



EXPLORE GOD | Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering? | Week 3 February 3, 2019

Gen 1:26-31, Gen 3, Ps 34:18, Ps 42, 2Cor 13:4, Jn 16:33

Opening: Over these weeks we are exploring some deep questions of faith. This week, we look at a universally troubling question. Why does God allow pain and suffering? Of course, implicit in this question is the challenge we addressed last week. “If there is a God” we might add to the front of the question. Is there someone or something to blame for pain and suffering? If so, who or what is it?

Context: Today we go further inside one of last week’s “philosopher’s dilemmas”, that of the transcendent ethicist. This week’s question derives from an ethical opinion that some things that happen are “not right.” Pain and suffering, we sense, are in contrast to what should be. *How do you define pain and suffering? Do you ask the question “Why does this happen?” Where does that lead you?*

God’s Story: Last September we talked about God’s story on planet Earth. We can come back to that today. 1) We were created in God’s image (Gen. 1:26-31). 2) We used our free will and sinned and creation fell (Gen 3). The rest of scripture is the story of 3) God’s redemption of our lives from the consequences of free will and 4) the restoration of God’s kingdom. *What does this have to do with pain and suffering? How do the character traits of God we talked about last week (personal, holy, compassionate, delivering) speak to God’s view of pain and suffering?*

There is Undeniable Pain in the World: Today’s information age confronts us ceaselessly with examples of extreme pain and prolonged suffering among people and in places we used to be blissfully ignorant of. *How do you respond to this onslaught? What do you feel? What defenses pop-up in you?*

None can be excluded: Pastor Lisa Capozzoli stated “Living a normal life expectancy, all of us will experience some sort of loss, some sort of suffering on this planet.” So that might suggest we ask some different questions. *How do you respond to personal pain and suffering? Do you blame someone else for your circumstances? Do you blame God?* Psychologists suggest we learn from painful outcomes and they change our future behavior. Has any instance of “pain and suffering” changed your subsequent behavior?

What we really don’t like: We would never choose Pain and Suffering over Command and Control. Human nature likes to be on top of life, in control—no help needed! C. S. Lewis once wrote, “Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” *Can you look back on an experience of grief and pain where God changed you? How were you changed?*



Broken Hearted, Crushed in Spirit: Read Ps 34:18. God does not cause pain and suffering but He responds to the results. *What has suffering done to your spirit? How did God respond? Did it change you?*

Aware of our Need, Seeking the Resource: Read Ps. 42.

The image in **vs.1-4** is that of a thirsty, frightened deer seeking life giving water. *What is the deer's thirst compared to? It is a _____ seeking _____.*

vs.5 *What do you say when you talk to your soul? What would this be in our language today?*

vs.6-8 *are a history lesson. What does the Psalmist remember? Has he suffered before? Did God respond?*

vs.9-11 *C'mon God my Rock....my suffering taunts me all day long. "Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him". How do you move from suffering to hope? What is your resource? Can you share a time this you were able to do this?*

Strength from Weakness: Read 2 Cor.13:4. Paul is defending his ministry with the Corinthians but he is also explaining the source of the believer's strength. *How do you apply this idea of weakness to your life? What does it mean to be "weak in Him"? Talk about your understanding of that expression.*

Practice of the Week: Meditate on the Good Shepherd (again)

"In this world you will have trouble" Jn. 16:33. Continue Ps 23 this week over your first cup of coffee. Keep learning to pull up the meaning without the Bible in front of you. Meditate on the Good Shepherd who is with you in the valley of death, in relationship with you and is your strength. What might be dying in you right now? Is that good or bad?

Family Formation: "I skinned my knee"!

What can we pray about? We can all relate to the pain and suffering of a skinned knee. It hurts, we cry and we take care of it with soap and band aids. Then it heals. Did crying heal the knee? No, it just made us feel better. Did soap and band aids heal the knee? No, it just protected it from infection. What healed the knee? The way God designed the body—His healing process is what worked. See if you can make this a metaphor for something in your child's relational life or some kind of "pain and suffering" they might be experiencing. The key is to get them to see there may be things they should do but they can ask God to heal the problem.

Additional Resources: *The Problem of Pain* by C.S. Lewis

We'd love to hear from you!

If you have thoughts questions, comments, ideas on how to make these study guides more meaningful for you and your group, please let us know.

We also enjoy hearing how God is using these scriptures and study guides in your lives.

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