

GROUP GUIDE

WEEK 1

Week 1: How can a loving God allow suffering?

This is the first week we're looking at Tough Questions where we're helping thinkers believe, and believers think.

Remember to start your conversation with some ground rules of respect, patience, honour and perspective. Keep perspective that in fact dealing with these questions are deeply practical for believers who are surrounded by a city who are using them as an arsenal against faith in Christ.

Why not open with a short simple prayer inviting God's presence and leadership.

FOR DISCUSSION

1. What most interested or impacted you in Sunday's message?
2. Have enough Bible's to go round. As a group read 1 Peter 1:3-11, which were written to Christians facing enormous suffering. From these verses try and draw out as many insights as you can that can comfort us in our suffering, making sense of why God allows it.
3. Read CS Lewis' quote: "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world... no doubt pain as God's megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to a final and unrepented rebellion. But it may give the only opportunity a man far from God can have for amendment. It removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul." Can anyone relate to what Lewis says? Explain.
4. Read Romans 8:28. In light of that verse, what's some of the more notable suffering you've endured? And what, if any, good has God brought out of it?
5. As a lead up to a time of prayer get someone with a good reading voice to read the imaginary story at the end of this guide.

DISCUSS IN SMALLER GROUPS (INSTRUCTIONS)

- a. Thank Christ that he truly can empathize with us in our sufferings.
- b. Spend a few minutes in personal prayer for those in the group who are currently experiencing some kind of suffering at the moment.
- c. Pray for the spiritual awakening of people you know who are far from God. Ask God to lovingly use whatever instruments is needed for the task. Be sure to make yourself available to be that instrument of awakening.

HELPFUL READING



This reading below could be a helpful thing to read in your group after you have had conversation and before you pray.

Remember to remain humble, respectful and aware that you won't have all the answers, but that you could begin the journey towards finding them.

As this document below does, do what you can to land your conversation in the sufficiency of Jesus in all his goodness to carry our questions.

"At the end of time, billions of people were seated on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly, not cringing with cringing shame - but with belligerence.

"Can God judge us? How can He know about suffering?", snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "We endured terror ... beatings ... torture ... death!"

In another group a Negro boy lowered his collar. "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. "Lynched, for no crime but being black !"

In another crowd there was a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes: "Why should I suffer?" she murmured. "It wasn't my fault. I was raped" Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering He had permitted in His world.

How lucky God was to live in Heaven, where all was sweetness and light. Where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred. What did God know of all that man had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most. A Jew, a slave, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child. In the centre of the vast plain, they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever... 'God, before you can be qualified to be our judge, you must endure what they have endured. Your sentence: to live on earth as a man. You must be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of your birth be doubted. Have a work so difficult to do that even your family will think you out of your mind.'

"You be betrayed by your closest friends. You face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. You be tortured. And at the last, feel what it means to be terribly alone. You die there drinking down the poison of injustice to it's dregs.'

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence, there was a long silence. No one uttered a word. No one moved. For suddenly, at the sight of his extended pierced hands, all knew that God had already served His sentence."