

# Why Does God Allow Evil?

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## Settling In: *About 10-20 minutes*

- 1) Make a note to yourself who, if anyone, is missing from your home group this week.
- 2) Spend some time finding out how everyone is doing: make a note for prayer requests.
- 3) Introduce a time of conversational prayer. Make it clear that group members are not required to participate if they are not comfortable.  

or
- 4) After a more brief time of prayer...
  - a) Ask someone ahead of time to briefly tell the story of how Jesus came into his or her life.
  - b) Invite other members to ask a few questions about the testimony.

This is only for your information...don't make a big deal of who is missing to the members who are present.

Conversational prayer means each member taking turns praying for various concerns with reasonably short and to the point prayers.

## Opener: *About 10 minutes*

- 1) Do you believe in the reality of evil? Why or why not?
- 2) Ask for several people to briefly share a recent incident or news item that made the evil that's in the world seem closer to home or more real.
- 3) Who or what do you think was responsible for those evil deeds? Society, family, poverty, God, drink, drugs, the devil, government...

You may not have time to ask every question in the study. Also, some of the discussion questions may not be appropriate depending on who is at the home group on a particular night. That's okay! We've intentionally given you more material than you can usually use.

## Mini-teach: *About 10 minutes*

### The problem of evil

- 1) From the beginning people have asked "Why does a good God allow evil to exist?"
  - a) The problem is often posed like this:

A good, all-powerful God would have the power to make certain that his creation was all-good.

Creation is not all good.

Therefore, there does not exist a God that is all-powerful and all-good.
  - b) This could lead some people to the conclusions that:
    - i) God is either not all-powerful and is therefore as much of a victim as we are. Or...
    - ii) God is not all-good and is therefore blameworthy for the sorry state of the world. Or...
    - iii) There is no God in any meaningful sense of the word.
- 2) However, there is one very important factor that often omitted in this kind of reasoning: God is not the only one with will and power active in the universe.
  - a) To say that God can do all things is not the same as saying God does all things.
  - b) In other words, while God is supremely powerful, he does not choose to exercise his power and impose his will in all circumstances.
  - c) With his power and freedom, God chose to make creatures with

Highly recommended resource: *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* by Kreeft and Tacelli. See their chapter on The Problem of Evil, p. 122ff.

The Problem of Evil is sometimes referred to by theologians as "theodicy" meaning "the justice of God." This refers to the question: "How can God allow evil in the world and still be 'just' or 'righteous'?"

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- genuine free will: the ability to make good or evil choices.
- d) Most of the suffering in the world is down to the evil choices of human beings, the results of those evil choices are clearly not God's will.
- 3) Someone might say, "But could not an all-powerful God make human beings without free will?"
    - a) Free will is an essential part of the definition of what it means to be human.
    - b) It is like asking for a blue ball that is an orange block; or perhaps a four-sided triangle.
    - c) The Bible is clear that God cannot contradict himself. It is another way of saying he is consistent, rational, and just. A human being without free will is not really fully human.
    - d) Besides, no one ever seriously wants to give up his or her freedom.
  - 4) Could God prevent all harm to his creatures by a continuous stream of miracles?
    - a) What effect would that have on our experience of cause and effect?
    - b) Wouldn't that make life chaotic and unpredictable?

### **Discussion 1: About 15 minutes** **God made a good world.**

- 1) Look through Genesis 1. What statements recur on different days of creation?
  - a) What does God think about his creation? (He saw that it was good...he approved!)
- 2) Read Genesis 1:31
  - a) Did God create a world with evil already in it?
  - b) How could God have kept evil out of his world? (Only by not making creatures with free will. But wouldn't that be a bit like making a road system without vehicles or a dollhouse but no dolls?)
- 3) Read Genesis 2:9;16
  - a) What restrictions did God place on the man's freedom? Was God's restriction clear?
  - b) Which was greater: the man's freedoms or his restrictions?
  - c) Why didn't God just place the tree out of the man's reach?
  - d) How is this story repeated today? In society? In our lives?

Someone might say, God may not have created a world with evil already in it but he made a world in which evil was unavoidable. C.S. Lewis countered, "If there are other intelligent beings on other planets, it is not necessary to suppose that they have fallen like us."

Try not to get into a discussion about the literal/figurative debate about this passage. Our discussion on the problem of evil does not depend on settling that issue.

This story represents how human beings continue to choose to follow their own desires and reject God's laws.

### **Discussion 2: About 15 minutes** **What went wrong?**

- 1) Read Genesis 3:1-19
  - a) Who are the main characters in this story?
  - b) What is the basic plot?

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- 2) What does the serpent ask the woman?
  - a) What is he trying to do by asking this question?
  - b) What is her answer? Up until now what does her answer reveal about her attitude toward her privileges and one restriction?
- 5) In 3:4, What claim does the serpent make? What is he implying about God?
  - a) Was the serpent telling the truth or lying?
  - b) How was the woman's resistance to the temptation overcome?
- 6) What happened when the man and woman ate the fruit?
  - a) Did they get what they wanted?
  - b) Do they seem happy with their choice?
  - c) After they ate the fruit, what does God say?
- 7) What are consequences of this first sin for each of the characters in the story?
  - a) For the serpent? (Humiliation and a reference to the devil's ultimate defeat by the woman's descendant: Jesus Christ.)
  - b) For the woman? (Pain in childbearing; the injustice of male domination)
  - c) For the man? (Struggle and frustration in work; physical death)
- 8) How is the story of Adam and Eve repeated in our lives today?
- 9) What should be our attitude toward suffering?

The responses to this question could take several directions. Here are a few suggestions:

- We should see ourselves as God's hands & feet.
- Understand that suffering comes to everyone.
- Recognize that there isn't always an easy answer.
- There is no strength, growth, or real learning apart f/ suffering.

### Closer:

- Fortunately, even though we "broke" God's good and perfect world, that isn't the end of the story!
- Even in the midst of Adam and Eve's original failure are the seeds of God's plan of redemption and salvation.
  - God's mercy is shown when he takes the initiative to seek them out (3:9); when covers them with clothing (3:21); and when he promises a saviour (3:15).
- God's pursuit of humanity continues to be demonstrated today:
  - The Good News of redemption is being shared and believed around the world like never before.
  - The mercy of God is being shown by people who work to relieve human suffering that resulted from the "curse" in Genesis 3.

Their innocence died immediately...never to be restored.

"Where are you?" becomes the theme of the whole Bible.

These consequences are facts of life for most of humanity today. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to counteract pain, injustice, or prolong our lives with medicine!

That the man did not die instantly is down to the mercy of God.