

Small Group Guide – August 27 & 30

Head Scratchers: The Problem of Suffering

Date: August 27 & 30, 2026

Focus Passage(s): Psalm 22:1-2; John 9:1-3; 1 Peter 5:10

Theme: Why is there suffering?

Suggested Schedule (60 minutes total)

Segment	Time	Description
Icebreaker	10 min	Get comfortable, begin connecting
Intro/Recap	5 min	Read the key passages for the week
Group Discussion	25 min	Dive into Scripture and discuss application
Deeper Dive Option	5–10 min	Deeper Bible study or individual challenge
Prayer & Requests	10–15 min	Close in prayer for growth + personal needs

Welcome + Icebreaker (10 min)

What is a "why" question you remember asking a lot as a kid?

Keep this one light. Maybe it was wondering why you had to go to bed, why you had to eat vegetables, or why your parents had a certain rule.

What is something you understand now that made absolutely no sense to you when you were younger?

Key Message Recap

Questions are part of being human. Some are easy to answer. Others come from places of deep pain. We are talking about one of the biggest questions people have asked throughout history: Why is there suffering?

Why cancer?

Why did the marriage end?

Why did we lose the baby?

Why did someone hurt me?

Why is my child struggling?

Why am I still dealing with this?

Why would a good God allow suffering?

People in Scripture asked these questions too. Psalm 22 begins with David crying out: **"My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"**

Tonight is not about finding a simple answer that makes every painful experience suddenly make sense. It is about discovering what Scripture tells us we can trust when life does not make sense.

Discussion Questions (25 min)

Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Read Psalm 22:1-2. What do you notice about the honesty of David's prayer?

The message asks one of the most difficult questions in Christianity:

"Why do bad things happen to good people?"

One answer given in the message is sin, but not necessarily someone's individual sin. Sin entered God's creation and everything changed. Relationships became broken. Pain, disease, injustice, death, and decay became part of life in a fallen world.

Sometimes suffering is connected to our own choices. At other times, we experience suffering simply because we live in a broken world.

Discuss

- Why is it important to distinguish between the consequences of someone's personal choices and suffering that comes from living in a broken world?
- What danger is there in assuming someone's suffering must mean they did something wrong?
- Why do you think we are so determined to find a reason for suffering?

Key Truth

Suffering exists in a world broken by sin, but someone's suffering should not automatically be interpreted as God's punishment for something they did. Asking "Why?" does not necessarily mean we lack faith. Sometimes bringing our questions to God is an expression of faith.

(continued)

Jesus Challenges Our Assumptions

Read John 9:1-3 The disciples see a man who has been blind since birth and immediately want an explanation.

Who sinned? The man? His parents? Jesus rejects both choices.

The message puts it this way:

"It's amazing how often we pray like we're giving Jesus a multiple-choice test. 'Lord, is it A or B?' And Jesus says, 'Actually...it's C.'"

Discuss

- Why do you think the disciples immediately wanted someone to blame?
- Where do you see people making similar assumptions today?
- How does Jesus' response change the way we should approach someone who is suffering?
- What would it look like to move from asking, "Whose fault is this?" to asking, "How might God work in the middle of this?"

Key Truth

We do not always know why suffering happens, but we can trust that God can work in the middle of it.

A Better Question

One of the most important shifts in the message is moving from:

"Why is this happening?" to "What does God want to do in me and through me?"

This does not mean the first question is wrong. Scripture gives us plenty of examples of people asking God why. But there may be questions we never fully answer this side of heaven.

Discuss

- How does the second question change our perspective without dismissing our pain?
- Can you think of a difficult experience God eventually used to shape you or help someone else?
- What can God develop in us through suffering that might be difficult to develop through comfort?
- How can suffering cause us to rely on God differently?

Key Truth

We may not always understand what God is doing around us, but we can trust Him with what He wants to do in us and through us.

Even in the Bad Things, God Is Still Good

The central hope of the message is:

Even in the bad things in our lives, God is still good.

This does not mean the bad thing becomes good.

Cancer is still painful.

Loss still hurts.

Abuse is still evil.

Grief is still real.

God's goodness does not require us to pretend suffering is good. **It means suffering does not change God's character.**

Read 1 Peter 5:10

Discuss

- Which promise in this verse stands out to you: restore, support, strengthen, or place you on a firm foundation? Why?
- What makes it difficult to believe God is good when circumstances are bad?
- How is trusting God's character different from understanding God's plan?

Key Truth

Our circumstances can change dramatically without changing the character of God.

More Truth From the Gospels (10 min)

The Gospels give us an especially important perspective on suffering because they allow us to watch how Jesus responds when He encounters pain, tragedy, grief, and questions.

Suffering Does Not Automatically Mean Someone Did Something Wrong

Read Luke 13:1-5

Jesus discusses two tragedies, people killed by Pilate and eighteen people killed when a tower fell. Jesus specifically challenges the assumption that those who suffered were worse sinners than everyone else.

Foundational Truth: Tragedy is not proof that someone is worse than someone else.

Jesus' teaching reinforces what we see in John 9. We should be extremely careful about assigning a specific spiritual cause to someone else's suffering.

Discuss

- Why are people sometimes tempted to connect tragedy with someone's behavior?
 - How should Jesus' response affect the way Christians respond to people experiencing tragedy?
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Jesus Enters Into Our Suffering

Read John 11:32-36

Mary is grieving the death of her brother Lazarus. She says something remarkably honest to Jesus:

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Jesus knows resurrection is coming. He knows Lazarus will soon walk out of the tomb. Yet Jesus does not respond to Mary's grief with a lecture. Jesus weeps.

Foundational Truth

God's response to suffering is not emotional distance. Jesus enters into our grief.

Discuss

- What does Jesus weeping tell you about the heart of God?
 - Why is presence sometimes more helpful to a suffering person than an explanation?
 - How could this change the way we respond when someone we love is hurting?
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Jesus Never Promised a Trouble-Free Life

Read John 16:33

Jesus tells His followers plainly that they will experience trouble in this world, while also telling them that peace can be found in Him and that He has overcome the world.

Foundational Truth

Following Jesus does not eliminate suffering. It gives us Someone to trust in the middle of it and hope beyond it.

Discuss

- How is this different from the idea that following Jesus should make life easy?
 - What do you think it means to experience the peace of Jesus while the circumstances are still difficult?
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The Cross Is God's Ultimate Response to Suffering

Christianity does not give us a God who watches human suffering from a distance.

Jesus experienced rejection, betrayal, grief, physical pain and death.

As the message says:

"A bad thing happened to the only good person so we could have heaven."

At the cross, the only truly innocent person suffered. But suffering did not get the final word. Resurrection did.

Foundational Truth

The cross shows us how deeply God loves us. The resurrection shows us that suffering and death will not have the final word.

Discuss

When you cannot understand what God is doing, how can what happened at the cross help you trust who God is?

Real-life Application (5 min)

There may be a "why" you have carried for a long time. Maybe you have prayed about it repeatedly. Maybe you are angry. Maybe you are exhausted. Maybe you have stopped expecting an answer.

God is not asking you to pretend it does not hurt. But while you are asking why, He invites you to rely on Him.

The message gives us this reminder:

"The worst thing going on in your life right now is not the end of your story."

Reflection Question

What is one situation where you need God's help moving from "Why is this happening?" toward "God, what do you want to do in me and through me?"

Prayer

Suffering and Hope-Focused Prayer

Pray for those who are experiencing grief, illness, disappointment, broken relationships, anxiety, addiction, injustice, or other difficult circumstances.

Ask God to give strength where people feel weak.

Ask for peace where circumstances have not changed.

Ask for God's presence to become especially real to those who feel alone.

Ask God to help the group trust His character even when they cannot understand His plan.

Thank Jesus for entering human suffering and ultimately defeating sin and death.

Pray for the hope promised in 1 Peter 5:10: restoration, support, strength, and a firm foundation.

Open Prayer Requests

Give everyone an opportunity to share anything happening in their lives for which they would like prayer.

Remind the group that personal requests should be treated with confidentiality and care.

Deeper Dive Character Study: Joseph

Scripture: Genesis 37; Genesis 39-50

Key Scripture: Genesis 50:20

Joseph's life gives us one of Scripture's clearest pictures of trusting God through suffering we do not understand.

Joseph was betrayed by his brothers. He was sold into slavery and taken away from his family. He was falsely accused, imprisoned and forgotten.

For years, Joseph had no way of seeing how the pieces of his story fit together, yet God was at work.

Joseph's story does not teach us that the evil done to him was secretly good. His brothers' actions were genuinely evil. Instead, Joseph eventually recognizes that human evil did not have enough power to stop God's purposes. Faith does not require us to pretend betrayal does not hurt. That makes his story an important companion to the message's reminder:

The worst thing going on in your life right now is not the end of your story.

Key Moment 1: God Was With Joseph

Read Genesis 39:1-3, 20-23

One phrase keeps appearing throughout Joseph's suffering:

The Lord was with Joseph.

God's presence did not mean Joseph avoided hardship. It meant Joseph was not abandoned in it.

Key Moment 2: Waiting Without Answers

Joseph spends years experiencing circumstances he did not choose and could not control. He could not see the ending from the middle of the story.

Key Moment 3: A Different Perspective

Read Genesis 50:15-21

Years later, Joseph tells his brothers that although they intended evil against him, God worked through the situation to accomplish good and preserve many lives.

Notice what Joseph does not say. He does not say their evil was good, but he recognizes BOTH realities.

They intended evil. God was still at work.

Takeaways

- God's presence does not mean an absence of suffering.
- We may not understand what God is doing while we are in the middle of the story.
- Evil remains evil, but evil cannot prevent God from accomplishing His purposes.
- God's faithfulness is bigger than our circumstances.
- Sometimes perspective comes only after a long season of waiting.
- Our suffering does not get to write the end of our story.

Additional Scriptures for Further Study

Psalms 22:1-5

David demonstrates that faith and difficult questions can coexist.

Romans 8:18-28

Paul places present suffering within the larger hope of God's restoration.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Present difficulties are viewed through the perspective of eternity.

Revelation 21:1-5

Scripture's story ends with God making all things new, wiping away tears, and ultimately ending death, sorrow, crying, and pain.

Connection to This Message

The question "Why?" is not a bad question.

David asked it.

Jesus' disciples asked it.

People have asked it for thousands of years.

But Scripture gives us something to hold onto when the answer does not come.

God is still present.

God is still working.

God is still loving.

God is still good.

And because of Jesus, suffering does not get the final word.

As the message reminds us:

"The worst thing going on in your life right now is not the end of your story."