



Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



Introduction: Before giving people the handouts, assess whether the image of the “Tortured Christ” will be appropriate for your group.



Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How is God in our suffering?



Understanding the information (25 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Suffering can remain the largest stumbling block to our discipleship. Yet the difficult times of our lives can also be those in which we can most learn to rely on God, allowing Him to be at the centre of our lives and to shape our characters.

But if Jesus has overcome evil, why is there still so much suffering? The Swiss writer Oscar Cullmann uses a wartime analogy to explain why the world is not yet as God wants it to be. He says that while Jesus’ first coming broke the power of the enemy, as happened on D-Day in World War 2, we are living in a time when we are still waiting for the war to be over (VE-Day) and for evil and death to be completely destroyed. We can have confidence in God’s victory (now), but we still long for its completion (not yet).

As disciples we are called to continue to confront evil and suffering in a world in which that battle can feel as intense as ever. Paul says that this affects not only us, but the whole world which is “groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” The universe longs for ‘VE-Day’, when “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” (Romans 8: 19-22)

While this may go some way to help our understanding, it is essential on an emotional level for any disciple to know that, through Christ, God suffers with us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Only a suffering God can help.” It helps our understanding, because, while no answer can fully take away or explain our suffering, our picture of God now includes one in which suffering is at the centre of who God is. It helps our experience of suffering because we know we are not alone in it, but God is with us.

The picture ‘The Tortured Christ’ gives us a visual sense of the reality of God’s agony on the cross. Through the cross, God understands suffering. Not only that, but the book of Hebrews suggests He has allowed Himself to be shaped by it: “Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered...” (Hebrews 5:8)

The fact that God IS love means that God can choose to be vulnerable, without losing His power. While not understanding suffering fully, disciples can know that on the cross God shares in, and protests about, our suffering. The photo ‘Corona Jesus’ also speaks of how Jesus is present with us in our sufferings. In the Bible, God does not say, “Do not fear, I will take away all your pain.” Rather, we hear, “You have no need to fear, since I am with you.”

Discuss: How does God want us to respond when we suffer?

Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read Romans 8: 18-39 which is a long meditation on how we live in the world as it is. You will need more time for this Bible Study than normal.



Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:
What does this passage teach me about God?
What does this passage teach me about people?
How does this passage call me to obey God?
What might I do in response to this this week?

Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of responding to suffering as a disciple.



Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



Group prayer (5 minutes)

You had no beauty or majesty to attract us to you,
nothing in your appearance that we should desire you.
You were despised and rejected by humankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
you were despised, and we held you in low esteem.
Surely you took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered you punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
You were oppressed and afflicted,
yet you did not open your mouth;
you were led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so you did not open your mouth.
After you have suffered,
you will see the light of life and be satisfied.
Amen.

Adapted from Isaiah 53





How do we respond to suffering?



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