

Series: Hard Questions

Lesson #4: Why is there so much suffering in the world?

November 22nd, 2009



MAIN POINT: Don't ask "Why?" Ask "Who's in charge?" God is in charge and I can trust him.

Teaching:

How can a loving God allow so much suffering?

If you are now 10 years old... you were 4 years old on 9-11 the worst terrorist attack ever carried out on America, you were 7 when a tsunami slammed into much of South East Asia killing 170,000+ people, and just a few years ago you witnessed the complete destruction of a major US city by Hurricane Katrina, which killed thousands of people and left tens of thousands to fight for survival with nearly nothing.

This suffering seems to us totally senseless - why would God allow these terrible things to happen?

Suffering makes it seem like God either doesn't care about us, or He can't stop suffering. But the Bible insists that He is (1) Good/Loving and (2) All-powerful.

Often people get hurt and it is very hard to answer, "Why?"

People get sick, people die, hurricanes and tsunamis happen... You will experience bad things in your life, probably a lot before you die.

But the question, "Why?" is not as important as the question, "Who's in charge?"

You can search forever and not find a comforting answer to the question why - but you can know that God is good, and that he is ultimately in charge. The thing to remember and to focus on is that God loves me, and he will be with me (even in the worst of circumstances.)

The Bible doesn't give us all the answers, but it does give us answers for some things.

1. Often people blame God when bad things happen, but it's not always God's fault. Many times He is not the cause of our suffering - people are. *(This is talking about a specific type of suffering - yes there is suffering due to other causes - e.g. suffering because of righteousness.)*

Example: If you decided to play with fireworks that you weren't supposed to, and you blew up your hand, you wouldn't blame the inventor of fireworks -- you knew you weren't supposed to do it.

Choice is part of being “made in God’s image.” Our choices actually count - they change things (not meaninglessly).

Most suffering is the direct result of wrong choices.

Neglect (not feeding your hamster → it will die)

Poor judgment (running with scissors → you get stabbed)

Poor health habits (not brushing your teeth → they fall out)

Greed (stealing)

Cruelty & hatred (making fun of others, doing mean things)

A lot of other things are the result of earlier wrong choices:

Natural disasters (hurricanes, tsunamis, tornadoes...)

Many diseases (not caused by my wrong choices)

Birth defects

God told Adam + Eve that nature would cooperate with them as long as they submitted themselves to God, but they did not. Now we have to deal with the consequences.

ROM 8:20, 21 “Against its will, everything on earth was subjected to God’s curse. All creation anticipates the day when it will join God’s children in glorious freedom from death and decay.” -- Set free from slavery by Jesus. The Kingdom of God is coming... which means no more suffering, no more death.

2. Sometimes God does allow evil and suffering for His own good reasons.

Suffering can at times be used for good in our lives - like to deepen our trust in God, to help bring us closer together with other people, even simply to show off God’s awesome power/goodness.

God can and does use some bad situations to make good.

Romans 8:28 “And 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.”

A great example of this is the life of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph was sold into slavery when he was a young boy, and as he followed God more and more suffering came his way - and it was because he followed God that he was thrown in prison. In the end God put him in a place of power (2nd in command all Egypt) and used him to save his entire family (and the nation of Egypt) from a huge famine. (Genesis 37-46)

Why doesn’t God just stop all bad things now?

(1) He is going to do something about them...

Revelation 21:4 “He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. For the old world and it’s evils are gone forever.”

(2) He is waiting to give people the chance to turn back to Him

2 Peter 3:9 "The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent."

Sometimes God doesn't tell us because we wouldn't understand, sometimes because it's not good for us to know. Remember what's more important - Am I going to trust God through this suffering?

We can't always understand why, but we can understand why we trust the One who knows why.

God helps people who suffer. (2 COR 1:3-5)

God understands your suffering, b/c he has experienced it (HEB 4:15,16)

God can give you love, strength, hope, & peace even in suffering (2 COR 1:4,5)

God can work through your suffering for good (ROM 8:28).

Possible Applications:

When something bad happens...

Ask God to help you trust Him. Be totally honest with Him about your feelings, fear, & pains - He already knows and nothing you can say will make Him love you more or less. If you're a believer your acceptance by Him is absolutely assured because of Christ's death on the cross.

Talk to others who know God and the Bible and can help you trust Him.

Share your struggles and pain with others, and ask them to pray for you.

Thank God that he knows what you are going through, and can help you.

Ask God to give you comfort.

Ask Him to use that situation for good in your life.

Thank God that we can trust him, even though we don't know exactly what will happen.

Small Groups:

1. Read Genesis 3:14-24. Try to find at least 3 things that are the consequences of Adam and Eve's choice to sin.

(Such as curse to be enemies of Satan, women have great pain in childbirth, ground is cursed so we have to work hard to eat, you will die, and return to the ground, kicked out of Garden).

2. Read Romans 5:18,19. How did Adam's sin affect each of us?
3. Read Romans 8:28. What are some ways that God can bring good out of bad circumstances?
4. Has God ever done this in your life?

crafts: Straw Sculptures

Instructions: Use straws and paper clips to build your own tower. You can cut the straws to whatever size you like. Bend them to add to your design. Teachers are encouraged to set up a contest as well. Whoever can build the best _____ in 5 minutes will get a prize. (Use "tower," "human," "dog," "dragon," etc.)

Feedback form:

Please give us some feedback on this lesson.

Name: _____ CT: _____ Lesson: _____

1. Is the main point of this lesson stated in a simple and clear way?
2. Is the information in this lesson simple enough to understand and communicate to the children?
3. Was the application of the main point age-appropriate?
4. Was the outline of the lesson clear and easy to follow?
5. What should be changed about or added to the format, content, teacher preparation of this lesson?
6. Did the lesson challenge the children to think or learn? If so, in what way?