



SESSION 8: DOES THE EXISTENCE OF SUFFERING PROVE THERE IS NO GOD ?



Aim

To explore whether suffering proves that there is no god.



Starter

Play a game of 'Would You Rather?' Pupils choose which fate they would rather suffer!

- ◆ Would you rather be trapped in a small room with 10,000 tarantulas for 10 minutes, or eat 10 tarantulas in 10 minutes?
- ◆ Would you rather lose all your teeth or all your hair?
- ◆ Would you rather have a permanent splinter under your big toenail, or have a permanently bad haircut?
- ◆ Would you rather have to dress all in bright orange or all in lime green for the rest of your life?
- ◆ Would you rather be stranded in the jungle or in the desert?
- ◆ Would you rather always have a song stuck in your head or always have an itch that you cannot reach?
- ◆ Would you rather slowly walk across red-hot coals or put your hand on a hot iron for 10 seconds?
- ◆ Would you rather always have a small stone in your shoes or always have mud in your shoes?
- ◆ Would you rather get a paper cut between your fingers every time you turn a page or bite your tongue every time you eat food?
- ◆ Would you rather always feel dizzy or always feel nauseous?



Video

Watch the video [Does the Existence of Suffering Prove There is No God?](#) (Running time 4:08)



Questions

Encourage pupils to write any questions on sticky notes as they occur to them.

Answer questions of understanding about the video straight away unless these will be answered later in the session. If there is not time for a question, confirm you will answer it another time. Consider using the 'car park' so pupils know you will not forget.



Exploring the Bible

As we think today about suffering, we are going to look in Mark's biography at some people who approached Jesus in the midst of suffering.

Read Mark 5:21-34

Here we see part of Jesus' encounter with two people who were suffering. Jairus has a daughter who is dying, and he begs Jesus to come and help. He must have been suffering great anxiety for his little girl's life. However, on the way Jesus stops when he meets a woman who is also suffering greatly, with a condition which has left her bleeding for 12 years. As if that were not bad enough, this condition would have also meant she was an outcast from society because of Jewish religious laws. She was isolated from friends and family and must have longed for a cure, but none was to be found. She seizes her chance to touch Jesus and be healed.

Discuss

Why do you think Jesus stopped to talk to the women even although Jairus' Daughter was dying? Was there any need to stop after the woman was healed?

This woman was an outcast. She did not have contact with anyone, perhaps had entirely lost her dreams for her life, and would have been looked down on by everyone around her. There was more to heal than her physical condition and Jesus takes the time to acknowledge that. He speaks to her, shows that he is prepared to be in her company, and calls her 'daughter', a term of love and intimacy.

If you could ask Jesus any question about something you have suffered, or could Hear something from him, what would that be?

Group members may not wish to share something personal, but give them the opportunity if they wish to. You could also invite them to share anonymously using sticky notes if you prefer. If anyone does share, thank them for doing so and avoid giving too simplistic or quick an answer. Consider if it would be helpful to attempt an answer now or come back to questions in an extra session.

Read Mark 5:35-43

Discuss

How do you think Jairus felt, hearing that his daughter had died? How would you Have responded to Jesus' request not to be afraid but believe?

If we do not know the end of the story, we can imagine Jairus' heartbreak that Jesus is too late to help. His whole world has just ended. We might feel that Jesus' request to believe is absurd in these circumstances.

At the end of the story we see why Jesus did not need to rush to get to the little girl. He brings her back from the dead with the same ease as we would wake someone who is asleep. He can set his own priorities and in this encounter his priorities were to be with, and show compassion to, those suffering.

Discuss

When you are suffering, what kind of people bring you most comfort? What kind of people bring you least comfort?

It may be that people who listen and care are the most helpful, whereas those trying to 'fix' things or give a quick answer are less so.



Reflection

Allow a time of reflection that is most appropriate to your group.

You may wish to reflect quietly or discuss the following:

- ◆ Imagine having a friend who understood completely what you were going through without words, was always there for you and never let you down and was planning your future carefully to bring you to a place without suffering. What would that be like?
- ◆ The Bible teaches that God knows suffering more deeply than any of us can. This is because Jesus was sent to live on Earth and sacrifice his life, bearing the punishment for the wrongdoing of the whole world, to make it possible for humans to know God. Do you think Jesus is like that, as the Bible describes him?