

CoreGroup Guide | Why Did Jesus Have to Die? – Part 4

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Welcome

This is the fourth week of our series *Why Did Jesus Have to Die?* This week we are discussing a response to that question that may be pretty familiar to those who grew up in or around the church. However, it is also a response that leaves many of us saying, “Wait a minute. That seems kind of intense. Do I really need to believe this in order to be a follower of Jesus?”

The Substitutionary theory of atonement requires us to wrestle with several ideas. We must wrestle with the notion that all people sin and that sin leads to consequences. We must wrestle with the belief that God cares about justice so much that God requires punishment for our sin in order to make things right. We must wrestle with the hope that God is also supremely loving. So loving, in fact, that God sent Jesus to take on that punishment himself, as a substitution.

Opening Prayer

God of Justice, God of Love. This is heavy stuff! Thank you for this group and for the opportunity to have these conversations together. For some of us today’s topic feels familiar and comforting, like a connection to some truth we know deep in our hearts. For others this feels confusing and uncomfortable. Words like “sin” and “punishment” do not resonate with the God we know and love. Lord, we invite you into this space today. Be present in our conversation and in our hearts. Help us to hold this tension together as a group, with strength and curiosity. Help us to sit in the discomfort with courage and compassion. It’s in your name we pray. Amen.

Ice Breaker

If you had a time machine, what point in the past, present, or future would you visit and why?

The Head

Hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus, a prophet named Isaiah wrote about a servant who suffered for the sins of the world, sacrificing himself to heal humanity. Read this scripture out loud together, pausing after each verse to feel the weight of the words.

Isaiah 53:3-6

*3 He was despised and avoided by others;
a man who suffered, who knew sickness well.
Like someone from whom people hid their faces,
he was despised, and we didn’t think about him.*

*4 It was certainly our sickness that he carried,
and our sufferings that he bore,
but we thought him afflicted,
struck down by God and tormented.*

*5 He was pierced because of our rebellions
and crushed because of our crimes.
He bore the punishment that made us whole;
by his wounds we are healed.*

*6 Like sheep we had all wandered away,
each going its own way,
but the Lord let fall on him all our crimes.*

- Which phrases in these verses are the most impactful to you and why?
- Using this scripture as a guide, how would you describe the Substitutionary theory in your own words?
- Verse 5 states, “He bore the punishment that made us whole.” How could the death of one man make all of us – all of humanity – whole? How does that work?
- We know that this scripture was recorded hundreds of years before Jesus died on the cross. How does this timing shift your understanding of this theory?

The Heart

One thing to remember with this theory is that Jesus is not just a regular human. Jesus is God incarnate. That means Jesus *is* God. Jesus is human, capable of feeling pain and sorrow just like us. But Jesus is also God, capable of fully taking on that hurt. We are forgiven because through Jesus’ death on the cross, God absorbed the impact of our sin. In other words, as God incarnate, Jesus absorbed the punishment that humanity deserves.

- How would you describe the idea of “sin” in the world today? Separation from God? Missing the mark? A transgression of some sort? Something else?
- Do you believe the cross is a symbol of God’s wrath, God’s love, or both? How do you reconcile these two extremes together in your heart?
- What does it feel like to be forgiven? What does it feel like to forgive someone else?
- In what ways does this Substitutionary theory help you feel more forgiven and free?

The Hands

Jesus is God, but we are not. However you define it, we cannot take on the sin of the world by ourselves. We can barely tend to our own sin without the love and support of others! God’s grace is a gift – a simple gift, perhaps, but not an easy one to accept.

- Think about a time you messed up, and probably deserved the consequences that came after. How does this theory help you feel a sense of forgiveness about that situation?
- Think about a time you forgave someone else after they caused you harm. What did you have to absorb in order for this forgiveness to take place?
- Where is a place in your life that you can choose grace today, knowing that Jesus can hold the sin of the world so that you do not have to?
- The next time you are in worship, spend some time reflecting on this theory. Even if you don’t fully agree with it, how can you still respond with gratitude for the gift of the cross?

Closing Prayer

A Prayer from Psalm 31:

We take refuge in you, Lord. Please never let us be put to shame.
Rescue us by your righteousness. Listen closely to us.
Deliver us quickly; be a rock that protects us; be a strong fortress that saves us.
You are definitely our rock and our fortress.
Guide us and lead us for the sake of your good name.
Get us out of this net that's been set for us because you are our protective fortress.
We entrust our spirits into your hands.
You, Lord, God of faithfulness – You have saved us.
Amen.

Going Deeper

This semester, each CoreGroup guide will include a memory verse that you can learn on your own or together with your group. The recommended memory verse for the *Why Did Jesus Have to Die* series is John 3:16-17 from the Common English Bible (CEB):

16 God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. 17 God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Here are three simple ways to practice memorizing a verse:

1. **Write it** (one time a day on a notecard, in your notes app, or on your mirror).
2. **Say it out loud** (at the same time daily - driving, brushing teeth, before bed).
3. **Pray it** (turn the verse into a one sentence prayer for yourself or someone you love).

From Pastor Charity

[Easter Sunday](#) is just around the corner on April 5. This year we will have services at two locations: The Factory in Chesterfield, MO and Dogwood Social House in O'Fallon, IL.

Easter services are only possible with the help of amazing volunteers. We invite you to serve with us on the hospitality team or in kids ministry. Click on one of these links to sign-up:

[Volunteer at The Factory \(Chesterfield\)](#)

[Volunteer at Dogwood Social \(Illinois\)](#)