

LIFEGROUP STUDY
REAL GOOD QUESTIONS:
“How can we believe in a good, loving and all powerful
God when there is evil and suffering in the world?”
20210516

LEADER NOTES

OVERVIEW

Welcome back to our series, Real Good Questions. Over the weeks of this series, we’re exploring six common challenges to Christianity and how Christ followers can respond. Our challenge for this final week is – “How can we believe in a good, loving and all powerful God when there is evil and suffering in the world?” Of all the questions asked of Christianity today, perhaps this one is the most challenging. It is challenging because suffering is not just a philosophical topic. All of us have first-hand experience with suffering. Our hurt and pain require not only a philosophical response but a Person who walks with us through our suffering. Today, as we explore this question, let’s allow God to bring us His comfort and hope. He is our God who meets us in our suffering. He will see us through.

ICEBREAKER - I Still Don’t Know What Happened!

Have you recently had something freaky happen that you can’t explain? Maybe it was your house alarm that, for some unknown reason, went off in the middle of the night, or maybe you arrived home to find your TV on, when you know it had been off and no one is there. Share your “freaky” story with the group!

STUDY

1. On Sunday, Pete said we don’t have to feel like we always need to come up with an answer for our friends about why they are suffering. Often the best thing we can do is to be present, to simply be with those who are suffering. **Have you felt the pressure in the past to have an answer of “why”? How was Pete’s insight freeing for you?**
2. All of us have first-hand experience with suffering and have struggled with the question, “why”? **How has suffering impacted you or those you love this past year?**
3. **What “easy” explanations have you heard for why people suffer? Why are these not satisfying?**
4. READ: John 11:1-44. Jesus, the Resurrection and the Life

- When their brother, Lazarus, was sick, Mary and Martha sent word to Jesus, asking him for help. But rather than going right away, Jesus stayed where he was for two days. **Why did he wait?**

LEADER NOTE: In verse 4, Jesus said that Lazarus' sickness would not end in death, but would bring glory to God. Although the trip from where Jesus was staying to where Lazarus, Mary and Martha lived would have only taken one day, Jesus followed his own sense of timing. When God waits, He has a purpose and plan we may not know in the moment, that will ultimately bring glory to Him.

5. Sometimes, when we call to Jesus through our tears, he does not come in the way we hope. **How might Mary and Martha's story speak to our struggle with feeling like our prayers haven't been answered?**

LEADER NOTE: When we go through times of suffering it is normal to struggle in our faith, to feel our prayers aren't being answered the way we hoped. This season of struggle does not mean God doesn't care deeply about our suffering. Although He did not respond right away to Mary and Martha's plea to come (vs. 3) Jesus cared about their situation. He had a good plan for them and his timing was perfect.

C.S. Lewis, reflecting on his faith struggle at the suffering of his wife with terminal cancer, writes -"Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, 'So there's no God after all,' but 'So this is what God is really like.'" A Grief Observed

6. In verse 24, Martha makes this faith statement to Jesus about her brother, "Yes, he will rise when everyone else rises on the last day." Although Martha had faith in God's ultimate promises, her faith statement did not ease her real and urgent pain. **Why, even when we believe God's ultimate promises, can we still experience such suffering in the moment?**

LEADER NOTE: Although we have God's ultimate promise of our future resurrection to trust in and cling to, suffering still brings a lot of pain in the moment. This pain does not mean we lack faith. It simply means we are human beings who feel and hurt and cry out. In these times of suffering, we can be assured that God knows and God cares. Jesus has experienced suffering too.

7. READ: John 11:25-26

"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

- In saying these words to Martha, Jesus reminded her, and us, of our greatest need. As we go through our times of suffering, our greatest need is not to have our suffering end, but to know

and experience Jesus. **How do Jesus' words, "I am the resurrection and the life" help you know Him more?**

LEADER NOTE: The most powerful remedy God offers us in our suffering is Himself. God's plan for our life is that we would know Him more and bring glory to Him. Often, this happens most powerfully through our times of suffering. When Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life" He invites us to something much deeper than a quick fix to our pain. He is your life, even in your moments of greatest suffering.

8. The shortest, but powerful, verse in the Bible is John 11:35 – "Jesus wept." **What does this verse tell us about how God identifies with our suffering?** (also see Isaiah 53:3).

LEADER NOTE: Jesus identifies with our suffering. In Isaiah 53:3 we read, "He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief." Rebecca McLaughlin writes, "Jesus holds us close when we lament. He weeps with us when we weep. He knows the end of the story, when he will wipe every tear from our eyes. But this does not stop him from cleaving to us in our pain. In fact, pain is a place of special intimacy with him."

9. In John 11:26, Jesus asks Martha, "Do you believe this?" Suffering never leaves us spiritually neutral. **Do you think it's possible for suffering to drive you into a deeper relationship with Christ? How?**

LEADER NOTE: In our suffering we are faced with a choice. We can choose to allow our suffering to drive us away from God, or we can choose to believe. Many followers of Jesus have testified that it is in their times of suffering they have felt closest to God and experienced His presence most powerfully. To find Him in your suffering, call out to Him, wait for Him, cling to Him. He is right there waiting to embrace you in His care and love.

10. **What is a key takeaway for you from this study?**

PRAYER

This week, let's pray for our youth at Creekside.

- For encouragement for students during online school
- For our youth to experience and know that God's love is real and that they grow closer to him.

