



THE PROBLEM OF GOD

Week Four

Opening Prayer

God, thank you for being here with us. Help us to use our time in a way that helps us grow closer to you and to one another. Amen.

Leader Instructions: If you have new members in your group today, here is an easy way to help everyone connect.

To help everyone get to know each other a little bit more before we jump into our study, go around the circle sharing these three things. Due to the time, let's keep answers short.

- (1) Share your name, (2) how long you have been going to EastLake, and (3) one thing you value about this season's growth group experience.

Icebreaker

- Tell us about a funny or awkward time you assumed one thing, but later realized your assumption was incorrect.
- Being misrepresented can be a messy, hurtful process. Other times it can be no big deal. Tell us about a time you were innocently misrepresented or you misrepresented yourself.

Talk it Over

This is week four of our series, The Problem of God. The foundational idea in this series we want everyone to keep in mind is that faith is not intended to be religious, wishful, magical thinking. Faith is not about blindly following something or avoiding all questions or doubts. This means each of us has permission to think critically or question issues surrounding faith, God, the Bible, and so forth. When we talk about faith we are talking about having reasonable confidence in the evidence presented about Jesus.

- How would you say God has been misrepresented in our society and culture?
- Do you feel that God was ever misrepresented to you personally? Without throwing anyone under the bus, tell us about that experience.

Will someone read our theme verse Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

The invitation laid out for each of us in this series is that we each stay open to following where the evidence may lead us — instead of pushing for where we hope the evidence leads or where we feel the evidence should go.

- Is there anything you have found yourself wrestling with more since we started this series? If so, tell us about that.

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Today we looked at the big question: Why does God allow evil and suffering? Stated differently, how can there be a God who is good and all-powerful if he allows evil and suffering? Regardless of our worldview or where we stand on the topic of faith, it's common to wrestle with this question. In fact, in a nationwide poll, this was one of the top questions people asked around the topic of faith. As we go about this conversation today, it's critical we understand this question is not simply a philosophical question, this is a question that involves our personal feelings.

- The question of "why does God allow evil and suffering" hits home for so many people. Have you ever wondered about this topic? If so, tell us about your journey with the question. If not, why do you think that is?

As we kicked off exploring this week's topic, we were asked the following question: If you could, would you remove everything evil and bad from the world right now? Then, before we answered the question, we were asked to consider: Have you, or someone you loved, ever done something evil and/or bad?

- What did these questions stir up in you in light of the topic of "why does God allow evil and suffering?"

Will someone read 2 Peter 3:9 (NCV) out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

Christianity has always worked towards trusting and believing that God has a reason for not removing all the pain and suffering in the world. None of the reasons center around the idea that God is powerless to act or lacks compassion. But rather, the reason for God's patience lies in his heart for people. In other words, the only way for God to remove our chief complaint about God allowing evil and suffering is to remove all the complainers.

- Without feeling the need to overshare, when you think about the evil or bad things you've done, how has God been patient in your life?
- In what ways has God's patience helped you to become a new person?

While each of us may walk this out differently, this week we looked at the idea that the question "why doesn't God remove all the evil and suffering in the world?" often bumps up against some level of hypocrisy. To help us see one of the ways this might play out in our lives, we looked at an illustration involving justice spray and bad spray. The main idea behind the illustration was that we are much more inclined to want justice when we are the ones controlling how the justice plays out.

- In your own life, how have you seen this illustration play out?
- What are some specific areas of your life this season that leave you thankful for grace? What would "justice" look like in those given areas?

Two common beliefs are exposed when we explore the topic of God removing all evil and suffering. The first is that "certain things ought not to be". For example, most people believe stealing, killing, and raping are things that 'ought not be'.

- What are some other things you see in this world that leave you thinking, feeling, or declaring, "this ought not to be?"
- Is there anything you are walking through this season that leaves you with the feeling of "this ought not to be?"

The second common belief this topic exposes is that the world is broken. The Biblical narrative says this brokenness is a part of life because God gave people the freedom to choose. (The "why" behind that statement is its own long conversation. An oversimplified way to address the topic is to say, God opted for free will for the sake of love.)

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- When was the first time you remember having a sense of the world being broken?
- In your own life, how have you come to terms (or not) with the idea that the world is broken?

Another core Biblical narrative is that God has not stayed out of our mess or this world. While many Biblical ideas point to this truth, more specifically, this is communicated very clearly through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

- What impact does knowing God is present with us in our pain have on your life?
- Tell us about a time you saw God move in the midst of brokenness.

Will someone read our theme verse Romans 8:18-21 (NLT) out loud for us? Feel free to use a Bible or your phone to access the verse.

Another key teaching in the Biblical narrative that applies to today's conversation is that one day all suffering will end. The Bible actually tells us that the current world is not the original or final version of the world; there is hope available to us now and there is hope to come. This concept runs contrary to many other worldviews.

- Have you ever held or do you hold a different worldview than Christianity? If so, what is/was your answer to the problem of evil and suffering?
- Have you ever processed through this idea that brokenness does not get the final word? How does this conversation bring hope now and hope for the future?
- Have you experienced hope in the midst of evil and suffering? If so, tell us about that experience.

God desires to use his people, the church, to fight and move against evil and suffering. God desires to use his people to bring hope, healing, freedom, and love to a hurting world. This idea is central to the Gospel message or the good news story of Jesus.

- What are some good things you see people doing around you to take a stand against evil and suffering? Remember, these acts of goodness come in all sorts of packages.
- In your own life, how do you see yourself being an agent of hope, healing, freedom, and love to a hurting world? Again, remember, there is no one way to do this.
- Are there other ways you might want to engage in bringing hope, healing, freedom, and love to a hurting world? Are there areas of injustice, near or far, that spark your attention?

We ended this week's talk looking at the idea that if God removed evil from the world, he would have to begin with us. Instead of doing that, God entered this evil world through Jesus to forgive us rather than remove us. As we move toward our closing prayer, let's take a minute to quietly consider all we have talked about. As you reflect, consider what you are thankful for, an area of pain or suffering where you want to feel God's presence, the ways in which God is patient, etc.

Closing Prayer

Leader Instructions: Feel free to lead this week's closing prayer either using the prompt below or praying your own prayer for the group.

God, thank you for being patient with us. Thank you for being with us in our pain and suffering. Help us to find you in the midst of the brokenness. Help us to partner with the restorative work you look to do in the world. We want to know the hope you offer and to be dispensers of that same hope. Amen.

Closing Reminders For Our Group

- Let's each commit to attending the next four group meetings.

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- As a group, let's make sure we have all our group logistics squared away for next week. For example, who wants to bring snack next week? Are we all set on when we meet next? Are there any childcare details we should talk about?

How To Use this Discussion Guide

The guide is meant to serve you and your group as you intentionally create space to grow in friendship and faith. Use the guide as a tool to help your unique group.

With that in mind, consider reviewing the guide before your group to see if some content or questions might resonate more or less with your group. Don't feel pressure to read all the content or to hit all the questions. The guide is not meant to be something you power through for the sake of completing. Pick the content from the guide you feel will help foster friendship and faith in your specific group.

In addition, spend some time praying for your group each week, preparing your heart, and asking God for wisdom and guidance as you lead.