

Where was God?

1: God in the Good & Bad Times

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each take a turn to share 2 things you liked & 1 thing you didn't like (or was difficult) over the Christmas/New Year period.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

In 3s/4s, use people's responses to the 'Welcome' question, to pray together – thanking God for the good things & praying about any difficult things. You could finish by all putting your hands on one person's shoulders in turn and praying 'God bless you in 2014. Amen'.

WORD

In this series, we're taking a brief look at the story of Job & exploring some of the big questions it raises. Job is thought by some to be the oldest book in the Bible.

Read Job 1 – You could read this between you by allocating parts: Narrator, Job, Satan, God, Messengers (don't take personally which role you get!)

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

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Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Are there any big questions that this passage raises for you? (list them, rather than discuss them now)

Verses 9-11 are key to the whole book – Satan's challenge to God is: Does Job only follow God for his own benefit?

- Why might Job have followed God just for his own benefit?
- In what ways might we see Christianity as primarily about 'What's in it for me'?
- How does this fit with people's attitudes to life today?
- Do you personally find it's easier to follow God closely, keeping him as your number 1 priority, when things are going well... or when life is tough? If possible, give examples.

How do you feel about the way that the interaction between God and Satan is portrayed in this chapter?

- Who is in control?
- What are the motives of each?

Imagine you were Job, without the 'view from heaven'...

- Describe your feelings. How would you have reacted?
- Would you have talked to God – and if so, what would you have said? How would it compare to verses 20-22?
- Have you ever felt like this in your life?

WHAT NEXT?

- Get out your PI charts from last term & pray for the people on them
 - * Who could you invite to Alpha?
- Pray too for the Alpha Courses starting soon
- Pray for any people – you or others – who are suffering at this time (albeit less than Job)

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2: Why do Good People Suffer?

The issue of suffering is huge & complex! It's also very important to a lot of people. Try to stay focussed on the topic, but give everyone a chance to share their thoughts & feelings – and **please be sensitive**. You may want to explore people's responses further over the next few weeks – the sessions in this series (& the next) touch on related issues.

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

If you saw children starving in the third world on the news, what feelings would come to mind? Each share just 2 words.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Try reading Psalm 22:1-8 with appropriate music in the background. This Psalm was quoted by Jesus on the cross. As you listen, reflect quietly on his suffering for your sake – and respond either silently or together in prayers of thanks/praise.

WORD

Someone briefly summarise Job 1. Now Read Job 2:1-10

Now write the following on separate sheets of paper: God, Devil, Us, Others. Also, add a few blank spares to add other words. Put them in the middle so everyone can see them as you talk together.

- Which of the following do you personally think are the main reasons for bad things happening to us? Why?
 - * Because of **God** – testing/teaching/punishing us
 - * Because of **the devil** – an attack

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- * Because of **us** – our sin or lack of faith
 - * Because of the actions of **others** – now or in the past
 - * Because of **something else** (add any other reasons people suggest to the sheets of paper in the middle)
- How many of these do you think were reasons for Job's suffering?
 - * Which ones weren't? Why?
 - * Do you think the causes of Job's suffering are typical or unusual?

Divide into 2s/3s/4s. Each group discuss one scenario from...

1: A person whose child has died; 2: Someone injured in a car crash;
3: A cancer patient; 4: A hungry child in the 3rd world.

- * Give all the possible reasons you can think of for the suffering.
- * What factors make it easier/harder to explain? Why?
- * What do you think God feels about these situations?

Now, share briefly what you talked about with the whole group.

- *In 2s/3s/4s:* If possible, share one or two personal examples of suffering and your response to them. *Please be sensitive to others.*
- *All together:* How would you answer someone who asked you: 'How can a loving God allow people to suffer?'
- Stories of severe suffering (Job, Jesus & others) play an important part in the Bible. How might this fact help in facing suffering yourself – or offering a Christian response to others?

WHAT NEXT?

- Pray for the Alpha Courses
- In 2s/3s/4s: Share anything you're struggling with personally at the moment. Pray for one another. THEN mention anyone else you know who's suffering/struggling & pray for them.
- **To think about:** One role of Growth Groups is to care for one another. How could you support one another better as a group?

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3: With friends like these...

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...
In your opinion, what makes a good friend?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

If there's someone who plays an instrument in the group, let them choose a song to play, then sing it together.

WORD

First: Summarise between you the story so far of Job 1:1-2:10.

Now: Discuss: Imagine Job was a friend of yours. You visit him one day and he tells you what he's just gone through. How would you react?

Next: Read Job 2:11-13

Then: After their silence, Job's friends then offer lots of different opinions and advice. For example... **Read** Job 4:1-7

Job responds to them... **Read** Job 16:1-5

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Now write the following large on sheets of paper: 'Listen', 'Offer Advice', 'Give gifts', 'Practical help', 'Keep away', 'Hug', 'Pray', 'Challenge', 'Write'. Now add any other general ways that you can think of in which you could respond to a friend who was struggling. Put them in the middle so everyone can see them as you talk together.

- If you were one of Job's friends, which approach to Job do you think you'd be most likely to adopt? (be honest!)

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- As one of Job's friends, how would you feel about Job's reactions?
- How could Job's friends have done better in their response?
- Share examples from your own experience of times when you feel it was right to either offer your opinions or to remain silence

Now imagine you are Job...

- How would you feel about your friends' reactions?
- How would you respond to their silence?
- How would you respond to their advice?
- We're all different. When you are struggling, which responses do you value most from your friends, if they are trying to care?

Sometimes Job listens to his friends, sometimes he ignores their advice, sometimes he responds.

- When other people give us advice, how can we decide what to listen to, what to ignore and what to challenge?
- Imagine someone offered you advice about your health or someone offered you a new job... how would you decide whether to take their advice or not? In what ways could you seek God's will for you?
- Share examples of when you've been glad that you listened to other people's advice and also examples when you should have ignored advice you were given.

WHAT NEXT?

- **Pray** for people known to you who are suffering at this time.
- **From last time's thoughts:** Discuss ways in which you could care for one another better as a group.
- **To think about:** As part of the church, are there ways that you could get more involved in helping people in our community or church – through listening, giving advice or in practical ways?

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4: Restoration Man

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Discuss: Who likes/doesn't like DIY/Restoration/Building TV programmes & why?

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

God responds to Job by pointing him to creation. Each write down or draw a few things in creation which inspire or amaze you. Each share one of them with the group. Finish with a few people saying a few short prayers mentioning some of them.

WORD

We've jumped to the end of the story. Here's part of God's response to Job...

Read Job 38:1-7; 40:6-14

After God graphically points out his power and knowledge as Creator, Job then responds...

Read Job 42

Discuss your initial reactions to these passages:

- Does anything jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

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In 38:1-7 onwards, even God himself doesn't answer the question of suffering in his response to Job. Instead, he puts his own questions to Job and points out graphically that he is the creator of everything.

- How do you think Job felt about God's response?
- How do you feel about God's response?
- How do you feel about living with unanswered questions about suffering?

At the end of the story...

- Does Job pass the test posed by Satan in 1:9-11? Who is the judge? How is this relevant to the difficult times we go through?
- Job shows that his reason for following God is not for what he gets out of it. What steps can we take to avoid this pitfall ourselves?
- Job may feel that he's done well in being faithful to God. But he still recognises his need to repent (42:4-6). Would you do the same in his shoes? Why/why not?
- God gives Job twice as much as before (42:10). But, what if Job finished worse off than before or even died? Would there be any ways in which the message of the story would change?
- What does Job's story say about our attitudes to possessions?
- If you could change the ending of the story from chapter 38 onwards, how would you do it?
- Summarise what you think are the main messages of the book of Job.

WHAT NEXT?

- Using information from organisations such as Open Doors, Tearfund, ICFEM etc, pray for people who are suffering elsewhere.
- In what ways has the book of Job helped your view of issues such as suffering? (Feedback on the notes is always appreciated!)