

Talk It Over

BARRIERS

(Week 1)

How could a loving God allow so much suffering?

SMALL TALK

1. Was there ever an occasion for you to question God's love for not answering a prayer request about suffering?
2. What painful experience in your life resulted in joy?

VIEWPOINT

3. **READ John 16:17-33.** What does Jesus tell his disciples would happen to them? Why are they to take heart?
4. **READ John 11:17-37.** What did Martha say to Jesus who came after Lazarus had died? Why did Jesus weep even though he knew he was planning to raise Lazarus from the dead?
5. **READ 2 Corinthians 1:3-4.** What other unanticipated good thing can come out of your suffering?

GETTING PERSONAL

6. When do you tend to second-guess God?
7. How and when has God disappointed you? Where are you at with that experience now?
8. In your own words, how would you answer this "barrier" question (see title)?
9. What attitude of disappointment do you need to confess to God and change to trust in His sovereign control?

MAKING PROGRESS

10. How can you be a comfort to a struggling or hurting person this week?

April 12, 2020

BARRIERS—1

How Could A Loving God Allow So Much Suffering?

[adapted from *Confronting Christianity: 12 Hard Questions for the World's Largest Religion*, by Rebecca McLaughlin]

We are separated by physical distance because of a pandemic, but we are celebrating together that Jesus is Alive!. A pandemic cannot stop us from celebrating Jesus all across the globe!

*Since this is not a typical Easter, this is not a typical Easter message. I will be starting a new series today called “**Barriers.**” It could be that you have joined us today, and you aren’t even sure what you believe about Jesus. Or you are pretty sure you don’t believe what I believe. If that’s you, welcome. I’m glad you are here. Here’s the series description we begin today:*

Series Description:

Nearly everyone has encountered hard questions about what followers of Jesus believe. These hard questions become barriers between people and God. But what if there are answers that can transform **barriers** that block our way into **signposts** that point the way?

We will be looking at these 4 barriers in the next 4 weeks.

1. How could a loving God allow so much suffering?
2. How can you say there is only one true faith?
3. Hasn’t science disproved the Bible?
4. How could a loving God send people to Hell?

How could a loving God allow so much suffering?

If this is your question today, I’m glad you are here. Our church is all about helping people take steps from wherever we are to where God wants us to be. Perhaps today might help you a little. I pray it does.

This question definitely feels weighty. This question certainly gets our attention. But does this question actually become a barrier? Does it have the power to torpedo our faith?

Jesus certainly did not think so.

John 16:33 (NIV) “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Jesus tells us to expect trouble. Nowhere in the Biblical worldview are we told to expect quick fixes, easy answers. NO. Actually on nearly every page of the Bible we encounter suffering and problems, and how to deal with them. *“In this world you will have trouble”* is not some new teaching from Jesus. What he brings that is new is that he has overcome the world, and we can be overcomers with him! It’s as if Jesus is saying:

I. Suffering gets our ATTENTION.

Suffering is like a megaphone. Suffering gets our attention.

If you will let Jesus hold the megaphone, he cut through a lot of noise. He did not sugarcoat anything. But he does provide us solid hope, and amazing comfort.

Now let’s consider the weight of this problem, and Jesus’ answer that transforms this barrier. It is a personal example we can identify with.

II. When Jesus WAITS...

In 2 verses this BARRIER presents itself personally in real time.

John 11:5 (NIV) Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.

Lazarus is very sick. His sisters call 911... Jesus, their close friend. A miracle worker. They have seen him in action. He is the answer they need. They need him NOW. But then, if this is true, the very next sentence is a confusing one. It just doesn't seem to follow, logically. But here it is.

John 11:6 (NIV) So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,

Jesus frequently healed strangers. Sometimes Jesus healed long-distance. So why not this time? Why did you let us down? Ever Experienced this? I have.

III. Jesus claims to be the ANSWER even now

John 11:21-24 (NIV) {21} "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. {22} But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." {23} Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." {24} Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Martha does not need or want a platitude. She does not want comforting words. She believes Jesus can do something NOW. But the answer Jesus brings isn't the quick fix she wants.

He knows that when we suffer, we are not like philosophers. We are more like hurting children crying out for an answer as we see it.

He is not giving a philosophical answer, he is turning a hurting heart toward an answer that is bigger than she realizes. Perhaps bigger than she is ready for..

John 11:25-26 (NIV) Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; {26} and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha does not fully understand...what Jesus is saying. Do you?
Part of what Jesus is saying is this:

- **Your greatest need is not to have your brother back again.**
- **Your greatest need is not to have a trouble free life.**
- **Your greatest need is not to have your suffering removed right now. Your greatest need is your need for me.**
- **I am what you need right now, more than anything else.”**

Jesus says to us, “This is not the time to lose your faith, this is the time to use your faith. This is not the time for your faith to weaken. This is the time for working your faith. He says, “I am the life...Do you believe this?”

This audacious claim (among others) eventually get him crucified.

Jesus claims that He is the life you need right now while you are suffering. He says, “You need me because I’m the overcomer. Trust me when it is hard. Trust me while you are suffering. Follow me. I am the life.”

All parents know that, at times, they must let their children suffer. We will sometimes hold our crying babies while strangers stick needles into them for medical reasons. Why do we allow them to suffer like this? We do it in exchange for something better.

Here is one Parent’s story from our church:

Pain. It comes in many forms. Physical, mental and emotional. ... Our kids are going through the “growing pains” phase of childhood. We have learned that sometimes when the “growing pains” show up all that needs to be done is getting the child to relax, get some sleep and in the morning the pain has gone away. Some nights we can tell the child needs the right medicine to help relieve the pain. As the parents, it is up to us to choose the right option. One night our daughter, after she had been put

to bed, called us back into her room to inform us that her leg was hurting. My wife and I decided that this was one of those “relax and get some sleep” times. Our daughter disagreed with our decision. She was hoping for the “quick fix” of the medicine and so she spent some time trying to convince us that her choice was the best. After a while she called me back into her room and asked “Daddy, would you please hold my hand”? How could I say no to that? She quickly fell asleep holding my hand and woke up in the morning with the pain gone. That experience got me thinking and I have to admit, when I have had pain in my life my first response is to ask God for the “quick medicine” fix. By that I mean, a prayer focused on God quickly fixing the situation or taking the pain away. Now there is nothing wrong with asking God, who is “an ever-present help in trouble”(Psalm 46:1), to quickly remove the pain. Sometimes He does. The question is, what is my response when God decides to answer my “quick medicine” prayer with a “be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Do I try and convince Him that my choice is the best? Do I focus my eyes on the pain and lose sight of God? Or, like my daughter, do I call out and say “Daddy, would you please hold my hand”? On that night my daughter learned to relax and find comfort in simply knowing her father was with her. May I learn to “be still and know that He is God” in the middle of the pain. May I continue to ask for His hand to hold with each “growing pain” in my life. Always finding comfort simply knowing my Father is with me.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, {4} who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

The shortest verse in the Bible is...

John 11:35 (NIV) Jesus wept.

Easy to memorize... not easy to understand.

He could have avoided everyone’s sorrow, including his own sorrow. Why not a quicker fix? It’s the same question for all of history. Why does he let all the suffering of all the world go so long?

Why didn’t Jesus give the quick fix? He could have avoided everyone’s sorrow, including his own sorrow. Do you realize this

question can be asked of the whole human experience? Why wait so long for the remedy? Why not a quicker fix?

Isaiah 53:4-6 (NIV) {4} Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, ... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. {6} We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

- **Jesus did not watch our suffering from a safe distance.**
- **Jesus did not wink and smile knowing something better was around the corner we knew nothing about.**
- **Jesus wept, carried our sorrows, and will as a result carry them away.**

- **Have you discovered the mind blowing reality that while you are suffering Jesus can draw you into a closer intimacy with him than ever previously experienced or imagined was possible?**

Of course, Jesus does more than bring emotional support. He is the resurrection and the life. He proved it when he said.

John 11:43 (NIV) ... “Lazarus, come out!”

But the ultimate proof was not Lazarus but what we celebrate today on EASTER—Jesus’ own resurrection! Jesus conquered the disease of sin, and he conquered death, never to die again!

The next time you wonder, “Why all the suffering?” Remember this: God is not restoring a messed up world to its original condition as described in Eden, but to something BETTER. The cross was never plan B, but plan A. Because of Jesus, we can know God more intimately than Adam and Eve ever did in Eden. What could possibly be worth letting us wait and weep through suffering? Jesus’ answer to this question is that He is!

Suffering gets our attention.

When Jesus waits...Jesus is the Answer even now.

Jesus speaks to you today.

“I am the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this?”

Lead in:

Since we stopped meeting in person together, we have had 3 baptisms. Here is one of them. **Baptism Video**

Lead out:

Today is the day for Jesuschangedmylife videos. Post them!
Watch them! Share them! Let's spread the contagious good news!
Jesus is alive!