



SESSION 8: DOES THE EXISTENCE OF SUFFERING PROVE THERE IS NO GOD ?



Aim

To gain peace in our suffering and understand that God can use it to strengthen us and direct our attention back to him.



Starter

Play a game of 'Would You Rather?' Pupils choose which fate they would rather suffer!

- ◆ Would you rather be trapped in a small room with 10,000 tarantulas for 10 minutes, or eat 10 tarantulas in 10 minutes?
- ◆ Would you rather lose all your teeth or all your hair?
- ◆ Would you rather have a permanent splinter under your big toenail, or have a permanently bad haircut?
- ◆ Would you rather have to dress all in bright orange or all in lime green for the rest of your life?
- ◆ Would you rather be stranded in the jungle or in the desert?
- ◆ Would you rather always have a song stuck in your head or always have an itch that you cannot reach?
- ◆ Would you rather slowly walk across red-hot coals or put your hand on a hot iron for 10 seconds?
- ◆ Would you rather always have a small stone in your shoes or always have mud in your shoes?
- ◆ Would you rather get a paper cut between your fingers every time you turn a page or bite your tongue every time you eat food?
- ◆ Would you rather always feel dizzy or always feel nauseous?



Video

Watch the video [Does the Existence of Suffering Prove There is No God?](#) (Running time 4:08)



Questions

Encourage pupils to write any questions on sticky notes as they occur to them.

Answer questions of understanding about the video straight away unless these will be answered later in the session. If there is not time for a question, confirm you will answer it another time. Consider using the 'car park' so pupils know you will not forget.



Exploring the Bible

Ask for volunteers to read these passages:

John 16:33

Romans 5:3-4

2 Corinthians 4:17-18

Revelation 21:3-4

Discuss

If God exists and is powerful and good, why does he not just bring an end to suffering?

When we ask this question we are usually looking at the suffering that is caused by evil that is happening elsewhere, pointing away from ourselves... over there... NOT at the evil that is in us. We all do evil. This is not to say that all our suffering is caused by our own evil, for example in the story of the man who was born blind (John 9).

Why does God just not stop us from doing evil or protect us from suffering?

For God to stop us doing evil he would have to take away our free will. We would then have no free will to choose to love him.

God tells us to pray for protection ('deliver us from the evil one') but never promises that we will not face suffering. In fact, the Bible says the opposite.

Does suffering serve a purpose? (See Romans 5:3-4)

Pain warns us of danger. We do not put our hands in a fire because we know that it will burn and be painful. Can we see then that perhaps God, in His infinite wisdom allows pain to let us know that something is wrong? For example, the pain felt when someone close to us dies tells us that something is wrong. It is not meant to be that way. C.S. Lewis, in the book *The Problem with Pain*, puts it like this.

'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.'

Pain makes us question why life is as it is. The fact that we are discussing it now shows that to be true. We are asking where is God in all this suffering? We are looking for Him. The purpose of life is not to be comfortable and happy, contrary to what we see and hear around us, but it is to know God (John 17:3) and make Him known (Matthew 28:19). Pain, suffering, famine, war, genocide... these point to the fact that we are living in a broken world. God has not ignored that. He did something about it when Jesus was born, lived and suffered here on earth, and died in our place on the cross.

What would a world without suffering look like?

A picture of a world without suffering and therefore without sin can be seen in the description of heaven in Revelation 21:3-4.



Reflection

Allow a time of reflection most appropriate to your group.

You may wish to reflect on 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 and these thoughts:

- ◆ Our troubles now may not seem light or momentary. That perspective is only seen when we recognise this time as a part of eternity. If you are a Christian, perhaps ask, 'Why is God allowing this suffering? How is this helping me to know God?'
- ◆ If you are just beginning to think about things of God, perhaps try to imagine what a world without selfishness, hate, sin would be like, and you shall begin to imagine a world without suffering. Does the existence of suffering then suggest that there is no god, or does it suggest that we suffer most when we step away from a God who loves us dearly?



Further resources

Suffering: If God is Good, Why is There So Much Evil in the World? – an online talk by Tim Keller

Suffering and Singing – a book by John Hindley