

Small Group Guide

Why Does God Allow Pain and Suffering?

Important Questions of Faith (Part 2)

September 27, 2026

Overview

This session explores one of the most profound and personal questions in human experience: why does God allow pain and suffering? Rather than offering easy answers, this guide is designed to create space for honest conversation, honest doubt, and honest faith. Come prepared to listen well and speak carefully with one another.

Key Takeaways from the Sermon

1. The Core Tension

Three statements create the central dilemma: God is good. God is powerful. Pain and suffering exist. Holding all three together is one of the greatest intellectual and emotional challenges in faith.

2. Proposed Explanations for Suffering

- The yin and yang view: suffering and joy are simply opposing forces that balance each other out
- Suffering as a test of faith: it produces growth, perseverance, and character (Romans 5:3-5)
- Suffering as the consequence of a world in rebellion against God, beginning in Genesis 2 and 3, and unraveling ever since

3. The Distinctive Christian Answer

All major religions respond to the question of suffering. Only Christianity has a God who enters it. Jesus did not observe human suffering from a distance. He walked into it, endured it in his own body, and out of it the Father wrenched redemption.

4. What We Can Do While Waiting for the Why

- Cry out to God honestly and persistently
 - Acknowledge that you cannot carry it alone
 - Anchor yourself to scripture
 - Keep moving forward in faith, trusting that God is present even when He does not feel present
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Opening Question

Begin here before diving into the deeper discussion questions. Give everyone a chance to respond briefly.

- When you hear the phrase "pain and suffering," what is the first personal memory or experience that comes to mind?
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Discussion Questions

Section 1: The Question Itself

1. The sermon opened with several people sharing their raw, unfiltered thoughts about suffering. Which voice in that opening video resonated most with you, and why?
2. The sermon suggested that for many people, the question of why God allows suffering is the primary barrier to faith. Have you ever encountered someone for whom that was true? Have you ever felt that way yourself?
3. The French author Jules Renard was quoted as saying that it would be better for God's reputation if He did not exist, since then He would not have to account for the existence of evil. How do you respond to that kind of thinking? What would you say to someone who expressed that view?

Section 2: Exploring the Explanations

4. The sermon walked through several explanations for why suffering exists. Which of the following felt most compelling to you, and which felt least satisfying? Why?
 - Suffering as the natural balance of life (yin and yang)
 - Suffering as a test that produces growth and character
 - Suffering as the consequence of a world unraveling in rebellion against God
5. Romans 5:3-5 describes suffering as producing perseverance, which produces character, which produces hope. Can you think of a time in your own life when suffering produced something good in you? Was it easy to see that at the time, or only in hindsight?
6. C.S. Lewis wrote that pain is God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world. Do you find that image helpful or frustrating? What are its limits as an explanation for suffering?
7. The sermon described the world as being like a sweater with a pulled thread, unraveling further and further from Genesis onward. How does the idea of a world in rebellion against God help you make sense of suffering? Where does that explanation still fall short for you?

Section 3: The God Who Enters Suffering

8. The sermon made the claim that what distinguishes Christianity from all other world religions and philosophies is that Christianity has a God who enters suffering rather than simply responding to it or explaining it. What difference does that make to you personally?
9. Jesus quoted Psalm 22:1-2 from the cross, crying out that God had forsaken him. What does it mean to you that Jesus himself experienced that sense of abandonment? Does it change how you bring your own pain to God?
10. Angie Smith said in the video that in the darkest moment of her life, after losing her daughter, she felt God holding her. She was also honest that she did not fully feel it in the moment. She pushed the words out. Have you ever had to push words of faith out even when you did not feel them? What happened?

Section 4: Living in the Middle of It

11. Joni Eareckson Tada, after more than sixty years of quadriplegia, offered three pieces of counsel: cry out to God, tell God you cannot do it alone, and anchor yourself to something. How practical does that advice feel to you? What would it look like for you personally to follow it?
12. The sermon acknowledged that not everyone has the experience of feeling God's presence in their darkest moments, and that the absence of that feeling does not mean God is absent. How do you hold onto faith in seasons when God feels distant or silent?
13. Romans 8:18 states that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed. The sermon described this life's suffering as a small fraction of our total existence. Is that perspective comforting to you, or does it feel like it minimizes real pain? How do you hold both the weight of present suffering and the hope of future redemption at the same time?

Section 5: Personal Reflection

14. The sermon said there is no fully satisfying answer to the question of suffering. Where does that leave you? Does the absence of a complete answer shake your faith, or have you found a way to trust God in the tension?
 15. Job said in the middle of his suffering, "I know that my Redeemer lives," without knowing how his story would end. What does it look like for you to make that kind of declaration in the middle of your own unresolved pain?
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Practical Applications

This Week, Choose One:

- **Honest Prayer:** Set aside time this week to bring your hardest, most unresolved questions about suffering directly to God. Do not polish them. Cry out honestly. Write them down if that helps.
 - **Scripture Anchor:** Identify one passage of scripture that you can hold onto in difficult seasons. Write it somewhere visible. Return to it daily this week.
 - **A Conversation:** Think of someone in your life who is currently in a season of suffering. Reach out to them this week, not to offer explanations, but simply to be present. Ask how they are really doing and listen.
 - **Read Job:** Begin reading through the book of Job this week. Pay attention to how Job speaks to God in the middle of his suffering, and how God ultimately responds.
 - **Reflect on Your Story:** Write down one experience of suffering in your own life and try to identify anything good that God brought from it, even if it took years to see. If you cannot identify anything yet, write that down too and bring it to God.
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Closing Reflection

The sermon closed with the story of Horatio Spafford, who wrote "It Is Well With My Soul" over the spot in the ocean where his four daughters drowned. He did not write those words because the pain was gone. He wrote them in the middle of it.

Close your group time by reading or singing together the first verse and chorus of that hymn. Then close in prayer, giving space for anyone who wants to bring a specific burden before God out loud.

Closing Prayer

Invite group members to share one word or phrase describing where they are right now in their own experience of suffering or faith. Then close with a simple prayer that acknowledges the pain in the room, trusts in the God who enters suffering, and asks for strength for the week ahead.