



Dear LifeGroup Leader,

It feels like Fall, doesn't it? How's your group doing? How are you feeling as a leader? How do you sense God growing you as a leader?

This week's study might require a bit more hands-on approach from you. We're talking about the problem of pain. How can an all-powerful, loving God create a world in which pain exists?

The danger is for this to become an intellectual discussion about pain "out there". My experience is this kind of discussion helps us mainly tuck away our anxieties, clean things up so we can maintain homeostasis.

Yet often our collusion around resolving this question neatly keeps us from a more direct and genuine encounter with the Living God. How do we get here? By reflecting on the pain we've experienced in our own lives.

Some tips: be watchful of people talking about pain in general, or about other people's pain. See if you can direct people to reflect on their own experiences with pain, and to resist the temptation to answer people's questions about pain. Sometimes the most comforting thing we can do is to simply ask the question, to wonder about the question together, allowing God to meet us there.

-Connor



God Questions

The Problem of Pain

The next few weeks we'll be addressing common difficult questions we all struggle with concerning God, the world, and our place in it. While we all want clean answers, often healing comes in pondering important questions together. This week we talk about the question, "If God is all powerful and good, then why does evil exist?" The Bible does not deny the reality of pain. Instead, it seems to acknowledge that God has allowed free will, and in it, the ability to make choices that cause pain for ourselves and others. And with that is the choice to do something about the pain - to respond as God's healing presence in a world in pain.

FOCAL POINT: Wrestling with the pain in our own lives, rather than giving easy answers, draws us toward God.



Getting Started

Catch up together about how your week has been, possibly also revisit last week's meeting.

- ▶ What's the worst physical pain you've experienced?



Exploring Scripture

Read the following passage together.

Romans 8:18-28

- ▶ Where do you hear God's heart in this passage?
- ▶ What words or phrases stick out to you?



Reflection

Take time to reflect together about the passage.

- ▶ How is this image of the world different than how you envision it intuitively?
- ▶ What do you know about Paul's suffering? How do you imagine Paul himself was affected by these words?



Praxis

With the understanding that we gathered here are the body of Christ, let's allow the truth from today's scripture to impact us as a LifeGroup.

- ▶ The problem of pain cannot remain an intellectual or philosophical argument. Each of us has been deeply shaped by the pain in our lives. How we experience pain - whether we were left alone, vulnerable in a chaotic situation, or experienced comfort from God or others - is deeply important to the way we talk with each other about the problem of pain.
 - ▶ When you have felt pain in your life, what questions has it formed in you? What emotions do you feel toward God about that pain?
 - ▶ When this week did you sense pain or evil in the world? How did that affect you?



Moving Outward

Challenge each other to live out God's truth this week.

- ▶ What small thing might you be able to do when you sense the world's pain or evil this week?

Romans 8:18-28

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.