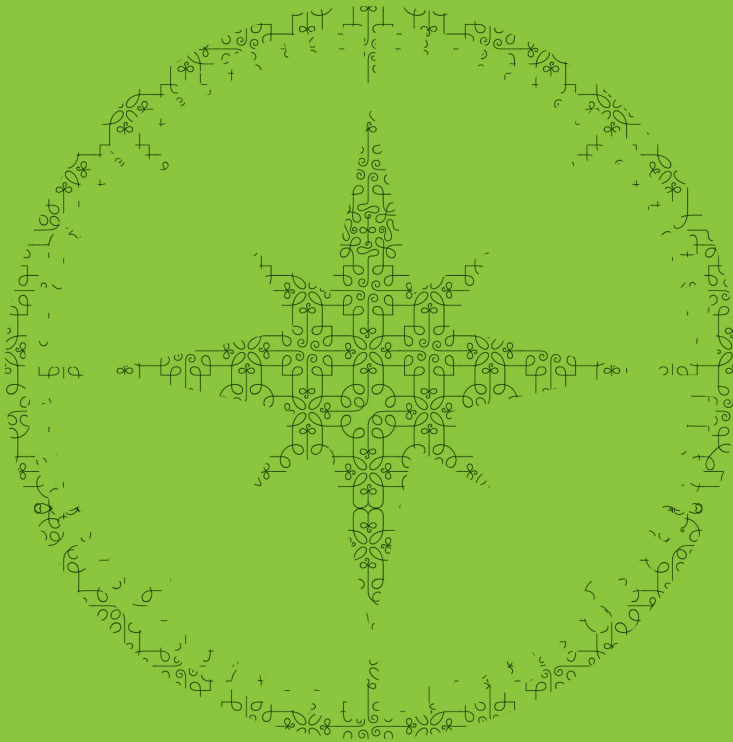


DIALOG

Searching for Answers

EXPLORING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS
ABOUT FAITH AND THE BIBLE



Facilitator's Guide

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SESSION

I

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW SUFFERING?

Focus Scriptures: Romans 8:18-30

Session Goal: To help group members understand why God allows suffering to enter our lives.

OPENING OUR MINDS

Option 1

Begin by reading Psalm 10:1 (NRSV), *Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?* Then, read it again, inviting your group to silently reflect on how the psalmist might have been feeling when he wrote these words.

- **How do you think the psalmist was feeling at the time he wrote these words?**
- **What circumstances might lead someone to feel this way?**
- **How would you respond to someone who expressed this same feeling?**

Option 2

Read the following definition of suffering: *pain that is caused by injury, illness, loss, etc.: physical, mental, or emotional pain.*¹ Then ask,

- **What are examples of physical suffering? Mental suffering? Emotional suffering?**

1. <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/suffering>> Accessed April 22, 2014.

- **What are examples of suffering caused by our own actions?**
- **What are examples of suffering caused by outside influences?**

Invite your group to silently reflect on the following question: *Why does God allow suffering to enter our life?*

Imaginative Option

Pass out slips of paper and pens/pencils to each person. Ask everyone to write a type of suffering people experience. Then, collect each slip of paper. Read each slip and ask people what thoughts and feelings a person might experience while going through that particular type of suffering.

OPENING THE WORD

Understanding Romans 8:18–30

Paul doesn't avoid the issue of suffering. In fact, this passage points out that suffering is a part of life—even for those who follow Christ. Although we may experience earthly suffering, it is nothing compared to the glory “revealed in us.” In his letter to the believers in Corinth he wrote, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all (2 Corinthians 4:17). We may encounter suffering in this world, but it is only temporal; our future glory is eternal.

Although we may experience difficulties in this life, we can rest in the truth that God is with us and that nothing we face can separate us from Him (8:21–39). Even though things like illness, hurt, and disappointment are not good, God can and does work through those things to bring about ultimate good. Despite what we are going through, we can be assured that God is working in every situation. Suffering still brings pain and sorrow, but we can trust that God will never leave us alone.

This is a powerful passage because it gives witness to a God who is at work in the world. It allows for suffering and it suggests a God who is invested in the suffering of creation.

Option 1

Read Romans 8:18–30. Then ask,

- **Do Christians experience suffering?**
- **What is the difference between suffering as a result of our faith and other types of suffering?**

Read verses 18-21.

- **What is the “glory revealed in us” that Paul is talking about?** (As Christians we are called to share in Christ’s sufferings and thereby we will share in His glory—eternal inheritance. See Romans 8:17.)
- **Why should we consider our current sufferings not worth comparing to the “glory revealed in us”?**

Read verses 22-27.

- **What does verse 22 tell us about the present world?**
- **What is our hope?**
- **In what ways does the Spirit help us? How is this related to when we experience suffering? That is, how does the Spirit help us in times of suffering?**

Read verses 27-30.

- **What does it mean that “in all things God works for the good of those who love Him”?**
- **In what ways does it help you to understand that God knows us better than anyone?**
- **What is God’s call that Paul is talking about?**

Option 2

Divide everyone into groups of three. Invite each group to read Romans 8:18-30 and discuss how this passage could help someone who is going through suffering. After sufficient time, ask each group to share their discussion.

OPENING OUR HEARTS

Option 1

Read James 1:1-25: *Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you*

should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

- **How does this verse help in our understanding of why God allows suffering to enter our lives?**
- **Although we do not intentionally seek trials and suffering, in what ways can suffering produce a stronger faith?**
- **What are the benefits of perseverance?**
- **Why is it important for believers to turn to God in times of suffering?**

Close your time together by asking your group to get silent before God. Then, invite them to think about areas in their lives where they may feel suffering and need God's presence. Spend a few moments in silent prayer, encouraging group members to seek God's Spirit.

Option 2

Share with the group that suffering is a part of life. Even as Christians we will experience suffering. Yet, despite what we might be going through, God is with us and at work in and through us. Read Habakkuk 3:17-19 from *The Message*.

*Though the cherry trees don't blossom and the strawberries don't ripen,
Though the apples are worm-eaten and the wheat fields stunted,
Though the sheep pens are sheepless and the cattle barns empty,
I'm singing joyful praise to God.
I'm turning cartwheels of joy to my Savior God.
Counting on God's Rule to prevail, I take heart and gain strength.
I run like a deer.
I feel like I'm king of the mountain!*

- **What is the message of the writer?**
- **From these verses, should we be happy about suffering or never pray for God to relieve our suffering? If not, what does it mean?**
- **How can we have the same attitude when experiencing suffering?**

Imaginative Option

Consider playing *Praise You in This Storm* by Casting Crowns as a closing to your time together. As the song is being played, invite group members to pray silently.

Connect -----

WEEK 1

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

THIS WEEK: The problem of suffering raises the most central of all theological questions. This week we will look to answer the questions of “Why does God allow suffering?” “Can I avoid it from entering my life?” and “Does God hear my prayers in the midst of my suffering?”

THINK ABOUT THIS: In what ways are you experiencing suffering in your life?

PRAYER CONCERNS:

Searching for Answers

EXPLORING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS ABOUT FAITH AND THE BIBLE

Topics in this 7-week study include:

Session 1: Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Session 2: What Should a Christian Believe About Creation?

Session 3: How Do We Reconcile the Violence of the Old Testament with
the Call to Be Peacemakers in the New Testament?

Session 4: Is the Bible Trustworthy?

Session 5: How Do We Know God's Will?

Session 6: Is Christianity the Only True Religion?/
Is Christ the Only Way?

Session 7: Why Don't We See More Miraculous Signs in the Church
Today?

The DIALOG SERIES offers topical and biblical small group studies that generate meaningful conversation. Each 7-week study explores a subject significant to the Church and to the story of God. Dialog creates community. So let's talk.

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