

Searching for Answers | Week 2 - Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Points to Keep In Mind

1. The Scriptures never address the question of pain and suffering in an abstract way. They do, however, consistently portray God as one with the brokenhearted and on the side of those suffering and in pain. In the New Testament, we see that Jesus enters our world and suffers alongside us in solidarity. This has been the testimony of the Black Church as expressed in the following statement of James Cone. “The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God’s presence in Jesus’ solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is the faith that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair.”
2. Don’t try to fix people’s questions or struggles with an easy answer to their pain. Even Jesus, at the death of a friend, sat down at the grave of a friend and wept, even though he raised him from the dead a few verses later. The reality of pain and suffering doesn’t need answers to questions as much as it needs presence, solidarity, and understanding. So don’t give quick answers; instead, use statements like “tell us more,” which invite the sharer to process the complex realities of their experience. The process of pain is more important than ensuring the correct answers are given.
3. Cultural influences often make our pain and suffering even more challenging to process. Use these questions to explore a few cultural lies we’ve absorbed and how they influence our experiences.
 - a. The goal of life is to be happy. Help individuals recognize how this influences their processing of pain and suffering. This lie is deeply rooted in American culture; we consider pursuing happiness an inalienable right. “In the secular view, suffering is never seen as a meaningful part of life but only as an interruption.” –Tim Keller
 - b. If I do good, I’ll be rewarded. If I do bad, I’ll be punished (Karma). The Bible does not support this belief...“He (referring to God) causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” –Matthew 5:45b, yet many have endured the deep shame of past mistakes. Help the group explore how their shame plays into how they experience and process pain & suffering.
 - c. I have to be OK now. Encourage the group to explore how they may numb or ignore pain and suffering to avoid it. Healing takes time, and trying to circumvent the pain does not make healing faster. Aspirin and ibuprofen can slow down healing because inflammation is integral to the cleaning and rebuilding process of healing a fracture.

Quotes

“Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don’t be afraid.” — Frederick Buechner

“Some like to think that because Jesus suffered once, we never will have to. That because Jesus was wounded, we’re promised permanent healing; that if He was abandoned by God, we never will be. But what if the very fellowship of His suffering is meant to draw us closer to Him? What if our very pain is meant to help us see Him more clearly?” — Lina Abujamra, “Fractured Faith”

“It can’t be that [God] is indifferent or detached from our condition. God takes our misery and suffering so seriously that he was willing to take it on himself.” – Tim Keller, “Reasons”

Next Steps

1. Where do you see God at work in your life right now?
2. What next steps do you feel called to take in your YOU+ journey? Check out communitychristian.org/you
3. Have you considered getting baptized? Learn more at communitychristian.org/baptism
4. If anyone in your small group is seeking professional counseling, you can always refer them to our resource page: communitychristian.org/mentalhealth