Confident Conversations

# 2: Why do people suffer?

## Discussion questions

1. Can anyone remember (or suggest) any ground rules for talking with non-believers? (see PowerPoint)
2. The problem of suffering seems to be the biggest problem for people. Why do you think this is? (God is all powerful, knowing, loving and present, yet evil still exists!)
3. There are 2 types of suffering –
   1. suffering caused by people and
   2. suffering caused by nature

Which is the hardest for people to come to terms with when thinking about God?

1. Three Christian responses to the problem of suffering are
   1. The Fall – when sin entered the world it became corrupted and spoiled
   2. Free Will – people’s wrong choices still cause suffering today
   3. Soul Making – God allows suffering to make us stronger

All the above are true, but why is this not enough to convince someone to believe in God?

1. Read the following:

*‘For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,’ declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* (Isaiah 55:8-9)

How do these verses help the Christian to handle the problem of understanding why people suffer? (Sometimes we have expected God to behave like we do or we have tried to understand God who is beyond our understanding)

1. Does any of this help answer the question to a non-believer? NO! So what can we do? We can share our story! Show how this verse is true for us from personal experience:

*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* (Romans 8:18)

(Our job is to show a hurting world that we have hope. Future hope for a perfect afterlife)

And this verse:

*3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. 5 For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.* (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)

(We can show others we have a present hope because God is with us)

1. So our story is, “Evil exists, but thank God he is present in my suffering. I trust in his love to see me through. He will never leave me nor forsake me. I’m so glad I have a God who is all knowing. He knows my suffering, he understands my pain. I believe in his power to put things right, if not now, in the future.”

Ask people to share how they have known God’s presence in their suffering.

Then ask how confident they’d feel sharing that story if the issue came up in conversation with an unsaved friend. This is the kind of relational evangelism that speaks volumes and cuts through the questions.

1. Finally, read the following to remind the group that even the hardest person knows deep down inside that there is more to life than this.

*He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.* (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

Finish by praying for divine moments with our unsaved friends and family and for Spirit-led conversations that lead to genuine searching and finding Christ.

Have a great time!