

The Sacred Chain: Conclusion

Near the end of the manuscript, Stump turned to an acquaintance, Cortland Dahl, about how to pray for others. Dahl is a Buddhist with a PhD in Psychology.

Stump doesn't want peoples' lives to be hard, but he does want them to be meaningful. Should he pray that they have just the right amount of suffering?

"Summing up a great deal of research, I think we could safely say that being concerned about, and willing to help alleviate, the suffering of others is one of the most meaningful things we can do. Science and the world's wisdom traditions seem to largely agree on that point."

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"Of course that is right. We should not seek out suffering (perhaps with the exception of camping!). Even Jesus prayed that the "cup" of suffering would pass from him. And we shouldn't pray that our loved ones find meaningful lives by suffering. Instead, let's pray that they find meaningful lives by alleviating the suffering of others."

Some degree of suffering appears to be good for us, but we don't want it and shouldn't seek it out.

And those of us who are Christians believe that a future is coming in which there will be no more suffering.

Really? No more suffering?

What does science have to say about that?

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Stump's recap: God intentionally created us to be image bearers, but not even God can create morally mature people without their cooperation in the process (the challenge of pain).

God didn't create things originally the way they were ultimately intended to be (the challenge of species).

God's image bearers now have a special duty to care for this groaning creation until God acts again to bring about the eternal Kingdom of Heaven (the challenge of pain).

Allowing evolution to be a dialogue partner has led Stump to a deeper faith. "I've found that science and faith together can tell a coherent and reasonable story about our past, present, and future. That gives me hope that the story could really be true."

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Let's look at Stump's views on major theological questions.

What is the role of God?

What is the role of scripture?

What is the role of Jesus?

What will the end times be like?

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