

Study Guide for

Painful Questions

Facing Struggles with Faith

by Gary L. Watts

Introduction

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This Study Guide gives a general introduction to the book, followed by fourteen individual lesson guides. For each chapter and the epilogue, the Study Guide presents—

- A brief chapter summary.
- A listing of related Scriptures.
- Ten discussion questions (* —question at chapter end in book; may be reworded).
- A suggestion for a Journal or Reflection assignment.

The Journal-Reflection suggestion can be used in one of three ways:

1. To provide a means for the individual to reflect on the topic of the chapter in a practical and personal way throughout the week following the lesson.
2. As a discussion starter for each week's class. Class members could be asked to share something from their journal with the others at the beginning of the class. In this case, it would be best to assign the Journal-Reflection suggestion from chapter 2 at the end of class session 1, the Journal-Reflection suggestion from chapter 3 at the end of class session 2, etc. This would match the discussion starter with the topic for the day.
3. In an academic setting, as an assignment for a one- or two-page paper, to be turned in for

evaluation.

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General Introduction to *Painful Questions*

Painful Questions is an attempt to respond to questions that arise for believers as we face the inevitable struggles, problems, and pain of life. As an ordained minister and college professor, I have found that these painful questions are almost always in the back of our minds if not on the tips of our tongues. But often the answers given are either so philosophical that they leave us more confused than ever, or so simplistic that they seem to avoid the issues altogether.

Painful Questions steers a middle course. It draws on the rich theological and philosophical history of the discussion. But it employs everyday language and real-life illustrations to deal with our common human struggles in a clear and practical manner. Many of the ideas in *Painful Questions* have been used with success for more than a decade in Sunday school classes, discussion groups, sermons, and the college classroom.

Throughout Christian history, much has been written on this important topic. The annotated bibliography at the end of the book provides a good guide for getting started on further reading. The particular approach of *Painful Questions*, however, is perhaps best described by the following statements that outline its emphases:

1. If we look carefully at a question like "Why me?" we realize that it is often more than one question. Depending on the circumstances, one who asks "Why me?" may be asking any or all of the following: "Where is God when I am suffering?" "What did I do to deserve this?" "Does God really love me?" "Will anyone listen to me?" "Can anyone do something to ease my pain?"
2. Since there are many painful questions, there is no one answer that fits them all. As when putting together a complicated picture puzzle, we must deal with many different pieces—many different answers—and try to fit them together, to bring the whole picture into focus.
3. To look for answers to the painful questions of life, we must begin a journey of faith. We are not likely to find answers unless we have the eyes of faith that enable us to look beneath the surface and behind the façade of life. Such a journey must be guided by the hope that points us in the right direction and tells us which paths are worthy of our investigation. We do not merely want to discover solutions. Instead, we want to take part in creating solutions ourselves. Hence, we will need to rely upon the power of love.
4. As we piece together the puzzle with the help of faith, hope, and love, we find that the picture slowly emerging begins to look much like a cross, the cross of Christ.