

Study Guide for
Painful Questions
Facing Struggles with Faith

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Chapter 13 & Epilogue

Chapter 13

Chapter 13: The Way of the Cross

Summary: This chapter introduces the central Christian response to the problem of human suffering: the cross of Christ. The cross demonstrated God's good faith and solidarity with all who suffer. God could not necessarily explain to us in our limited state of understanding all the reasons for our suffering. Yet in Christ, God was willing to suffer with us as a confirmation of his love. Furthermore, the cross ties together all the answers given so far in previous chapters, and also explains how God repaired the broken relationship between himself and creation.

Related Scriptures: Mark 15:1—16:8; Luke 23:1—24:12; Heb. 12:2; Luke 22:44; Mark 15:16-21; 1 Cor. 15:54-57; Col. 1:18; John 11:25; Luke 23:34.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do we have such great respect for those who are willing to stand beside us in hard times rather than just to throw us advice from afar?
2. In what way does the cross show that God takes our suffering very seriously?
3. Hebrews tells us that Jesus "endured the cross, despising the shame, for the glory that was set before him" (12:2). How might this same idea apply to our suffering?
4. *In Jesus, God experienced the struggles and pain of our world. In what ways does this help us to cope with suffering?
5. From a human perspective, Jesus' death was a miscarriage of justice—a great evil. Yet it is part of the story we refer to as "good news." How does this apparent contradiction provide an

answer to the question of suffering?

6. In what way does the cross respond to all three of our questions: the fact-finding question, the fact-stating question, and the fact-changing question?

7. What is the difference between a "response" and an "answer." In what way is Jesus' death on the cross both?

8. Jesus' death and resurrection does respond to our questions about suffering. But for Christians, it has always meant more than this. What other significance does the cross of Christ have?

9. *Jesus endured the shame of the cross for (on behalf of) others. Can some of our pain be viewed at times as for others? In what way might this make it more endurable and more meaningful?

10. What does the cross teach us about the power of love?

Journal-Reflection Suggestion: Read the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus from one of the Gospels. Write down all the different ways this event responds to your questions about suffering. How would you describe this event: hopeful, comforting, challenging, encouraging, etc.?

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Epilogue

Epilogue: The Silence of God and the Patience of Job

Summary: The problem of suffering and evil is really the problem of God's silence. If God had given us the answers to all our questions, we would not have to speculate. We therefore wonder why God is so silent on such important matters. The ancient story of Job suggests that part of the reason for God's silence is our human limitation. There is no doubt much in heaven and earth that we cannot know and therefore will not know. From this acknowledgment, three conclusions follow:

First, we can live quite well with silence, without all the answers. Second, silence can actually serve to help us think for ourselves and take stock of who we are. Third, God has promised to reward our faithfulness. In the meantime, we must wait patiently together.

Related Scripture: The story of Job, especially the prologue (chapters 1–2), Job's encounter with God (38:1—42:6), and the ending (42:10-17).

Discussion Questions

1. Why are we often frustrated by the silence of those around us?
2. What is the relationship between God's silence and the problem of suffering?
3. *The silence of God is often extremely troubling. In your opinion, why is God so silent?
4. Why does Job refuse to accept the blame for the tragedy that has befallen him?
5. Job finally gets to speak with God. In what way is his interview with God different from what he might have expected or wanted?
6. Why does God not tell Job about his contest with the Adversary, the Accuser? Is there anything for us to learn from God's silence on this point?
7. *If God were to speak to humanity more clearly, would this completely resolve the problem of suffering? Why, or why not?
8. What makes us as human beings uncomfortable with silence? What can we learn from this?
9. How does silence (both the silence of God and of other human beings) help us to understand ourselves better?
10. In the end, God rewards Job for his faithfulness. Does the form of the reward raise any questions for you? How might those questions be answered? What does God's rewarding of Job teach us about God's relationship to us in times of difficulty?

Journal-Reflection Suggestion: This week try to spend some time in silence. Write down the thoughts about God, yourself, and life that come to mind during this time. What reasons do you think God might have for being more silent than we would like him to be?