



MESSY MIDDLE

Tragedy and pain are brutal facts of life, which no amount of prayer or obedience can help us escape. In fact, Jesus taught that suffering and death were inevitable products of the sin that had infected the world, and He displayed power over both sin and its consequences in His miracles and ultimate resurrection. But just because God didn't cause suffering and doesn't always choose to alleviate it, doesn't mean He isn't using it. Christians have believed for millennia that in the same way that our sense of pleasure give us glimpses of the way God intended things to be, our pain acts as an avenue to focus our attention on His voice—because acknowledging the brutal fact of our predicament on Earth just might be the necessary first step to embracing the savior who invites us to trade sin and death for the redemptive reality of resurrection, to join Him in making all things new. We may not see the complete triumph over death and suffering on Earth in our lifetime. But the resurrection allows us to retain hope in the end of the story.

Start Talking

1. Do you tend to remember difficult seasons of your life with relief, fondness, or disgust? Why do you think you remember them with these feelings?
2. Would you rather be stuck on a desert island with certainty that you would never be rescued, no knowledge of the future at all, or the certainty that you would be rescued, but it would occur in the final days of your life?

Looking Back

1. On Easter, we talked about strategies for trading in the patterns of this world for the reality of Jesus's resurrection. What did you do this past week to join Jesus in the redemptive work of making all things new?
2. When were you most tempted to fall back into the old, dead patterns of sin that dominate the world? How did you respond?
3. Who in your circle of influence needs the hope of Jesus's resurrection right now? How did you pray for them this past week?
4. What did you do to be a real, tangible source of hope for them as you prayed?



What About You?

1. Were you raised to assume there is a one-to-one correlation between bad behavior and suffering?
2. What is, or has been, your go-to explanation for why good people suffer?
3. Has suffering ever chipped away at your faith?
4. Do you find it easier or more difficult to connect with God in difficult seasons? What about during seasons of success?
5. Do you think of yourself as an optimist, a pessimist, or something in between? Why?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passages: John 9:1–5. Mark 2:5–10. Romans 5:12, 17. Philippians 2: 6–8. Hebrews 4: 15–16. Romans 8: 18–24.

1. What do you make of Jesus's explanation for why the man was born blind? What does this tell us about the ultimate purpose of suffering?
2. Re-read Hebrews 4:14-16. According to verse 14, why should we remain faithful during seasons of suffering?
3. According to verse 16, what can we expect from God during seasons of suffering?
4. When Jesus healed the man lowered into the home on the mat, what do you think he was implying by saying, "Your sins are forgiven," instead of, "You are healed; pick up your mat and walk?"
5. The Apostle Paul traded in a life of privilege and comfort for one of nearly constant suffering. Based upon the section of Romans that we read, how did Paul understand his temporary suffering? What gave him hope?

Putting It All Together

1. What will you do when you are faced with the "brutal facts" of suffering and death this week? What would a New Testament response look like?
2. What would it look like to adopt Paul's outlook on hope and suffering in your life in the days to come? What phrases or concepts from his explanation in Romans can you implement in your prayer and internal monologue?
3. How can your "hope in the end of the story" inspire you to give and love more freely this week? After all, the decision to give and love is only risky when the end of the story isn't secure.
4. If God uses pleasure and pain to draw our attention, what can you do to intentionally "listen" over the next few days? How can you make room to hear His voice in your life?
5. What are three ways you can strategically remind yourself of the hope we have in the "end of the story" this week?

