

## The Problem of Evil and Suffering!

### Welcome/kids ministry

**Intro: (Maybe Sandra video)** In 1989, I was 17 years old and a junior in high school, when my grandfather died. He was a pastor, he pastored 10 different churches in eastern NC, over nearly 40 years of ministry but died of cancer. He was only 64 years old. Just before his death, I visited him in the hospital and he laid his hands on me, leaving me his blessing, his mantel. He believed I would grow up to be a pastor one day. Although, I was grateful for his blessing, I would have rather had my grandfather. If there is a God, and He is good, and He is all powerful why would he let my grandfather, a pastor, not only die but die a slow, painful death at such an early age.

**Where was God? Have you ever asked that question?**

### Read: Acts 16:16-34

I wonder, as Paul and Silas sat in a Roman jail, if they asked God and each other, how could God let this happen to us? If there is a God and He is good and He is all powerful, why are we in prison. Let me share some thoughts from our story.

### 1. Sin produces suffering.

**Explain:** What is sin? Sin is a violation of God's law and a violation of love. This poor girl is a slave. She is being exploited rather than loved. These men, rather than finding an honorable way to earn a living are abusing their power, taking advantage of this girl's vulnerability and exploiting her for financial gain. Our tendency is to blame God for suffering. The truth is, most pain and suffering are caused by people rejecting God, living for themselves and exploiting rather than loving others.

**Illustrate:** Parent's divorce- Hell into our family

- **Pastor:** I'm going to do it my way, Hell! Example after example. When their plan does not work, they get mad and often blame God.

**Argue:** **Romans 1:18-32**, reject God...suffering ensues, Hell breaks out.

**Argue:** **Matthew 22:34-40**, Jesus makes it simple. However, if we reject God, we assume the place of God and begin to violate the law of love.

**How do we learn to love each other?** It is a work of the Spirit.

**Argue:** **Romans 5:5, Galatians 5:22, 1 John 4:7-8**

**Apply:** *Be with, Become like, and Do what Jesus did.* The most clear and common message over and over, from cover to cover in scripture is this. God is good and when we follow Him His kingdom, the culture and blessings of His kingdom, grow. When we reject God and choose independence hell, pain, suffering begins to grow in our lives. Trust me, follow me, choose life!

**Argue:** **Joshua 1:8, Psalm 1:1-3**

## 2. Jesus brings Life!

**Explain:** When Paul and Silas encounter this young girl, she is possessed by an evil spirit. This spirit gave her the ability to tell the future. This ability earned her masters a lot of money. Slavery was common in the first century, 1 in 5 people were slaves in the Roman Empire. Each day this girl would proclaim, these men are servants of the Most-High God and they have come to tell you how to be saved. Finally, Paul commands the evil spirit to come out of her and instantly she is set free.

**Argue: 1 John 3:8, Colossians 2:13-15**

**The Devil wants to enslave us; Jesus came to set us free. John 10:10**

A. **Sometimes our suffering is caused by the sin of others.** Girl, Paul and Silas, their families and friends, Jesus- Easter, my story. However, God can redeem our suffering. *One of the most important skills in life is the ability to reframe our suffering as an opportunity for growth that propels us into the future.*

B. **Suffering can open our hearts and push us to Jesus.** Girl, Paul and Silas, Jailer and family! God took a bad situation and used it for their good.

**Illustrate:** When I look at my life, over and over again, God has used my suffering, suffering has been a huge catalyst in my spiritual journey. Even now, I am 53, I have been following Jesus for 30 years, but God is using my current suffering to grow and deepen my faith.

**Argue: Romans 8:28, OT Characters**

**We generally take the path of least resistance.** We are not willing to do what it takes to change until the pain of staying the same is greater than the pain of change.

A. **Freedom is instant and progressive. (Verse 25)** This girl was instantly free but had to learn an entirely different life. The Jailer and his family were forgiven but had to learn how to follow Jesus. Paul and Silas were free internally before they were free physically. They were free before their circumstances changed.

**Question: What if God is waiting for you to change before changing your circumstances?**

**How?** Paul and Silas are in prison but worshipping Jesus. If we can worship, in the midst of our suffering, Jesus will set our hearts free.

**What is worship? Romans 12:1, Jesus is my aim and my happiness. I will not demand anything. Psalm 37:4, "This one thing!"** When our hearts are free, our relationships flourish and we make wise decisions. Paul and Silas stay when most would have run. The jailer and his family are saved and then they are exonerated which the soldiers discover they are Roman soldiers. Rather than them leaving as fugitives they left with an apology.

B. **Sometimes we are not delivered, in this life, from our suffering. Why?** Why did my grandfather, a pastor who served the Lord most of his life die? I do not know. Maybe one day I will understand. However, I will not allow what I do not know to invalidate what I do know.

## **The Death and resurrection of Christ, gives me unshakeable hope!**

### **4. Jesus brings Hope!**

**Explain:** The reason the apostles were so courageous, is they knew through first-hand experience, death was not the end. They would live forever in a resurrected, glorified, incorruptible, eternal body! If I know, upfront, I cannot lose, it is not possible, I have amazing courage, strength, hope, peace, and joy!

**Illustrate:** Abraham, Noah, Joseph, Moses, David, Apostles- Courage! **India**

**Argue:** Galatians 2:20, Romans 8:18-24, 37

**Apply:** So many people are trying to anchor their hope, peace, happiness, joy, love in their circumstances. We must anchor our lives in Christ, our resurrected, glorious, reigning king!

**Argue:** Revelation 21-22- We win!

**Apply:** Following Jesus is not a decision or a moment it is like marriage; it is a life-long transformational journey. If you learn to follow Christ and intentionally cultivate your relationship with Him it will grow stronger, rich over time until one day you are standing face to face with Him and all our suffering ends!

### **Prayer for those who are suffering**