



SESSION 6: BROKENHEARTED

TOPIC: Why Is There Evil and Suffering in Our World?

GOAL

The goal of this session is to introduce the teens to the idea of suffering and offer them a lens through which they can view and better understand suffering in their lives and the world.

KEY CONCEPTS

When we live in a relationship with God, we come to know God's greatness and want to live our lives for Him.

The problem of evil is a challenge to our faith and there is not a simple answer.

There is no way to escape the reality of suffering. The difference between Christianity and all other world religions is that we worship a God who suffers with us and desires to bring good out of it.

KEY TERMS

Faith: Both a gift of God and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God who invites his response, and freely assents to the whole truth that God has revealed.

Moral Evil: Results from the free choice to sin which angels and men have; it is permitted by God, who knows how to derive good from it, in order to respect the freedom of His creatures.

Natural Evil: A result of the state of journeying toward its ultimate perfection in which God created the world, involving the existence of the less perfect alongside the more perfect, the constructive and deconstructive forces of nature, the appearance and disappearance of certain beings.

SCRIPTURE

Genesis 1:28

James 1:17

Psalms 34:18

Romans 8:28

CATECHISM

222-227

272-273

306

309-313

1040

ABOUT THIS SESSION

The Gather is a competition that involves various handicaps that make it difficult for the teens to win the game. The Proclaim addresses the reality that suffering is inevitable, while reminding the teens to not lose hope because God suffers with us. During the Break, the teens have an opportunity to reflect on the suffering they have experienced and discuss why God allows suffering. The Send encourages the teens to serve those in their community who experience suffering and closes the session with the Litany of Trust.

ENVIRONMENT

Display different images of suffering around the room, for example: someone with a physical handicap, a person who is homeless, someone struggling with depression, a family grieving the loss of a loved one, or a natural disaster.

AS YOU GET STARTED

For a deeper Send, consider inviting a speaker to come share about their experience encountering and alleviating suffering in the community. Following the testimony, allow the teens to ask questions about this person's experience. Once all of the questions have been asked, have the speaker help facilitate the planning of a service project for a community who experiences suffering. Some service projects include assembling sack lunches for individuals who are homeless, making care packages or cards for elderly individuals who live in a nursing home, serving a meal at a local soup kitchen, or volunteering their time at a camp for youth with special needs. Encourage the teens to plan out the details of their service project and follow through on their commitment that week or at a specified, later date. Once the teens have finished organizing their service project, invite them to pray the Litany of Trust to close the session. A sample litany can be found on the *Litany of Trust* handout.

GATHER

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. Welcome them to the session and begin in prayer.

Balloon Competition (10 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space and instruct them to remain with their small groups. Give each group an inflated balloon and explain that they need to keep it from touching the ground. Give some groups a handicap (e.g., they cannot speak, they must keep one hand behind their back, they must stand on one leg, they have to link arms, they have to keep multiple balloons in the air) but allow one group to participate without any handicaps. The group to keep their balloon in the air the longest wins. If time allows, play multiple rounds, assigning more difficult handicaps each round. Be sure that the same group is not assigned any handicaps throughout the various rounds. This group will likely win every round. This dynamic will be processed in the Proclaim.

PROCLAIM

"Brokenhearted" Teaching (15 min)

Faith

Our faith in one God matters, and our relationship with God has implications in our lives. When we live in a relationship with God, we come to know God's greatness and want to live our lives for Him.

CCC 222-223

When we live for God, we recognize the great things He has done for us and we live with gratitude. Since everything we have is a gift, we cannot help but thank God for those gifts and blessings.

CCC 224; James 1:17

Our relationship with God has implications for our other relationships as well. We see the unity of all people as created by the same God and born with the same dignity. When we look at our neighbor, we see people made in the image and likeness of God, just like we are.

CCC 225

When we view creation, we also make good use of the things God has created. We respect our world, the environment, and the whole of creation that God has given us. We use it ethically and responsibly.
CCC 226; Genesis 1:28

This faith in one God also means that we trust God in every circumstance. This can be the most difficult part of our faith. It is easy to trust God in good moments and in moments when everything is going well. It is much more difficult to trust God when our lives feel like they are falling apart, when we suffer, or when we witness the suffering of others. It can be hard to trust God in a world filled with evil.
CCC 227, 272

Struggles in Faith

When we hear about God being all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing, we may at first agree with those statements but then come to ask important questions: “What about suffering and evil? Does God know about that? And, if so, why does God seem so powerless against it?”

The question of evil and suffering in our world is a big one. It does not seem fair. Think about our opening game. The leader of the game had control over which groups had handicaps and which groups did not. Did you notice that one group seemed to always enjoy the favor of the group leader?

At this point, ask the small group that did not have any handicaps to identify themselves, if the large group does not already know who they are.

This group did not have any handicaps. When we think about the challenges we face in our world, it is easy to think that, if God is the master of the world, He should just remove the challenges, suffering, and evil we face.

The problem of evil is a challenge to our faith and there is not a simple answer. If you have experienced suffering or the effects of evil in your life, there may sometimes seem like there is not an answer that is good enough. Sadly, many people will say that the reason they do not believe in God is because of evil and suffering in our world.

There is a response to suffering and evil, though it is not a short answer. The story of Christianity is the response — it is a story of the creation of the world as good, but the fall of the world due to human pride. It is a story about God, who does not give up on us, and the ways in which some people choose to follow God and others reject His law. The story culminates in Jesus, God’s Son, who saves us by suffering on a cross.

CCC 309

To accept that answer, we need to enter into a relationship with God based on our faith that God is good and always wills our good. God is powerful and the master of all creation, but in His goodness, He allows us to determine our will. This, in itself, is a sign of how good God is.

CCC 273, 306

Two Kinds of Evil

There are two kinds of evil that cause suffering in our world — natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is only evil in the sense that it causes human suffering, but there is nothing “evil” in the sense that something sinister is being chosen. Natural evil is the result of the natural realities of our world. We are biological beings who live in a world where viruses, bacteria, and disease exist. We can get sick. Nobody caused the illness, but it still causes suffering.

Similarly, our bodies can develop diseases on their own because of a genetic predisposition or because they simply wear down. Natural disasters occur as a normal part of our weather patterns and the development of our planet.

This does not make these realities easy and it is simple to ask, “Well, why cannot God stop those things?” God created the world in a state of journeying — the world is not perfect but is moving toward perfection and ultimately will not be perfect until the end of time when God unites heaven and Earth for eternity.

CCC 310

The reality that we suffer in a world that is not perfect comes from the introduction of original sin into human history. The natural realities that can end our mortal life are a reminder that we are not made simply for this world; it is not our final home.

Moral evil is far more devastating than natural evil because we choose it. We cannot determine when the next storm will strike or if we will develop a chronic illness, but we can choose to sin against others and others can choose to sin against us.

CCC 311

God allows for this kind of evil out of love. That may seem like an odd sentence, but think about the nature of love. Love requires a free choice. God could make us slaves to His will, but instead, God allows us the freedom to choose our own will. Since God is love, to make us slaves would go against His very nature.

CCC 306

While God permits moral evil to exist, He is never the direct or indirect cause of it. There is never a point where God enacts evil. It would go against who God is. God does, however, permit evil in order to allow our freedom of choice to exist. God, in His infinite goodness, can bring good out of evil.

CCC 311

When we look at the cross hanging in our church, we understand this reality. The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, is the greatest moral evil committed. Yet, out of that evil God brings resurrection and new life. However, evil never becomes a good thing, even if God can bring good out of it.

CCC 312

A World of Hurt

Suffering is a reality we must face and even if God can bring good out of it, it is not always easy. Many saints and holy men and women lived lives that included suffering. Saint Paul experienced suffering and persecution in his life, ultimately being martyred, and yet still wrote, “We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him.”

CCC 313; Romans 8:28

God does not will our destruction, but only wills our good. That said, God is close to us when we suffer. In the Book of Psalms, we read, “The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”

Psalms 34:18

There is no way to escape the reality of suffering. All of us are going to experience it. The difference between Christianity and all other world religions is that we worship a God who suffers with us and desires to bring good out of it. We worship a God who is brokenhearted when we are brokenhearted.

We also believe that one day, God will triumph over all of these injustices and restore what has been broken. Our response to suffering and evil is faith and a resolve to act to remedy injustice and evil where we see it.

CCC 270, 1040

There is no simple answer to suffering, but there is a response. Our first response is faith that God has not abandoned us. Over the coming sessions we will dive more deeply into the answer to evil that can only be known in Jesus Christ. Our second response is to work in whatever way we can to combat injustice and evil and to eliminate evil and sin from our lives.

If you are experiencing suffering from evil in your life, know that God has not abandoned you. God wants to heal where you have been hurt and walk with you. This does not diminish how difficult it might be or the gravity of the pain you may be feeling. It does offer hope that our suffering and pain in this world is not the end of the story, but is one way that God can be present to us and ultimately make us whole.

BREAK

The Hospital Video (5 min)

Play the video “The Hospital” as a transition from the teaching into the small group discussion.

Small Group Discussion (20 min)

Divide the teens into their small groups. Begin in prayer and then use the following questions to facilitate a discussion:

- Think of a time in your life when you experienced suffering. What was that experience like? Did any good come from that situation?
- Why would God allow us to suffer?
- *Read Romans 5:3-5.* What stood out to you in this passage?
- Is there someone in your life who is an example of suffering that produced hope? What can you learn from this person?
- *Read Luke 9:23.* What does it mean to deny yourself? What does this look like in your everyday life?
- What are some of the crosses you are currently carrying? Why does Jesus give us different crosses to carry?
- How can we support one another in our suffering?

SEND

Alleviating Suffering (20 min)

Gather the teens in the main meeting space. While in the large group, explain the importance of supporting one another in our suffering, especially those who are most vulnerable in our society. Invite the teens to brainstorm different populations in the community who experience suffering and ways they can help alleviate that suffering. **Give the teens time to plan a service project for this group of people.** Some service projects include assembling sack lunches for individuals who are homeless, making care packages or cards for elderly individuals who live in a nursing home, serving a meal at a local soup kitchen, or volunteering their time at a camp for youth with special needs. Encourage the teens to plan the details of their service project and follow through on their commitment that week or at a specified, later date.

Once the teens have finished organizing their service project, invite them to pray the Litany of Trust to close the session. A sample litany can be found on the *Litany of Trust* handout

Handout: Litany of Trust

From the belief that
I have to earn your love...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear that I am unlovable...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the false security
that I have what it takes...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear that trusting you
will leave me more destitute...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From all suspicion of
your words and promises...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the rebellion against
childlike dependency on you...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From refusals and reluctances
in accepting your will...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From anxiety about the future...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From resentment or excessive
preoccupation with the past...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From restless self-seeking
in the present moment...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From disbelief in your love
and presence...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of being asked
to give more than I have...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the belief that my life
has no meaning or worth...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From the fear of what love demands...

Deliver me, Jesus.

From discouragement...

Deliver me, Jesus.

That you are continually holding me,
sustaining me, loving me...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That your love goes deeper than my
sins and failings, and transforms me...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That not knowing what tomorrow
brings is an invitation to lean on you...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That you are with me in my suffering...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That my suffering, united to your own,
will bear fruit in this life and the next...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That you will not leave me orphan,
that you are present in your Church...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That your plan is better
than anything else...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That you always hear me and in
your goodness always respond to me...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That you give me the grace to accept
forgiveness and to forgive others...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That you give me all the strength
I need for what is asked...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That my life is a gift...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That you will teach me to trust you...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That you are my Lord and my God...

Jesus, I trust in you.

That I am your beloved one...

Jesus, I trust in you.