

LifeGroup Study
2024-04-21
SKEPTICS WELCOME
Why Would You Believe What You Can't See?
Leader Notes

OVERVIEW: Welcome to week 3 of our series Skeptics Welcome. During this series we are looking at six common objections to the Christian faith and how the Bible speaks to these objections. This week we're looking at the issues of God's hiddenness and the problem of evil and suffering. For today's LifeGroup study, we will explore some of the compelling arguments around God's hiddenness and the problem of evil and suffering that have been proposed by theologians, philosophers, and apologists throughout history. Each argument offers unique insights into these topics.

THE BIG SERVE: LifeGroup Sign-Up This Week!

Check out THE BIG SERVE projects and let us know where your group would like to serve. Or, let us know about a project you have in mind. <https://www.creesidechurch.ca/thebigserve-groups/>

ICEBREAKER: I'm OK with a Little Mystery – Or Not!

Would you describe yourself as the kind of person who is OK with a little mystery, or not? Are you OK with not knowing all the details, or are you more in the camp of wanting to know as much as possible as soon as possible? Can you think of a recent experience where this side of your personality showed up?
Share your story with the group!

STUDY:

LEADER NOTE: This week's study doesn't have leader notes other than this one. Today's study focuses on several ideas that address the problem of God's hiddenness (question 3) as well as several ideas about the problem of evil and suffering. There are a number of ways you can cover this study with your group. Similar to last week, you may want to focus your group study on just one of the topics (either the hiddenness of God or the problem of evil and suffering.) Or, you may subgroup and have each group look at 2 or 3 of the ideas from each topic and present them to the group. While knowing the ideas presented in the study is important, the ultimate goal is to grow our faith as we follow Jesus, love God and love people.

THE PROBLEM OF GOD'S HIDDENNESS:

Imagine you have a friend who loves playing hide-and-seek. But this friend is really good at hiding! So good that sometimes you can't find them, even when you look really hard. Now, let's talk about God. Some people believe in God, and they think God is like a loving friend who wants to be close to us. They

expect that if God exists, God would make it super clear and easy for us to know he's there. But here's the tricky part: Not everyone believes in God, even if they want to. It's like trying to find your friend in hide-and-seek, but they're invisible! So, the dilemma is this: If God loves us and wants us to know him, why doesn't God just pop out and say, "Hey, I'm here!"?

QUESTIONS:

1. Does the problem of God's hiddenness trouble you personally or on behalf of people you know who don't believe in God? Have you experienced that God often feels hidden or absent?
2. Canadian philosopher John L. Schellenberg argues that a perfectly loving God would ensure everyone could be in a personal relationship with Him. Since not everyone experiences this, God likely doesn't exist. What do you make of "non-resistant, non-belief"? (non-resistant non-belief is when someone wants to believe in God and has been seeking God and yet still cannot believe.)
3. Take a look at the different ideas below that have been put forward as answers to the problem of God's hiddenness. **Which do you find to be most compelling and why?**

God's Desire for Seekers: God desires genuine seekers who actively seek Him. His hiddenness encourages sincere pursuit. **Bible Verse:** Matthew 7:7 "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you."

God's Mysterious Ways: God's hiddenness serves a purpose—perhaps to avoid overwhelming or scaring us into belief. **Bible Verse:** Isaiah 55:8-9 "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord."

The Necessity of Faith: Faith is essential for a genuine relationship with God. His hiddenness invites faith. **Bible Verse:** Hebrews 11:6 "And without faith, it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him."

God's Ultimate Revelation: While hidden now, God's ultimate revelation awaits us. Our faith sustains us until then. **Bible Verse:** Romans 8:18 "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

The Role of Faith and Perseverance: God's hiddenness challenges us to persevere in faith and love. Our hope lies in trusting Him. **Bible Verse:** Romans 11:22 "Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness to you, provided you continue in his kindness."

The Value of Free Will: God respects our free will. His hiddenness allows room for genuine choice. **Bible Verse:** Deuteronomy 30:19 "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL AND SUFFERING:

If God is super good and all-powerful, why doesn't God just zap away all the bad stuff? Why let suffering and evil exist? It would seem that he is either unable or unwilling.

Some people say, "Look, if there's so much suffering, maybe God isn't real." They think evil cancels out God's existence. Others will say, "Wait! Imagine a world without free will, where everyone's like robots. No one can choose to be good or bad. Would that be better?"

QUESTION:

How do you reconcile the existence of evil and suffering with a good and powerful God?

Take a look at the different ideas below that have been put forward as answers to the problem of evil and suffering. **Which do you find to be most compelling and why?**

The Free Will Defense: Evil and suffering exist because God granted humans free will. Our choices can lead to both good and evil outcomes.

Genesis 2:16–17 (NIV): "And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.'"

Deuteronomy 30:19 (NIV): "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

The Soul-Building Theodicy: Suffering serves as a means for character development, resilience, and spiritual growth.

James 1:2–4 (NIV): "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."

Romans 5:3–5 (NIV): "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

The Greater Good Argument: God allows suffering because it contributes to a greater good, such as moral development, compassion, or redemption.

Romans 8:28 (NIV): "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Genesis 50:20 (NIV): "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

The Eschatological Hope: Suffering is temporary, and God's ultimate plan includes redemption and restoration. Revelation 21:4. *"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

The Mystery of Divine Providence: God's ways are beyond human comprehension, and suffering may serve hidden purposes.

Isaiah 55:8–9 (NIV): *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”*

Job 38–41 (NIV): *These chapters contain God’s response to Job, emphasizing His wisdom and sovereignty over creation.*

The Silence of God: God’s apparent silence in the face of suffering raises questions but does not necessarily negate His existence.

MYSTERY:

God might have reasons we don’t fully understand for being hidden and allowing evil and suffering. Maybe there are greater purposes at work and things going on that we can’t see or understand.

QUESTION:

How do you deal with mystery, paradox and things you can’t fully understand? Are you okay with having this category when you think about God?

PRAYER:

Spend some time today thanking God for how he has made himself known to you. Ask him to continue to grow your faith, to trust him even when you can’t see his purposes or plans for your life.