



CONNECTED

11-14yrs

Session title:

GOD AND SUFFERING



AIMS

- To establish how suffering entered the world.
- For each young person to consider how their choices affect the world around them.
- To repent for poor choices and to receive comfort for past and present hurts.



MEMORY VERSE

**'GOD IS CLOSE TO THE
BROKEN HEARTED AND
SAVES THOSE WHO ARE
CRUSHED IN SPIRIT.'
PSALM 34:18**



CATCH UP (10 mins)

Refer to the teaching notes for guidance on how to run this time.



GOD SPOT (5 mins)

Have the young people talk about what they have seen God doing in their lives or the lives of others. They can also speak about things they are grateful for that have happened in their lives that week.

(This is based on teaching from Session 6 of the curriculum. If you haven't done this session than I recommend you don't include this.)



GAME 1 (5 mins)

Have five boxes marked 1-5 on the top. Inside each box put different prizes some you definitely wouldn't want to get and some you really would. Make sure the box is sealed.

At the beginning of the game ask for a volunteer - this is the person who will make choices (The chooser).

Have another five people volunteer, give them a box to hold each.

Now ask your volunteer to choose a box (they can say a number from 1-5). Tell the youth: *In the boxes are... and list the items from nice to nasty.*

Once they have chosen a box, ask if they would like to swap it for another number. If they refuse a box, open it to see what's inside. Repeat the offer until you have offered all the other numbers.

The chooser gets to keep whatever is inside the box they are now holding.

At the end say, *don't you find it interesting that our choices affect what we get in life?*



ILLUSTRATION (5 mins)

Pass Appendix 1 around the group and read it out loud.



DISCUSS

(5 mins)

The people in this story have suffered terribly. What things do you think about God when you hear about someone suffering on the news? (Why does He let it happen? Why doesn't He do something about it? Why does He make it happen? It's unfair. Is God playing with us? Could all be possible responses they give.)



TALK

(15 mins)

People have been trying to understand why we suffer for a very long time. There has been lots of different thinking on the matter. However, the Bible tells us how the world got messed up. In Genesis 2 is an explanation of how God created the earth. Within the story is the idea that God made man. He then puts man into the world, otherwise known as the Garden of Eden. God provides trees filled with food in the garden. In the middle of the garden, he puts the tree of life and the tree that gives knowledge about good and evil.

It says, God put man in charge of the Garden to work the soil and take care of it. God gives man one command, "You may eat from any tree in the garden. But you must not eat from the tree that gives knowledge about good and evil. If you eat fruit from that tree, on that day you will certainly die!"

Then God says, "I see that it is not good for man to be alone. I will make the companion he needs, one just right for him." So he creates woman to be man's partner.

He gives man the chance to name all the animals and birds. He puts men and women in authority over all things. The devil hates that man and woman have this authority and uses this hate to suggest to the woman that she does what God has asked them not to do...

"Woman, did God really tell you that you must not eat from any tree in the garden?"

The woman swallows his suggestion hook, line and sinker and eats from the tree. Then to make herself feel better about what she has done she encourages her husband to do the same. He falls for her suggestion, hook, line and sinker!

In that moment their eyes are opened and they feel shame for the very first time. It's rubbish, they feel so bad that they hide from God. It says God was in the garden in the cool of the day suggesting people and God used to walk together, enjoying a close relationship. The problem is in Genesis, Adam and Eve are so ashamed they are hiding in the bushes. Their relationship with God is broken and they have started to suffer as a result of their poor choice. Things get worse, Adam blames Eve, not taking responsibility for his own actions.

God takes control and tells them there is a consequence for their sin. Things are going to get rough and they have to go out into the world and work out how to survive. They will have to work for the things they need in life.

As a result of bad choices, suffering is introduced to the world. However, we know God is everywhere so even when they leave the Garden of Eden, God doesn't leave his people. As we move through Genesis we see a story of God again and again pursuing relationship with his people. In their bad choices, God is pushed away or drawn near when they turn back to him.

Do you think our choices affect how we feel about God?



TALK CONTINUED...

We know that there is a lot of suffering in the world caused by people's bad choices but how does God feel about suffering? What do you think?

When we want to figure out how God feels about something it's really useful to see what Jesus said or how He behaved. In Matthew 4:23 it says Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching, telling people the Kingdom had come, healing every disease and sickness, releasing people from shame and judgement. Look at Luke 4:18-19, what is Jesus saying? Jesus' actions and His words told people that God doesn't want people to suffer.

Does God use all things for good? Yes, but does he want you to suffer? No. He will however, let the consequences of our choices affect us and others, otherwise free will wouldn't be free will. The trigger for suffering in Genesis 3 is Eve's choice. It's the same in the world for many forms of suffering. Bad choices have resulted in some awful things happening in the world.

What does that tell us about the choices we make?

How do your choices affect other people? (Help them to think not just about choices that affect others directly but choices that affect others indirectly) – 4 hours alone on the Xbox may seem to affect no one else but does it help your parents? Does it reduce the time you spend with brothers or sisters or friends? Is there the potential our indirect choices make us unhappy or unhealthy and that affects others?



RESPONSE (10 mins)

Are there any choices you've made in the past that you want to say sorry to God for? If there are, write them on a piece of paper and come and shred them. Father God, we're sorry when we make selfish choices. Help us to make better choices in future.

God cares when we suffer, that's why He sent Jesus. The Bible says the Holy Spirit is sent to comfort us when we suffer. Take a moment now to think of a time when someone has hurt you. It might be happening now or in the past. Jesus cried when his friend died and he had great compassion for those who were suffering. I'm going to play some music and in your head ask God to come and comfort you and see what happens.

Suggested track: 'Jesus Hold Me Now' by Casting Crowns, 'Until the Whole Earth Hears.'



ACTION (10 mins)

Open Doors is a Christian organisation which helps suffering Christians across the world. There are practical things we can do to stop suffering. Have a look at this information and... (take an action from the website that you think will connect with your youth, there is a variety of options).



GAME 2

(5-10 mins)

Hand out a pack of mini Smarties to each young person in the group. Ask them to eat them until they only have one colour left. Now tell them to come and get a card from you with that colour on it – they may need to share the card if some of them have the same colour (Appendix 2).

Each colour corresponds to a question. They now need to read the question and take it in turns to answer it in front of the group.



RESOURCES

- Print a copy of Appendix 1 for each young person
- Suggested music track: 'Jesus Hold Me Now', Casting Crowns, 'Until the Whole Earth Hears'

For the Response section:

- Paper shredder
- Paper
- Pens

For the Action section:

- Download information about suffering Christians in a location of your choice. Make sure you choose a location where there is an action your young people can take, such as letter writing, praying, giving or fund raising: <http://www.opendoorsuk.org/>

Game 1:

- 5 boxes with lids
- 5 'prizes' to go inside the boxes from nice to nasty

Game 2:

- A pack of mini Smarties for each young person
- Print Appendix 2 onto card and cut up

