

WONDER

Week 6 - If God is Good, Why Is There Evil?

"Jesus doesn't give an explanation for the pain and sorrow of the world. He comes where the pain is most acute and takes it upon himself. Jesus doesn't explain why there is suffering, illness, and death in the world. He brings healing and hope. He doesn't allow the problem of evil to be the subject of a seminar. He allows evil to do its worst to him. He exhausts it, drains its power, and emerges with new life." ~ N. T. Wright

THE MAIN POINT

One of the most difficult challenges many people face when it comes to faith in Christ is the question of the problem of evil. Our students are not exempt. Many who hear the gospel wonder why a God who loves them would allow them to endure things like abandonment, abuse, disease, and death. This small group will challenge students to look at this problem and see Jesus at work putting it right rather than a quiet, uncaring, brutal universe.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- None

GETTING STARTED

Welcome everyone and ask how they're doing. Remind the students about the rules for small group and ask if everyone can agree to them:

RULES FOR SMALL GROUP:

Commitment - Commit to being at every group meeting (make it a priority!)

Confidentiality - What is shared here stays here.

Be honest or be silent - don't make up an answer just to have one. Sometimes the most honest answer is no answer, so if you need to, just say pass.

Respect - for one another, their thoughts/ideas/opinions (no put downs).

We've been looking at some really tough questions over the last few weeks! Tonight is no exception. But first, let's have some fun!

ACTIVITY

This or That

Ok, so this one is really simple but it might start some arguments! I'm going to give you a choice between two items and point to one side of the room for each one. If you like one better than the other, you need to get up and move to that side of the room. Be ready to argue your case!

(For each of these, call on one of the young people from each side to make their case.)

iPhone or Android?

Xbox One or PlayStation 4?

LeBron James or Michael Jordan?

Coke or Pepsi?

SpongeBob or Patrick?

Mario or Luigi?

Batman or Superman?

Doritos or Cheetos?

Pepperoni Pizza or Sausage Pizza?

Cats or Dogs?

Rain or Snow?

Is it pronounced like "gif" or "jiff?"

GOING DEEPER

Discuss:

- What's one example of a funny/dumb decision or mistake you've made?
- Tell us about a time you've faced a difficult choice in your life? Did you make the right or wrong choice?

One of the toughest questions we get asked about faith in God is this: Why does a loving God allow us to go through so much pain? Why does evil exist at all? We aren't the first ones to ask it either. In fact, the Bible is full of examples of people asking the same question. One person named David once wrote, *"Oh God, how long will you forget me? Forever? How long will you look the other way? How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul, with sorrow in my heart every day? How long will my enemy have the upper hand?" (Psalm 13:1-2 NLT)* This is in the Bible! As you can see, you're not the first one to question God on these things.

- Have you ever had that same question for God? Have you ever felt forgotten by God or that he doesn't care about the hard things you go through? Talk about it.
- Why do you think God allows us to go through hard times?
- What are some of the hard times that you personally have faced? *As the group leader, set the tone by sharing a struggle that you've faced. If you are authentic, they are more likely to follow.*

These things are really difficult for me to hear. It's also difficult for me to share some of the things I've been through as well. From my faith perspective, I also have to admit there are no easy answers. This is one of the toughest rawest questions we could ask. The cool thing is, God is perfectly ok with us asking it. Earlier we had you make some tough choices between two options. When we look at the problem of why bad things are allowed to happen we also have two choices. On the one hand, you can believe that there is no God and things happen because the universe is uncaring and random. There is no purpose. But as we discussed a few weeks ago, that's a really difficult position to hold. The other option is that there is a God and there is hope to see things set right one day. I have personally chosen hope.

- What do you think?

The truth is that evil we see in the world is the result of choices—not the kind of choices we made earlier between iPhones and Android or between Coke and Pepsi. They are choices between the right things and the wrong things. Unfortunately, a lot of the hard times we’ve faced are a result of the wrong choices of others. Someone hurt you, a mistake was made in your parents’ marriage and it resulted in a divorce, someone in leadership made a poor choice that hurt you or your family. If we’re honest, some of the pain we’ve experienced is the result of our own wrong choices as well. It is these wrong choices, called sin, that grieve God and make our world much more difficult than He intended. Wrong choices/sin leave this world and people in destruction. Sin keeps us trapped in that cycle of destruction. However, if God didn’t allow people to make a choice between right and wrong or between His way and the wrong way, we wouldn’t be human. A loving relationship between us and God wouldn’t be possible if it were forced. The choice to follow Jesus brings freedom, joy, and allows us to become the kind of people He made us to be.

- How have wrong choices caused pain in your life?
- If people know what right choices are, why do we continue to walk down the wrong path?

It’s also true that there’s some pain we experience that just doesn’t make sense such as a family member dying in a car accident or from an illness. There are moments of difficulty that frankly just make no sense. These are the times when we can’t help but ask God “Why?” and maybe even feel forgotten like David. There aren’t simple answers to this question. However, there are some things that we can know.

TAKE AWAY

(For each of these, allow students to ask questions or process through them aloud. Remember that this is a small group not a teaching session.)

1. If God is the all-powerful Creator of the Universe, then there will also be things that we simply don’t understand. *“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “and my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.” (Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT)* In other words, when things happen in our world that just seem to not make sense, there’s more going on than we will ever realize. We can still trust that God is good because *“we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who*

love God and are called according to his purpose for them.” (Romans 8:28 NLT)

2. God knows and cares about your struggles. The Bible says *“Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7 NLT)*. In other words, when we’re struggling, we don’t have to carry it alone. Even though something really hard is also not easy to understand, we’re not left alone. God knows, He hears, and He cares.
3. God has experienced and understands the same struggles we face. As we said in a previous group night, God became a man and lived a human life. He experienced very real pain, loss, temptation, betrayal and so much more. Ultimately he experienced suffering on the cross for you and me—one of the most brutal and painful ways to die that has ever been devised. He did it while also carrying the weight of the sin of the world. (For reference, Hebrews 4:15-16)
4. God is right now and will one day make everything right. In talking about the future, the Bible says, *“He will wipe every tear from their [our] eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” (Revelation 21:4 NLT)* This means not only can we experience freedom and forgiveness from sin now, but the world will be put right someday in the future. Now that’s a cool thing to look forward to!

So we’re faced with another “this or that” choice. Will we trust God when life gets hard or not? That guy David we talked about earlier ended his honest prayer like this: *“But I trust in your unfailing love. I will rejoice because you have rescued me. I will sing to the Lord because He is good to me.” (Psalm 13:5-6 NLT)*. We can place our hope in God when life is difficult because He’s repeatedly shown Himself to be good and loving.

- Will you trust Him? What do you think? What questions do you still have?

RESOURCES

“The Problem of Pain” and “A Grief Observed” by C.S. Lewis