

Big Idea: Pain doesn't mean God has left the room.

Primary Scripture: John 16:33; Romans 8:28

Supporting Scripture: Psalm 34:18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

If you've ever played one of those "Would You Rather" games, you know that some questions are fun and easy.

- "Would you rather have unlimited pizza or unlimited tacos?"
(The correct answer is tacos, by the way. But we can argue about that later.)
- Then there are those questions that stop the room. The ones that make everybody go quiet. The ones that don't have an obvious answer.
 - Questions like... *If God is all-powerful and all-loving... why do bad things happen?*
- Unlike a "Would You Rather" question, this one isn't hypothetical.
- Every single person in this room has been through something painful.
 - Maybe someone you love got sick, and no amount of praying seemed to change anything.
 - Maybe your parents went through a divorce, and your whole world felt like it was splitting in half.
 - Maybe you've dealt with anxiety or depression and wondered why God didn't just take it away.
 - Maybe you've lost someone, a grandparent, a friend, a pet, and the grief felt so heavy that you couldn't imagine God being anywhere near you in that moment.
 - Maybe the pain wasn't that dramatic. Maybe it was quieter.
- This question isn't just asked by people who don't believe in God. It's asked by people who do.
 - Because if God is real, and if God is close, then why doesn't He fix things? Why does He let people suffer? If He's all-powerful, He could stop it. If He's all-loving, He'd want to stop it.
 - So... what's going on?
- These are not easy questions. And anyone who tells you the answer is simple probably hasn't been honest with themselves about the weight of the question.
- But here's what I want us to explore today: What if the most important question isn't "Why does God let bad things happen?" but "Where is God when bad things happen?"

- Those are two very different questions. And the Bible has a lot to say about the second one.
- We're in the middle of a series called ***Ask Me Anything***, where we're wrestling with some of the biggest questions people have about God.
 - A couple of weeks ago, we asked, "Is God even real?"
 - Last week, we asked, "Why does God feel far away?"
 - Today, we're tackling maybe the most difficult question of them all: ***If God is good, why do bad things happen?***

SCRIPTURE (What does God's Word say?)

- Jesus is speaking to His disciples on the very night He's going to be arrested.
- Within hours of what we're about to read in John, Jesus will be beaten, mocked, and crucified.
- He knows **exactly** what's coming.
- In that moment, with the weight of the entire world on His shoulders, He doesn't sugarcoat what's ahead for His followers, either.

³³ I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world. (John 16:33 – NLT)

- Suffering is part of living in a broken world, and Jesus doesn't pretend otherwise.
- Thankfully, He follows that statement with something that changes everything: "Take heart, because I have overcome the world."
- Jesus isn't promising to remove every difficult thing from your life. He's promising that difficulty doesn't get the last word. He does.
- Pain is real, but it's not the end of the story.
- The Apostle Paul picks up this same thread in his letter to the Romans.
 - Paul knew real pain, and he was writing to people who knew it too.
 - The Christians in Rome were living under a government that was starting to make life more and more difficult for people who believed in Jesus.
- When Paul writes the next verse, it isn't a theory. It's a lived experience.

²⁸ And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. (Romans 8:28 – NLT)

- If you've been around the church for a while, you've probably heard this verse before.
- Someone has probably even quoted it to you in the middle of something painful, as if to say, "Don't worry about it, it'll all work out!"
- When we use it that way, it can feel dismissive, like our pain is being brushed aside with a Bible verse.
- But Paul's not saying that every bad thing is secretly good. And he's not saying we should be grateful for tragedy.
- He's saying that God is able to take even the most painful, confusing, broken situations and, over time, bring something redemptive out of them.
- That's a huge difference. And it's a promise that requires patience and trust, not instant understanding.

INSIGHTS (What might this Scripture mean?)

1. Suffering is real, and God doesn't pretend it isn't.

- Jesus looks His closest friends in the eyes, on the worst night of His life, and tells them the truth: "This is going to be difficult."
- The Bible is full of people who suffered simply because the world is broken.
 - Job lost everything he had in a single day.
 - Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers.
 - David spent years running for his life, hiding in caves.
 - Paul was beaten, shipwrecked, and thrown in prison more times than he could count.
- Over and over, Scripture represents a God who meets us in our pain and says, "I see you. This is real. And you're not alone in it."

¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; he rescues those whose spirits are crushed. (Psalm 34:18 – NLT)

- God doesn't move away when we're hurting. He moves ***closer***.
- The moments when you feel the most broken, the most crushed, the most alone, those are the moments when God is drawing near.

- Pain doesn't mean God has left the room. It often means He's closer than you realize.

2. God didn't cause your pain, but He will walk through it with you.

- There's a big difference between God causing our suffering and God working through our suffering.
- God didn't design the world to include suffering. Suffering entered the picture when sin did, all the way back in Genesis.
- God takes broken things and makes them into something new.
- That means God refuses to let pain have the final say in your story. He's always working behind the scenes, even when we can't see it.
- This is a pattern you can trace all the way through Scripture.
 - God took the slavery in Egypt and used it to forge an entire nation through the Exodus.
 - He took the cross, the most brutal instrument of death in the Roman Empire and used it to bring salvation to the world.
 - Over and over, God takes the worst things and redeems them.
 - That doesn't make the suffering okay. But it does mean suffering never has the last word.
- Joseph's story in Genesis is one of the best examples of this.
- After being betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, falsely accused, and thrown into prison, Joseph eventually found himself in a position to save an entire nation from starvation.

²⁰ *You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. (Genesis 50:20 – NLT)*

- That's Romans 8:28 in action. Not that the pain was good, but that God was at work through it the entire time.

3. Your pain has an expiration date.

- When you're in the middle of something difficult, it can feel like the pain will never end.
- If that's where you are right now, I want you to hear what Paul says, because he's writing this from a place of real suffering, not from the sidelines.

¹⁶ That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷ For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! ¹⁸ So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever. (2 Corinthians 4:16-18 – NLT)

- This is the same guy who had been beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and left for dead.
- He's not minimizing what you're going through. He's comparing it to something even bigger: the glory and restoration that God promises to everyone who trusts in Him.
- Think about it like watching a movie.
 - There's always a point in the story where things look hopeless, where the hero is down, the villain is winning, and you can't see how it's going to work out.
 - If you walked out of the theater in the middle of that scene, you'd miss the whole point. The ending changes everything.
- God is asking us to trust that the story isn't over. The pain you feel right now is real, and it matters. But it's not the final chapter.

ACTION (How could we live this out?)

1. Name where it hurts.

- This week, when pain shows up, stop for a second and name it.
 - Say it out loud, write it in your notes app, or tell a trusted friend: "This is what's hurting right now."
 - Not a fix. Not a solution. Just acknowledging it.
- Naming it is the first step to everything else.
- Every time you do it this week, remind yourself: **Pain doesn't mean God has left the room.** He's right there with you, in whatever you just named.

2. Pray like David did.

- The more you read Psalms, the more you'll notice a pattern in how David prays:
 - He is **brutally honest** about what's happening *right now*.

- He is **quick to remember** how God has shown up for him and saved him *in the past*.
 - And he **holds on to hope** for what God will do *in the future*.
- This week, follow in David's footsteps when you pray.
- Here's what that could look like:
 - **Be brutally honest** – Don't perform for God. Don't pretend everything is fine when it isn't. If you're angry, tell Him. If you're confused, say so. If you're hurting, let Him know. If you're not even sure you want to talk to God right now, tell Him that, too. That's the kind of honesty David brought to God over and over in the Psalms.
 - **Be quick to remember** – Think about a time when God showed up in your life and thank God for helping you through a time when you needed Him the most.
 - **Hold on to hope** – Choose to trust that if God showed up for you before, He'll show up for you again and again and again.

3. Reach out to someone who's going through something difficult.

- This week, think about someone in your life who's going through a tough time.
 - Send them a text. Sit with them at lunch. Ask them how they're really doing and actually listen.
 - You don't need to have all the answers, just be there.
- Sometimes the best way to show someone God hasn't left the room is to walk into it yourself.