

“Where is God?”

I’m Glad You Asked Sermon Series | Week Two | Newbreak Church

September 25th, 2022

Newbreak’s Sermon Study Guide is an in-house resource that serves sermon-based Life Groups and/or individuals who want to reflect further on how the message contributes to our spiritual formation.

In this week’s study, we talk about the big question of suffering and address the question: Where is God in the midst of the pain and suffering?

Icebreakers for Life Groups

- If you have a muffin and you add frosting to the top of it, does it become a cupcake? Discuss!
- When was a time you felt overwhelmed by the hardship and pain of this life?

Going Deeper Into the Message

Where is God in all of this pain and suffering?

Read John 14:16–17; 2 Corinthians 1:3–4; Psalm 34:18

Point 1 – God is with you in your pain.

When pain or suffering hits, we are tempted to think of God as being absent. But there is nothing that pushes God away from His people—not even the pain.

The Lord is close to the brokenhearted;
he rescues those whose spirits are crushed.
(Psalm 34:18, NLT)

You might need to highlight, circle, or underline the word “close” in your Bible and point it to the word “brokenhearted.” Because there we see God’s compassion on display. He is not like the “gods” of the ancient world who had no care whether their people suffered or not. The “gods” were known to be rather annoyed by the complaining of humans for their plight of suffering. **Rather than being dormant, distant, or disengaged—God is**

right there, standing with you in your pain. And if we don't believe it when we hear it, we ought to believe it because that's what we see Jesus do in John 11, for example, when he weeps over the death of Lazarus, his friend. Jesus didn't just tell everyone to not weep in light of the miracle that was going to happen, nor did he comfort them purely on the future promise of resurrection at the end of time—though both of those responses would have been great! First and foremost, Jesus had empathy, expressed in the shortest passage in all of Scripture: “[Jesus wept](#)” ([John 11:35](#)). (You can read more about Christ's empathy in John 11 via [THIS blog post](#) we wrote previously.)

Surely we are not to lose sight of how Jesus ultimately resolves the problem of suffering, something we have written about in [THIS blog post](#). However, sometimes we need to reflect on where we are now, and not simply on where we will be when suffering ceases. It's okay to be honest with that! Pain has a way of grounding our feet firmly in the present. And if we don't walk through it in a healthy way, we might just become paralyzed by our pain. Therefore, the honest venting of our pain needs to be equally met by the reality that God is with us and has not forsaken us in our pain.

Jesus weeps with you and empathizes with you because He knows what it is to suffer. What kind of God is like that? He chose to enter our suffering—to solve it, yes—but as a result he knows it. He “[understands our weaknesses](#)” as Hebrews 4:15 says. Or to paraphrase it, you can picture Jesus looking you in the eyes and saying: “I'm right here with you, I have scars too.” Except his scars are not those of a victim without hope, but are the scars that sealed our “[living hope](#)” (1 Peter 1:3) and even our ultimate healing (1 Peter 2:24).

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- How do the Scriptural readings above give encouragement to you during times of hardship or pain?
- When was a time you were walking through pain but you sensed the presence of God in and through it? What was it like?
- Although we don't want to dismiss the present hardships we face, what role does knowing the end of the story and the elimination of suffering do for our faith?

Where is God in all of this pain and suffering?

[Read Romans 5:1–5; 1 Peter 1:6–7](#)

Point 2 – God is refining you through your pain.

As we read Scripture we should be overwhelmed by the way in which pain and suffering are given a unique kind of dignity. They are not arbitrary or meaningless. Granted, God is not the author of your suffering, but he will use it as a tool in your life for transformation. In other words: **What you are going through may not be good, but God can make something good out of it.**

It all comes down to this... **Suffering will either harden your heart, or it will tenderize it.** It comes down to how we will choose to respond.

Or as Peter says...

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So, when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. (1 Peter 1:6-7, NLT)

If we heed Peter's words, we will see that the crucible of pain in this life will melt us so that, like the process of gold being refined, the impurities can be burned away and what remains is a substance so pure that it is even more precious and valuable than before.

Sometimes we might think: *"How could this situation ever be used for any good?"* And while we might not have any good answers for you, we can consider how the death of Jesus—the worst torture for the only truly good person who ever lived—turned into the best thing that saved humanity! There is no way the disciples saw that coming, and sometimes we don't always see the purpose for our pain but we can rest assured that even though God is not the author of our suffering, He knows how to *right it* and *write it* into our story for something good and transformative.

God's love for you is stronger than any suffering that you go through.

No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39, NLT)

Nothing—no hardship or suffering can rip you from the grip of God's strong and loyal love.

Back when Paul wrote this letter to the Romans, a Roman father could disown his children for any number of reasons. A child had no security that his, or her, parent would always be there for him/her. But if a Roman parent chose to adopt a child, that parent could **never** disown that child. From the moment of adoption, he had all of the rights and privileges of sonship and could never be taken out of his father's hands. This is the security that Paul promises Christ's sacrifice gives us. God, through the precious blood of Jesus, will never disown us. We are his heirs and co-heirs with Christ forever.

Paul has been “convinced” that Christians are bound to the indomitable, unfailing, resilient love of God. And verses 38 and 39 are Paul's extensive way of making the point. His point is ample and beyond sufficient in the widespread language he uses to cover all the realms of antagonistic possibility—nothing is left out, which is the point—nothing can succeed in pulling apart the grip of God's love on the object of his love. If Romans 8:35 was a list of physical threats or unfortunate circumstances, 8:38–39 is a list of forces (natural and spiritual) that might try to threaten the Christian's security—but to no avail! **Clearly, Paul wants his Christian audience to also be “convinced” that God's love in Christ is the strongest force in all creation.**

Are you “convinced” that God's love is unconquerable and unfailing?

Questions for Group Discussion or Personal Reflection

- Why is it important to embrace suffering as a refining process?
- How have you seen the difference between your heart being “hardened” or “tenderized” through suffering?
- How do Paul's words in Romans 8:38–39 encourage you?

Memory Verse: Romans 8:39 (NIV) Neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—FINAL CHALLENGE QUESTIONS—

How are you going to think or live differently in light of what you have read, heard, and discussed this week?

How does this week's message shape or nurture your relationship with God?

BONUS: For those of you with kids or around kids: What is one truth from this message that you can share with your kids in a way that they would relate to or understand?