

Week 4

How Can God be Good if There's So Much Suffering?

March 14



(~90 minutes needed)

[In this series, we'll be taking an intentional dive into some of the most important questions we can ask as human beings. They have to do with God, our existence, meaning, purpose, suffering, salvation, and more. For your group discussion to flourish, it is paramount that your people in your life groups access the weekly content and think through the reflection questions ahead of time and even consider some of the resources sent out each week. You'll have time in these guides to give each person reflection time on the questions, but conversation will be best if people do most of their thinking beforehand.]

Begin with 1-3 minutes of silence + prayer (1-3 minutes)

As you begin your gathering, spend a minute or two together in prayerful silence. Then, after a few moments of quiet centering, have a specified person in the group pray for your time together.

Read this overview (1 minute)

In *The Lord of the Rings*, Samwise Gamgee asks the wizard Gandalf a question that as we look out onto our world we inevitably wind up asking too. He asks Gandalf, "Gandalf! Is everything sad going to come untrue?"

We all long for justice, righteousness, peace, order, goodness, and joy to reign supreme in our world. No one wants to see people in pain, suffering emotionally, physically, mentally, relationally, or spiritually.

This week, we're reflecting on the question: "How can God be good if there's so much suffering?"

It seems like an impossible question. It feels like it'd be the Achilles heel to God, right?

Because if evil and suffering exists and *there is a God*, then maybe God isn't all-loving or all-good, right? Or else why would He allow evil things to go on? It also seems to be the case that if evil and suffering exist, then maybe God *doesn't exist at all* since one would think that God would surely have it in His capability to do away with everything hurtful and harmful. So we are tempted to think that either He does exist but He's not all good OR that He doesn't exist altogether.

That's what we'll wrestle through this week as a church together. This week as we think about the question pertaining to God, evil, and suffering, we're going to wrestle with some of the feelings, thoughts, and tensions associated with it. Then, we're going to look to Scripture to see if we can find some answers.

Feel free to share openly and honestly about your own struggles with this question. This is safe space to voice any questions, fears, and doubts that you may have!

Personal reflection (10-15 minutes)

Give everyone about 10-15 minutes to sit with God and reflect on the question, "How can God be good if there's so much suffering?" Actually have people write out their thoughts on the questions below. *You'll want to have some pens and paper ready for people to jot down any thoughts that they have.*

Have people reflect on the following questions:

- What are your thoughts/feelings about the question pertaining to evil, suffering, and God? How does thinking about that question make you feel?
- What is your answer to that question? How did you arrive at that conclusion?
- In what ways have past sufferings you've endured contributed to how you think about this question?
- How would you answer that question if someone asked you?
- How does your answer to that question impact your everyday living?

Debrief these questions in triads (30 minutes)

Split your group into smaller triads to share their thoughts on the questions above.

Once the personal reflection time is completed, have everyone come back into a large group to share about their triad discussion, to read Scripture, and to debrief the sermon.

Gather as a large group for discussion (30 minutes)

Once you have debriefed your personal reflection time, spend time in the Scripture below as well as debriefing the sermon from this weekend. *There are lots of questions here, so feel free to pick a couple as you see fit to guide the discussion.*

- What were some of the things that came from your smaller group discussions that stood out?
- How did the sermon this past weekend challenge or deepen how you think about answering the question, "How can God be good if there's so much suffering?"
- Have there ever been any events in your life that were so bad that they made you question either God's existence or God's goodness? What were they? How did you wrestle through those times?

- Read through **Psalm 103**, **James 1:2-5**, **Romans 5:1-5**, **Romans 8:18-39**, **Isaiah 53:3-4**, and **Hebrews 4:14-16**. What do these verses tell you about God's relationship with suffering and evil?
- Many times, we think of evil and suffering as being something that's "out there" in the world. All too often, we fail to see the ways that we have personally contributed to the suffering of others. In what ways have you caused emotional, physical, mental, or relational suffering to come about that you need to repent of? *Be sure to affirm God's forgiveness upon those who share any ways that they have wronged another. You might want to read **Romans 8:1** over each person that shares or say something like, "Thank you for sharing. Romans 8:1 tells us that, 'There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.' Scripture tells us, You are forgiven."*
- If you were to engage in conversation with someone who asked you this question about evil and suffering, how would you go about engaging with that person? What do you think would be important to emphasize? How would you want to posture yourself if a conversation like this came up?
- What new questions did this message or does this topic raise for you?
- What is one key takeaway from tonight's conversation that you need to do or think more about?

Finish with prayer (10 minutes)

Like each week, finish your group session with prayer. You might designate someone in your group to write down everyone's prayer requests and then send them to the whole group for everyone to be praying about through the week.

- What is on your heart that you need prayer for?
- Who in your life needs prayer?

Have someone close your time together by interceding for the requests that were shared.