

Jessica (Claire Briggs)

Beth (Kylie Gannon)

Karen (Ariel Birkholz)

Getting Lit With Religion

Jessica enters Beth's home

Beth: How are you holding up since the fire?

Jessica: I am doing okay. Everything is just more difficult now that my family is not here with me anymore. Must be nice to have one of these big houses, I remember when I had one. I hope that one day I will start feeling better.

Karen enters.

Beth: It's all right, honey. Everything happens for a reason.

Jessica: Now my kids are dead, my dog is dead, and my house is dead.

Beth: Uh, I think you mean your house is *gone*.

Jessica: **cries**

Karen, Jessica, and Beth sit on a couch in the living room

Karen: Beth, you can't justify the death of her entire family and the loss of all of her possessions by saying that everything happens for a reason. Are you saying there is a reason to all these pointless evils?

Beth: Yeah, obviously. There's no such *thing* as pointless evils. God is great.

Jessica: Are you saying that there was reasoning behind all of these horrible things happening to my family and I? I, like you, used to have faith that God is all good, all-knowing, and powerful, but after everything that has occurred over the past few weeks, I truly do not think that God is all that great.

Karen: Exactly! There are so many reasons you would have to not believe in God. Think of all the deaths caused by fires - almost four thousand people per year, all the possessions and multiple tens of billions of dollars lost¹ by these families because of your “*Great God*”.

Beth: How could you say that!? According to Genesis, “The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time.”²

Jessica: Beth, that doesn’t even make sense...

Beth: Let me finish. If everyone is evil, then don’t we all deserve to die? God is allowing us the privilege to live if we are all evil. God has ended the evil of your family and they are at peace.

Karen: That is the most outlandish theory I have ever heard. Give me one reason why I should be able to see this as an action of God doing what is good for us and that everyone is automatically evil?

Beth: In Exodus, it says, “He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”³ All future generations were cursed by the fall of Adam and Eve.

Jessica: It may say that but in Acts 2:38, Peter said “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”⁴

¹ “U.S. Fire Statistics.” U.S. Fire Administration, November 5, 2020.
<https://www.usfa.fema.gov/data/statistics/>.

² “Bible Gateway Passage: Genesis 6:4-6 - New International Version.”
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+6%3A4-6>.

³ “Bible Gateway Passage: Exodus 34:7 - New International Version.” Bible Gateway.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+34%3A7>.

⁴ “Bible Gateway Passage: Acts 2:37-39 - New International Version.” Bible Gateway.
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+2%3A37-39>.

Beth: How does that relate?

Jessica: It mentions sins and the forgiveness of the evil you say that everyone has. Is that not what you were referring to before? The verse refers to the idea that God will forgive us for our sins, which I feel does not permit God to induce suffering on myself and my family if we were actually forgiven.

Karen: There is nothing for a God to forgive. God doesn't exist, sins exist from the choices we make for ourselves. Forgiveness is a personal problem, not something that is in relation with God.

Beth: How do you know her family didn't sin, even if it's a personal problem like you say?

Karen: I'm not saying that her family never sinned, I'm just saying that evil doesn't automatically befall a person due to some unforeseen ancestral history and that because of this, everyone is evil and deserves to die.

Beth: Just because we can't see the reasons or can't understand the reasons doesn't mean they don't exist. Everything happens for a reason and we are not God, so it is impossible for us to understand His reasoning.

Jessica: Can't you understand that that does not make anything better? That still does not justify the suffering of my family and the heartbreak that I will never overcome. Why can't you just shut up?

Beth: Shutting up is not in my nature.

Jessica: This great God you refer to should never have done this to my family. How am I supposed to believe that He is so amazing when all of these things have happened to me?

Karen: That's what I've been saying this whole conversation. God can't exist because of all these pointless evils that happen on earth.

Beth: Jessica, you and I have been going to church together for *years*. You shouldn't let this one little thing get in the way of your faithfulness to the God you and I both believe in.

Jessica: One *little* thing, Beth?! My family is dead. This *little* thing has forever changed my outlook on God. I may still believe in Him but I surely cannot believe that He is as good as people say. I definitely cannot worship him anymore, do not expect me to be in church with you this Sunday or ever again.

Beth: Wow, Jessica. That hurts. Don't worry, I'm praying for you.

Karen: Praying is not going to do anything. What are you praying to? The God that killed her family? That *perfectly good* God? The one that only wants the best for all of His creations and yet allowed for all of these evils in the world. Better yet, not only allowed for these evils, but created them?

Beth: God didn't create evil, He just made do with the product of the Fall.

Karen: But isn't God supposed to be omniscient? If He was, then He should've known about the Fall and prevented it.

Beth: In an ideal world, the Fall never would've happened. Yes, God knew it could happen and was coming, but God would not take away the free will of Adam and Eve. God could not have stopped evil without taking away their free will, which is too important to lose.⁵

Jessica: Who's to say that we have free will in the first place?

Beth: Who's to say that we don't?

Jessica: Even if we have free will, why should we assume that most people desire to have it if it means suffering in the end?

⁵ Beebe, James R. "Logical Problem of Evil." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Accessed November 20, 2020. <https://iep.utm.edu/evil-log/>.

Karen: What would life be for someone if it meant that every action we take was orchestrated by a higher power? What is the point of living? The way I see it, it is better to have free will and suffering together in the same world than believe there is someone out there that is controlling our strings.

Beth: Why wouldn't someone want free will? Didn't our country fight for the right to do what we want? Our founding fathers fought so we could say what we want, when we want. Our whole country is based on liberty, or being free within society. If rights are infringed, people riot.

Everyone wants free will.

Jessica: What are you going on about? Karen and I are referring to the freedoms we are given to us by God, not by the founding fathers....

Karen: I'm not arguing for freedoms given by God as I don't believe your God exists. Every person has free will, and chooses to do with that free will what they want, and this is where evil and good come from. Although you might see this as wrong, I don't believe so.

Beth: Um, the founding fathers defended rights that they believed were given to us by God. The Declaration of Independence literally said, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."⁶

Jessica: Even so, I don't understand how your argument relates to anything, Beth. I understand what Karen is saying about how good and evil result from our use of free will, but don't both of you think that life could be better if there was no suffering? How do we even know that we have free will right now?

⁶ "Declaration of Independence: A Transcription." National Archives and Records Administration. National Archives and Records Administration. <https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript>.

Beth: I was *trying* to use a non-religious comparison for the sake of Karen. And it *does* make sense: you're just stubborn. Suffering is for the ultimate good of everyone.

Jessica: Suffering is for the ultimate good of *everyone*? My family is dead, Beth. The suffering that God permits is obviously not good for everyone.

Beth: I said *ultimate* for a reason, Jessica. It happened too recently for you to see the potential good of it.

Jessica: The potential good?!

Beth: Let me finish, please. As I was *saying*, suffering helps you become a better person. God made it that way once the Fall happened because he had to do something with all that evil so that way *some* good could come out of it. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, Jessica. They might be dead, but you're not.

Jessica: I wish I was. I can't bear to live in this world of suffering any longer.

Karen: I know the pain is really fresh right now, so it seems as if your world will never be right again. C. S. Lewis said, "How often -- will it be for always? -- how often will the vast emptiness astonish me like a complete novelty and make me say, 'I never realized my loss till this moment?'" The same leg is cut off time after time. The first plunge of the knife into the flesh is felt again and again"⁷ It may feel like the pain from loss is getting better, and then something comes to remind you of it, and it all comes back like it just happened. I promise you it will get better.

Beth: They wouldn't want you to die.

Jessica: Shut. Up. Beth.

Karen: Okay... changing topics, Beth, going back on your point of God supposedly not creating evil but making do with the product of the Fall, so what you're basically saying is that all the

⁷ Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: Seabury Press, 1980, p. 56-57.

evils in the world are a result of the one mistake made by Adam and Eve. And for you, that includes pointless evils?

Beth: Do pointless evils even exist? We don't have any way of knowing the reasoning behind God's actions so we don't know why things are done. There could be reasons for things that you would call "pointless."

Jessica: How can you justify my children dying?

Beth: I said it earlier, suffering helps you become a better person. But God could have a thousand other reasons. I'm not God, I have no way of knowing His reasoning.

Karen: Exactly, there *is* no way of knowing. There seem to be many instances of suffering and evil where there is no visible reason or greater good evident. Give me examples where greater good comes out of allowing these evils.

Beth: But how can I know? I am a human, and God is God. I don't claim to have any divine understanding. The existence of evil doesn't diminish the supremeness of God just because humans are incapable of understanding it.

Karen: So if you were given an instance of evil, of pointless suffering, where one of Jessica's own children, 6 months old, not having committed a single sin, had burned alive in that house for however long it took for him to die. There was no one to help the child or ease his suffering, he was just left alone to burn. What kind of greater good can come out of this?

Beth: I am not God.

Jessica: Well, obviously...

Beth: I wasn't finished! As I was saying, I believe there does exist an all-powerful, all-knowing, and good God. Such a God would prevent any intense suffering He could, unless He could not do so without losing some greater good or allowing some evil equally bad or worse. There exists

instances of suffering which an all-powerful, all-knowing being couldn't have stopped without losing some greater good or allowing some evil as bad or worse.⁸

Jessica: I still do not think there is any justification for what occurred to my family and me. How is it that you are so confident that God is so good? Has nothing bad ever happened to you to make you believe otherwise? Can't you understand how I'm feeling?

Karen: I know how you are feeling right now, Jessica, the pain of losing someone you love. I've gone through the same thing before. And because of that, I can tell you with certainty that it does get better with time. Just because I may not believe there is any justification from God for why I have felt suffering and grief, that does not mean that I feel it any differently than those that do and that my experience may be different than yours.

Jessica: Thank you. Even if all of the suffering that my family and I went through was completely justifiable in the eyes of God how is it possible that all of the suffering in the world can be justified in the same way?

Karen: So are you trying to say that my suffering could somehow mean less than yours? That's not something I can believe.

Jessica: Not at all, I actually think that a lot of the suffering that occurs in the world has no real purpose, and even if some suffering has a purpose how can all of it be justified?

Karen: I totally agree with you on that, then. That makes a lot more sense. If God is supposed to have the ultimate good of all humanity in mind, how could suffering like this be allowed? How are all of these evils permitted?

Beth: I am not God. I can't claim to know his reasoning. Stop throwing the same argument at me and expecting a different answer. We shouldn't try to know the reasonings behind God's actions, anyways. God is superior and far better than all of us.

⁸ Rowe, William L. "The Problem of Evil and Some Varieties of Atheism," October 1979.

Jessica: Yeah of course, the superior God that allowed my children to die is *totally* better than me.

Beth: God doesn't really want your kids dead; he doesn't cause evil. Evil is the product of the Fall and human free will. He allows free will because it is great. Having free will is better than the alternative.

Karen: And what is this *alternative*?

Beth: Um, someone or something else making all of your choices for you? In such a world, Jessica may never have even *had* a family to love. I'm sure she'd say it's better to have had them for a short time than to not have them at all.

Jessica: I'm sorry, *what*? It still does not change the fact that my life is ruined. You can't argue against that.

Beth: Didn't someone say, "It's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?"⁹ It's a pretty famous quote, and if it's famous then it must ring true to at least *some* people.

Karen: And do you have any personal experiences with evil or suffering, *Beth*?

Beth: My dog died when I was seven.

Karen: Yeah, and I'm sure the death of a dog that you probably barely even remember compares to the death of Jessica's entire family only a few weeks ago. Don't speak about this problem like you have any idea what Jessica is going through, you haven't experienced it.

Beth: I don't claim to know the same feeling *personally*, obviously. I'm not an idiot. I can distinguish the difference between an animal and a human. Even if I did really love that dog. Poor Fluffy. But I have been doing some reading. I'd be a terrible friend if I didn't try and familiarize myself with what Jessica is going through.

⁹ Martin, Gary. "Better to Have Loved and Lost than Never to Have Loved at All' - the Meaning and Origin of This Phrase." <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/its-better-to-have-loved-and-lost-than-never-to-have-loved-at-all.html>.

Karen: But unless you have had a personal experience, you wouldn't truly understand the dissonance that happens within Jessica between her belief that God exists and her recent inability to worship him. Even I don't truly understand what she is going through. That is a problem only people like Jessica would go through, not people with beliefs like mine, beliefs that there is no God or being like Him. And you never know, you could experience this same problem down the road, you never know the suffering that may happen to you and how that would affect your beliefs.

Jessica: The suffering that I feel simply cannot be felt by another person, your willingness to try to understand my pain is amazing, Beth. However, there is no way that you will ever be able to truly understand my pain so please do not try to justify why I should feel any different than I do now. Even C.S. Lewis himself said that "You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you."¹⁰ It was easy for me to believe in God when everything in my life was fine and I was happy, but everything is so different now.

Beth: I disagree. God still loves you and you will come back to your faith eventually. C. S. Lewis did.

Karen: You saying that isn't going to change our point of views, Beth. I still don't believe in God, and Jessica still can't bring herself to worship Him, so I don't see why you keep trying to beat the dead horse. Just give it up.

Beth: You'll understand eventually. I'm praying for you both.

Karen: Do let me know the outcome of that. I'll be interested to see what comes of it.

Jessica: Same here, you praying to a God I don't believe is good on my behalf is not flattering. We'll have to agree to disagree on this one.

¹⁰ Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. New York: Seabury Press, 1980, p. 22-23.

Beth: Fine. Cookies, anyone?

End scene