



Asking for a Friend – If God is Real, Why is there Pain and Suffering? Leader Guide

Possibly the biggest reason people give to not believing in God is the reality of evil and suffering in the world. Discuss a time where you experienced pain and suffering // discuss a time you've seen evil in the world. Leaders feel free to start this discussion with a personal story from your own life. Be sure to monitor the conversation because these times can become extremely raw and people can become extremely vulnerable. Some examples of evil in the world – genocide, ISIS, Boko Haram, slavery, etc. **How did you respond?** Again, be personal with your response but monitor the discussion to keep it edifying and beneficial for all. **Did it influence the way you viewed God?**

People who are skeptical of God's existence and goodness often point to the idea that if God were real and good, then He would remove all suffering and evil from the world. What are some shortcomings to this argument? If God did this, what would it mean for us?

The classic argument concerning suffering/evil in the world is – “If God could, He would. If God was good, He would. So He either must not exist or not be good.” The issue with this argument is it is based on an objective standard to determine an objective moral value (what is – evil, good, right, wrong, etc.) but it does not recognize the existence of that objective standard. We can't have the moral values of right and wrong if some standard has not been set, so in all reality the presence of evil/injustice points us TO the existence of God not away from. Fyodor Dostevsky said it this way - If God does not exist then everything is permissible.” It was this understanding which pointed CS Lewis away from atheism and towards Christianity – (paraphrase) “I found within me thoughts of ought and ought not, where did they come from? The fact that things are not how they ought to be, point us to a higher standard.”

The problem with the argument “if God were good He would remove all evil from the world” is the question – where does He draw the line with evil? Is it according to each one of our definitions or His? The reality is if God were to remove all evil from the world (right now – we'll talk more about this in a couple of questions), He would end up removing every single one of us.

Sometimes pain/suffering don't push people away from God but actually toward Him. Have you ever seen someone who was suffering greatly but demonstrated extraordinary faith? How did that change the way you think about pain and suffering?

Many times great amounts of suffering and pain actually push people towards God not away. We see this quite often in third world countries and countries under extreme persecution, but perhaps the greatest example were the Jesus followers in the First Century. All of Jesus' disciples were persecuted and eventually killed (minus John) for their faith.

Often we stand in awe of those who have walked through extreme amounts of pain/suffering and come out on the other side with strong faith. We even see God commend the "ancients" for living this way in Hebrews 11:1-2.

Christians believe that God has already played an active part in suffering and evil, by taking it all upon Himself on the cross. How does this encourage us to know we have a God who not only can relate to our pain and suffering, but endured it fully for us? How does this truth give us hope that one day there will be no more pain, suffering, or evil?

The cross was God's response to pain, evil, and suffering – He DID do something about it! Jesus fully became our sin on the cross, enduring an unfathomable amount of pain and suffering, to take on the judgment of the Father due to our evil. He did this because He came to save us from our sin, not judge us for it. (John 12:47) Since He has taken it fully upon Himself, we can now live with full anticipation of redemption, restoration, and freedom from all pain, suffering and evil. Paul describes this in 1 Corinthians 4:16-18 – ¹⁶ *Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* ¹⁷ *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* ¹⁸ *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

At some point in time we will all encounter evil and experience pain and suffering in our life. What is one step you can take this week to embrace Jesus and the hope He offers us? How can you change your perspective to see everything from an eternal point of view and embrace what Jesus has done?

Leader Resources

- *The Four Pillars of Christianity* by Wade Smith and Kevin McKee
- *Reason for God* by Tim Keller
- *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* by Tim Keller
- *A Grief Sanctified* by JI Packer
- *Grace Disguised* by Jerry Sitzer
- *Why a Suffering World Makes Sense* by Chris Tiegreen
- *On Guard* by William Lane Craig
- *Mere Christianity* by CS Lewis