

**Group Study on Suffering**

*What you will need:*

* A print out of this document
* A Bible

*Read aloud the following excerpt and use your Bible to look up the passages cited in the text*

Suffering is one thing in this world that we can all be sure to encounter in one form or another. When we do encounter it, it can be really tough and we may find ourselves looking for ways to avoid it.

The question of how to reconcile faith and suffering has been a tough question for thousands of years. The problem we face is this: how can a good, loving, and all powerful God allow us to suffer? This has been a stumbling block to many people and it is a tough question to deal with.

Unfortunately, there is no one-line answer that will satisfy someone who is suffering. It is more of a journey as we walk with the Lord, learning to lean on Him and having our faith tested and strengthened along the way.

To think of suffering as the worst possible thing that can happen to us may not be the most helpful starting point. Our culture places great importance on happiness, pleasure, and having it our own way. This means that when we suffer we feel hard done by and we cry ‘foul’. We may find ourselves wondering why are we suffering, or complaining at the circumstance we find ourselves in.

It is important to realise that suffering, pain and death were never part of the original created world. It was because of 'The Fall' that sin, suffering and death entered the world. This was not part of God's original plan. And yet God allows suffering in our lives.

Our culture teaches us that suffering is a bad thing, and something to be avoided at all costs. The Bible, however, teaches us a different way to understand suffering. It teaches us that through suffering, we can learn and develop certain characteristics like endurance, character and hope (Romans 5:4).

More than just developing our earthly character, however, suffering can help us to realise our own limitations, learn to “let go” of our sense of control, and place our trust in God.

Ultimately, when we think of how Jesus suffered and died for us we can be comforted by the fact that He knows suffering, and suffers with us. He suffered and died so that we might share eternal life with him. Yes, we share in His sufferings. But we will also share in His glory! (Romans 8:17; 2 Corinthians 1:5; Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13).

Dealing with suffering, either in ourselves or in others, it is not quick or easy. Knowing that God still loves and cares for us does not mean the suffering will automatically go away. It does, however, teach us to rely and depend on Him: *‘And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose’* (Romans 8:28).

If you are suffering, it can be very healthy and helpful to share your journey with someone – for example, your pastor or school chaplain, who can support you.

*Discussion questions*

* We often expect that life will go well for us. Does suffering come as a shock to you?
* Why does God allow suffering? Can suffering help us turn to God?
* Without Jesus’ suffering, we would never be forgiven from our sins. How do we share in His suffering?
* Knowing that suffering will come does not make it easier. Read Philippians 3:10-14. Discuss.
* Look up James 1:2-18. Discuss.
* Where can you go to for Christian counsel when you are suffering? Try making a list to keep somewhere important.
* How are you suffering? How is your neighbour suffering? How might you be able to support each other?

*Close in prayer*

*Helplines and support networks*

* Beyond Blue (Support service for depression and anxiety: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support)>
* Kids helpline: <https://kidshelpline.com.au>
* Parent helpline: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/parents/parentline-services/>
* Raisingchildren parent helpline and hotline: <http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/hotlines.html>
* Domestic Family Violence Counselling Service: <https://www.1800respect.org.au>
* Alcoholics Anonymous Australia: <http://www.aa.org.au>
* Gambling help online: <https://www.gamblinghelponline.org.au>
* Family Drug Support: <http://www.fds.org.au>