



LIFE GROUP STUDY GUIDE

JANUARY–MARCH 2016

WEEK 4

GOOD SUFFERING

This study guide should be used the week following the sermon it supplements.

MAIN TEXT: Acts 7:54-8:3

54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul.

59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

8 1 And Saul approved of their killing him. On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. 2 Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison.

GETTING STARTED

The issue of suffering is said to be one of the most common objections people have to the Christian faith. Discuss why this is the case, especially in our twenty-first century Western world.

DIGGING DEEPER

1. Reflecting back on the last study, what had got the Sanhedrin so upset? Why do you think people respond negatively to the gospel? What makes them want to put their fingers in their ears? *Hint:* “A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.” (CS Lewis)
2. Read Acts 2:36-37, 41, 6:8, 15 and 55-56. How should the Sanhedrin have responded? How does this passage help to prepare us for different responses as we press on proclaiming the gospel (see also 2 Corinthians 2:14-16)?
3. When we (inevitably) face suffering it’s easy to look down or around with tears in our eyes at our trying circumstances. What does Stephen’s example encourage us to do?
4. What did Stephen see when he looked up? How did seeing Christ help him and give him assurance in the midst of great suffering? *Hint:* God is sovereign over suffering, turning the greatest evil (cross) into the greatest good (salvation). Death has been defeated; resurrection life beyond the grave is possible. God (unlike all other gods) has experienced the worst suffering and can, therefore, comfort us in our suffering. He knows what you’re going through.
5. Why is it significant that Jesus is “standing” and earlier referred to by Stephen as the “Righteous One” (7:52)? See also 1 John 2:1-2 and Hebrews 7:25. *Hint:* “Stephen has been confessing Christ before men, and now he sees Christ confessing his servant before God.” (FF Bruce)
6. What impact did seeing Jesus have on the way Stephen went on to suffer (see Luke 23:34, 46)? How can we resist retaliating or enforcing our rights and forgive and pray for those who hurt us (physically but as is more common, verbally)?

COMING UP

Alpha Course | 11 Jan-14 Mar
Beta Course | 11 Jan-22 Feb
Prayer Meeting | 17 Feb

7. Read Acts 8:1-3 (again) and 26:14. What purposes were there in Stephen's suffering? How did God again turn evil for good (Rom 8:28)? *Hint:* Stephen's preach changed the world by helping to convert the apostle Paul (aka Saul). The scattering pushed the church in Jerusalem out of its comfort zone to witness to the wider world.

NEXT STEPS

1. Discuss which of the above points might be most persuasive when discussing the topic of suffering with non-Christians.

2. Explore how other worldviews/belief systems (e.g. Buddhism, Atheism) attempt to answer the problem of suffering. Learn how to draw attention to their inadequacies.

3. Find out if anyone in the group has been facing particular opposition to their witness in recent weeks? Discuss different responses that could be made in light of what's been learned, encourage and pray for them.

4. Research how some Christians in the UK are being persecuted for sharing their faith, e.g. nurses, registrars, street evangelists through the Christian Institute or Christian Concern for our Nation website. Pray for them to be Christlike, like Stephen, in their suffering.

5. Commit to memorising the following verse this week:

"And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:59-60)

PRAYER

- Thank God for the encouragement we have in seeing how he vindicates his servants and the promise of glory as we suffer with Christ.
- Ask God for grace to respond rightly to gospel opponents.
- Pray for any of your family, friends or colleagues who may have responded negatively to the truth about Jesus.
- Pray for strength for yourself and other Christians all over the world facing opposition for sharing their faith.
- Pray for the gospel fruitfulness of courses and events coming up.

