

LEADER'S GUIDE

QUESTIONS REDIRECTED: WHY THIS EVIL?

PREPARING FOR CONVERSATION

Please remember, this study guide is offered for your personal preparation. It is not intended as a legalistic template to follow line by line. Doing that would take an enormous amount of time. Please use it as a guide for personal and private study in preparation for the upcoming meeting. If it does not fit your plans, no problem. Use whichever sections best fit your personality and gifting.

One other caveat is in order. The issue of God and evil is an enormous subject, with many complex and complicated issues surrounding the discussion. Today's devotional is intentionally narrow, focusing on one consideration known as the "Greater Good" argument: Evil is allowed because God has His reasons—reasons we might never know in this life—for allowing evil in this age. The focus here is one Christian response to pain and suffering for those who follow Jesus as His disciples.

MAIN SCRIPTURE

"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." —2 Corinthians 4:17

SUPPORTING SCRIPTURE

"We do not focus on the things that are seen but on the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal." —2 Corinthians 4:18

MAIN IDEA

Christianity does not ask us to deny, minimize, or ignore suffering. It teaches us to see present suffering in the light of Christ's victory and the eternal glory He has promised.

GOAL FOR THE GATHERING

Help the group understand that Paul calls suffering "light" and "momentary" only when he compares it with the eternal weight of glory awaiting those who belong to Christ.

By the end of the gathering, participants should understand that suffering is real and can be unimaginably painful; Scripture never asks us to pretend suffering does not hurt; present suffering is temporary rather than final; Jesus entered our suffering, bore our sin, and defeated death; the Christian's hope rests on Christ's completed victory; and eternal hope gives believers strength to persevere today.

LEADER PREPARATION

The subject of suffering may touch deeply personal wounds. Someone in your group may be facing cancer, grief, divorce, betrayal, chronic pain, financial hardship, or concern for a family member. Lead with compassion rather than trying to provide a quick answer for every form of suffering.

Avoid statements such as, “Everything happens for a reason,” “It could have been worse,” “You just need more faith,” or “You need to move on.” These statements may sound comforting, but they can minimize another person’s pain.

Instead, emphasize three biblical truths: The suffering is real. Christ is present with His people. The suffering will not have the final word.

OPENING QUESTION

Ask: Have you ever played a round when you felt physically exhausted, mentally defeated, or ready to quit? What kept you going?

Allow several men or women to answer. Keep the opening conversational. Do not immediately turn every response into a spiritual lesson.

TRANSITION

Consider saying: “Today’s story is about a golfer who kept walking through extreme physical suffering because of what might be waiting for him at the end. His story helps introduce a greater Christian truth: We persevere not merely because we hope we might win, but because Jesus Christ has already won.”

THE GOLF STORY AND PAUL’S SUFFERING

Tell the Story

At the 1964 U.S. Open at Congressional Country Club, Ken Venturi faced one of the most difficult tests of his career.

Once considered a rising star, Venturi had suffered injuries and struggled to regain his earlier form. By 1964, his career appeared to be fading. But at Congressional, he found himself in contention.

Because of the tournament format, the final two rounds were played on Saturday. That meant thirty-six holes of championship golf in one day. The weather was brutally hot and humid.

Venturi became severely dehydrated and disoriented. A doctor warned him about the danger of continuing. Nevertheless, Venturi kept walking and completed the final round. At the end of that exhausting day, he was the U.S. Open champion.

Discuss the Story

Ask: What physical and mental pressures was Venturi facing? Why do you think the possibility of winning helped him continue? How does knowing what may be waiting at the finish affect a golfer's willingness to endure difficulty? What is the difference between enduring pain for no apparent purpose and enduring pain when you can see a meaningful destination?

IMPORTANT QUALIFICATION

Explain: "Venturi's experience gives us a useful picture, but it is not a perfect comparison. Venturi continued because he hoped he might win. He could not know the outcome with certainty. Christians persevere because Christ has already won. Our hope rests on His completed work, not on our ability to endure well enough to earn the victory."

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–18 aloud.

UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S CIRCUMSTANCES

Paul was not writing these words from a comfortable life. He had experienced severe hardship because of his faithfulness to Christ. According to Paul's own testimony, he had been beaten, imprisoned, persecuted, rejected, threatened, shipwrecked, hungry, exhausted, and in danger from enemies and false friends.

Paul knew physical pain, emotional pressure, disappointment, and fear. Therefore, when he called his affliction "light," he was not speaking as someone unfamiliar with suffering.

Possible Discussion Question

Ask: Knowing what Paul endured, what is your first reaction when you hear him call his suffering "light" and "momentary"?

Allow people to answer honestly. Some may find Paul's language encouraging. Others may find it difficult or even troubling.

Leader's Emphasis

Paul was not saying, "Suffering does not hurt," "Your loss does not matter," "Strong Christians never grieve," or "If you trust God, you will not feel pain."

Paul was comparing two real things: present suffering and future glory. The suffering is real, but the glory is infinitely greater.

THE SUFFERING IS REAL

Christianity Does Not Minimize Pain

The devotional tells the story of a man and his wife who buried two precious daughters.

Someone who has experienced that kind of loss would never tell a grieving person, “Your pain isn’t that bad.” Instead, this father could say with tears in his eyes, “The loss is unimaginably terrible. But it is not final.”

That sentence captures the Christian response to suffering. The loss is terrible. The grief is real. The pain should not be minimized. But because of Jesus, death and suffering are not final.

Read Romans 8:18

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.”

Paul again uses comparison. He does not deny “the sufferings of this present time.” He places them beside “the glory that is going to be revealed.”

The Scale Illustration

Place one hundred pounds on one side and ten thousand pounds on the other. The one hundred pounds is real. It has not disappeared. No one is pretending that it is weightless.

However, the ten thousand pounds outweighs it so completely that the comparison changes how we see the one hundred pounds.

Paul is saying that our present suffering, as heavy as it may feel, cannot be compared with the eternal glory God has prepared for His people. The glory does not make the suffering painless. It gives the suffering a larger context.

Possible Discussion Questions

Ask: What is the difference between minimizing suffering and placing suffering in an eternal perspective? Why can quick explanations sometimes hurt people who are grieving? What does a suffering person usually need most from Christian friends? How can we be honest about pain without surrendering to hopelessness?

WHEN SOMEONE SHARES A PAINFUL STORY

If someone shares a personal loss, do not feel that you must explain why it happened.

You might respond: “I am deeply sorry.” “Thank you for trusting us with that.” “That sounds incredibly painful.” “We want to walk with you through this.” “May we pray for you?”

Listening with compassion can be more helpful than offering an immediate explanation.

ADDRESSING THE QUESTION “WHY?”

The question “If God is good, why does evil exist?” deserves thoughtful theological answers. Scripture teaches that evil entered God’s good creation through human rebellion against Him. Sin has affected every part of life, including our relationships, our bodies, and the natural world.

God is never morally responsible for evil. Human beings willingly rebelled against their Creator, and the consequences of sin have spread throughout creation.

However, when suffering becomes personal, a philosophical explanation may not satisfy the heart. A grieving person needs more than an argument. That person needs the presence and promises of God.

Christianity does not merely give us an explanation of suffering. It directs us to a suffering Savior.

Key Statement: “The Christian answer to suffering is not an abstract idea. Our answer is Jesus Christ, who entered this broken world and suffered for sinners.”

THE GLORY IS ETERNAL

Present Suffering Is Not Final

Paul contrasts two realities:

PRESENT AFFLICTION | PROMISED GLORY
Light by comparison | Weighty beyond comparison
Momentary | Eternal
Seen | Unseen
Temporary | Permanent

The contrast is not between something real and something imaginary. Both suffering and glory are real. The difference is that suffering is temporary, while the promised glory is eternal.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:18

“We do not focus on the things that are seen but on the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

Paul is not telling Christians to ignore the visible world. He is teaching us not to treat what we can presently see as the whole story.

What can we see? Aging bodies, medical diagnoses, broken relationships, financial pressures, injustice, disappointment, and death.

What do we not yet see in its fullness? Christ’s completed restoration of creation, the resurrection of the body, the removal of sin, the end of death, perfect fellowship with God, and eternal joy in His presence.

Faith does not mean pretending visible suffering is unreal. Faith means trusting God's promise concerning what is presently unseen.

Read Revelation 21:3–5

Emphasize the promises: God will dwell with His people. He will wipe away every tear. Death will be no more. Grief, crying, and pain will be no more. Christ will make all things new.

The Christian hope is not that believers will escape physical existence and become disembodied spirits. Our hope is resurrected bodily life with Christ in a renewed creation.

God will not merely help us forget the brokenness. He will finally and completely overcome it.

Discussion Questions

Ask: Which promise in Revelation 21 is most meaningful to you right now? Why is resurrection a greater hope than simply saying that life will eventually improve? How does eternal life with Christ change the way we view aging, illness, and death? What visible circumstance most easily causes you to lose sight of God's unseen promises?

POSSIBLE OBJECTION

Someone may ask: "Does focusing on heaven encourage Christians to ignore suffering and injustice now?"

Suggested response: "No. Eternal hope should make us more compassionate, not less. Because Jesus cares about suffering people, His followers should care for them as well. We comfort the grieving, feed the hungry, defend the vulnerable, and pursue justice. We do these things knowing that our efforts matter, while also recognizing that Christ alone will finally make all things new."

Leader's Emphasis

The promise of eternal glory is not an excuse for passivity. It gives us courage to serve faithfully even when we cannot repair everything that is broken.

CHRIST HAS ALREADY WON

Christian Hope Rests on Christ's Victory

Return to the Ken Venturi story. Venturi kept walking because he hoped he might become the U.S. Open champion. At the time, the outcome was uncertain. He still had to finish the tournament.

The Christian's hope is different. Christians do not persevere because they hope Jesus might win. They persevere because Jesus has already won.

AT THE CROSS

Jesus bore the guilt and judgment deserved by sinners. He did not die merely as an example of courage or love. He offered Himself as the atoning sacrifice for His people.

At the cross, Jesus bore our sin, endured God's righteous judgment in our place, accomplished redemption, and reconciled sinners to God.

IN THE RESURRECTION

Jesus physically rose from the dead. His resurrection demonstrates that His sacrifice was accepted, sin's penalty was paid, death was defeated, and everyone united to Christ by faith will also be raised.

The resurrection does not mean Christians will avoid suffering or death. It means suffering and death cannot finally defeat those who belong to Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:20–22

“But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.”

EXPLAIN “FIRSTFRUITS”

The firstfruits were the beginning of a harvest and the guarantee that more was coming. Jesus' resurrection is not an isolated event. It is the beginning and guarantee of the resurrection awaiting His people. Christ went through death and emerged victorious. Everyone who trusts in Him will share in His resurrection life.

Rhetorical Question

Ask: What is the difference between hoping that things will somehow work out and trusting in the historical death and resurrection of Jesus?

Possible answer: General optimism depends on circumstances improving. Christian hope rests on something God has already accomplished in history. Jesus died for sinners and rose from the grave.

FOR NONBELIEVERS

Some participants may not yet believe the claims of Christianity. Welcome their questions without pressuring them to pretend.

You might say: “Christianity does not ask you to manufacture positive feelings about suffering. It asks you to consider Jesus—who He is, why He died, and whether He truly rose from the dead. If Jesus rose, then suffering and death do not have the final word.”

Discussion Questions

Ask: Why is the resurrection essential to the Christian response to suffering? How is faith in Christ different from positive thinking? What would be left of Christian hope if Jesus had not risen? What makes it difficult for people to trust Christ when they are suffering? How can a Christian express honest grief while still holding firmly to hope?

Key Statement

Consider saying: “Our confidence is not that we are strong enough to overcome every trial. Our confidence is that Jesus has already overcome sin and death.”

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Read the examples from the devotional: cancer; a failed marriage; a body that does not work; betrayal by a business partner; a crisis you did not choose.

These experiences are real. Christianity never asks us to call evil good or pretend that pain does not hurt. But Jesus promises that these things are not final.

RETURN TO THE THREE STUDY QUESTIONS

Golf Connection

Ask: When you are struggling on the golf course, how can focusing on what lies ahead help you persevere? How does this picture help us understand Paul’s approach to suffering?

Leader’s direction: A golfer may continue because the next shot offers another opportunity, the round is not finished, or the goal remains ahead. Paul endured by looking beyond present suffering to the eternal glory promised by God.

The important difference is certainty. A golfer does not know how the round will end. The Christian knows that Christ has already secured the final victory.

Understanding Paul

Ask: Why could Paul describe his afflictions as “light” and “momentary” without denying how painful they were?

Leader’s direction: Paul was comparing present suffering with eternal glory. “Light” does not mean painless, and “momentary” does not mean insignificant. Compared with an infinite and eternal weight of glory, even lifelong suffering is temporary.

Personal Application

Ask: What suffering or difficulty are you facing, and how might Christ's victory and the promise of eternal glory change your perspective?

Leader's direction: Encourage honest answers. Do not pressure anyone to provide a triumphant conclusion. Sometimes faith simply says, "This is terribly painful, but because of Jesus, it is not final."

OPTIONAL PREPARATION PASSAGES

2 Corinthians 4:1–18; Romans 8:18–39; 1 Corinthians 15:20–28, 50–58; John 11:17–44; Revelation 21:1–5; Psalm 46.