flow simple answers to core questions:

- **What is evil?** Anything contrary to God's design and order—even seemingly minor rebellion unleashes cosmic consequences.
- **Where does evil come from?** Rebellion against God's design, originating in Adam and Eve's sin.
- **What is the solution?** Christ's atonement addresses sin; God's justice and final restoration eliminate evil and suffering.

Intellectually, Tackett insists, the problem is "easy" for a biblical worldview. Emotionally, it remains agonizing—but God's truth provides footing.

The difficulty intensifies outside theism. In naturalism (e.g., William Provine's view), no ultimate ethical foundation exists. Humans are material machines responding to stimuli; all actions are amoral natural processes. Evolution celebrates the strong destroying the weak. Evil becomes pragmatically defined—killing babies might be "good" for self-actualization or resource reasons, or

“bad” for future support. No absolute standard remains.

Contemporary Western culture compounds this through “homo deus”: autonomous individuals claim divine authority to define good and evil (e.g., self-declared identity as unquestionable proclamation). “Might makes right” prevails via votes, courts, or majorities. Evil shifts from personal sin to systemic/institutional causes—media avoids mentioning personal moral failing in atrocities, blaming structures instead. Solutions emphasize institutional reform or canceling those upholding biblical ethics, now labeled systemic oppressors. Following one’s heart becomes the antidote to evil; denying self is vilified.

Tackett concludes that the problem of evil plagues non-theistic worldviews far more than biblical ones. Believers fight not flesh and blood but spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12–13), standing firm in God’s armor. Engagement requires prayerful, empathetic relationships—asking questions, weeping with those who weep, building trust so hearts may soften and worldviews falter under their own inconsistencies, as Rosaria Butterfield’s did.

Ordinary families, through diligent prayer and winsome love, can turn worlds upside down. The webinar closes with announcements (recordings, slides, Engagement Project links) and an invitation to share personal stories for prayer and possible future examples. Tackett’s final prayer acknowledges God’s mercy amid suffering, trusting future restoration, and asks for opportunities to speak truth and hope to hurting neighbors—all for God’s glory.

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Neighborly Apologetics:

The Problem of Evil and Suffering, Part 1

A Neighborly Approach

(Insights from Del Tackett's [February 7, 2023](#) Webinar)

Evil and suffering confront every generation with a piercing question: If God is all-powerful and good, why does such pain exist? In his Neighborly Apologetics webinar, Dr. Del Tackett argues that, while emotionally devastating, the problem is not ultimately a logical barrier for a biblical worldview. Instead, it becomes an opportunity for ordinary Christians to engage hurting neighbors with empathy, truth, and hope.

Tackett roots his approach in the “royal law” to love one’s neighbor (Matthew 22:39). True love is “steadfast sacrificial zeal” seeking another’s shalom. Neighbors are providentially placed; God entrusts families with kingdom work through patient, grace-filled relationships. Apologetics here is not debate but defense offered gently when questions arise (1 Peter 3:15), with speech seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6). Wisdom discerns: believers and non-believers, open and closed hearts, strong and shallow worldviews require different approaches. Academic arguments provide foundation, but neighborly engagement must lead with relationship, as Rosaria Butterfield’s 500-meal journey illustrates.

Tackett identifies three forms of the problem: the logical argument (Epicurus), the evidential (pervasive horror suggesting divine indifference), and—most common—the personal (“Where was God when my loved one suffered?”). For believers, three biblical truths suffice: We live in a fallen world where creation groans (Romans 8); God remains righteous, just, loving, and unchanging; and ultimate hope rests in Christ’s atonement and the promised restoration of all things.

In contrast, non-theistic worldviews struggle profoundly. Naturalism offers no basis for objective evil—actions are amoral processes. Modern culture shifts blame to “systemic” forces while redefining good through autonomous self-declaration (“homo deus”). Solutions focus on institutional reform or silencing biblical ethics, never personal repentance.

Tackett closes with Ephesians 6: the battle is spiritual, waged through prayerful, empathetic relationships. Ordinary families, loving faithfully, can open doors for truth and hope to heal wounded hearts—all for God’s glory.

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