

Leader Guide

Where is God in The Middle of Suffering?

Fall 2026 | Week 6

Message Date 10/18/2026

THE GOAL

This week we welcome our guest, Dr. John Jackson, for a stand-alone message on one of the oldest and most honest questions a human heart can ask: “Where is God in the middle of suffering?” The problem of suffering and pain in this life is a much larger conversation, and one night together will not do it justice. Please be sensitive to the people in your group. Every person has either walked through pain, is walking through it right now, or loves someone who is, and some may be suffering at this very moment.

Our goal is for every person to leave knowing they are not abandoned in their pain, that God is present, good, and still writing the story, and to feel encouraged to fix their gaze on things that cannot be seen and keep sowing seeds of prayer and faithfulness for a future they may never see, but that God will surely bring to harvest.

MY STORY

- 1) What’s the most dramatic you’ve ever been about a really minor injury or inconvenience? Think paper cut or stubbed toe?
- 2) What is your favorite movie trilogy of all time and why?

QUICK REVIEW

- 3) What caught your attention from Sunday’s message?

DIGGING DEEPER / TAKING IT HOME

Lamentations 3:31–39 (NLT)

“³¹For no one is abandoned by the Lord forever. ³²Though he brings grief, he also shows compassion because of the greatness of his unfailing love. ³³For he does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow. ³⁴If people crush underfoot all the prisoners of the land, ³⁵if they deprive others of their rights in defiance of the Most

High, ³⁶if they twist justice in the courts—doesn't the Lord see all these things? ³⁷Who can command things to happen without the Lord's permission? ³⁸Does not the Most High send both calamity and good? ³⁹Then why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins?"

- 4) Verse 33 says God “*does not enjoy hurting people or causing them sorrow.*” How does it help to know we don't have to call our suffering good, and that God takes no pleasure in our pain?

Scripture never asks us to pretend we're fine. Evil is evil, and God doesn't ask us to call loss or sickness good. He takes no joy in our pain, and even in grief He shows compassion because of His unfailing love. It's safe to bring honest questions to Him. No one is abandoned by the Lord forever.

- 5) Verses 34–36 describe injustice and ask, “*doesn't the Lord see all these things?*” Sunday, we heard that some things God does not want still happen. How does that shape how you view your pain?

God's perfect will is what He desires; His permissive will is what He allows in a world with real freedom and a creation broken by sin. When someone chooses evil or a body breaks down, that isn't God's heart being carried out, and He sees all of it. He isn't the author of our pain, but He is able to redeem it.

2 Corinthians 4:7–18 (NLT)

⁷We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

⁸We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. ⁹We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. ¹⁰Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

¹¹Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies. ¹²So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

¹³But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, “I believed in God, so I spoke.” ¹⁴We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. ¹⁵All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

¹⁶That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. ¹⁷For 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! ¹⁸So 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.”

6) Paul says we are like “*fragile clay jars*,” pressed on every side but not crushed.

Which line in verses 8–9 best describes where you are right now?

Clay jars were ordinary and easily cracked, and that’s where God chooses to hold His great treasure, so everyone knows the power is His. Our cracks are often where the light gets out. Every line turns on one word: “*but*.” Invite your group to look for the “*but*” in their own story. God isn’t finished yet.

7) Paul says his suffering was “*for your benefit*,” so God’s grace would reach more people. How have you seen God use someone’s suffering to strengthen others?

Our pain is never only about us. Paul’s hardships became the place where others saw the life of Jesus. Many of us can name someone whose faith through loss or heartbreak strengthened ours more than any sermon could. That’s not pressure; it’s the hope that nothing we carry is wasted in God’s hands.

8) Paul calls our troubles “*small*,” though he had been beaten, shipwrecked, and imprisoned. What does it look like for you to “*fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen*”?

Paul isn’t saying our pain is small; he’s weighing it against a glory so great it will one day feel small. Fixing our gaze on the unseen is a daily practice: Scripture before the news, a Psalm, worship on the way to a hard appointment. We don’t need to feel strong for a whole season, just to look up for today.

Hebrews 11:32–40 (NLT)

³²How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets.

³³By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. ³⁵Women received their loved ones back again from death.

But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. ³⁶Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. ³⁷Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. ³⁸They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. ⁴⁰For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.”

- 9) Some in Hebrews 11 shut the mouths of lions; others were tortured and killed, yet all *“earned a good reputation because of their faith.”* Have you ever felt an unanswered prayer meant your faith was too small?

This passage gently dismantles the idea that more faith would have prevented our pain. Some people’s faith brought them out of the fire; others’ faith carried them through it all the way home. Both pleased God. Faith isn’t measured by whether our circumstances change, but by whether we keep trusting the One who holds them.

- 10) Some *“placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection.”* Knowing the big picture of Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration, how does the end of the story change how you walk through the middle?

Suffering feels unbearable when it feels like the final word, and it isn’t. God created a good world, sin broke it, Jesus redeemed it, and one day He will restore it completely. We live in between, so we still grieve, but the resurrection guarantees a day with no more death, sorrow, crying, or pain.

- 11) None of these faithful people *“received all that God had promised.”* What prayers are you praying and what seeds are you planting that you may only see answered in your children or grandchildren?

The heroes of Hebrews 11 never saw the promise fulfilled, yet they are counted among the most faithful people who ever lived. Many of us stand on the prayers of someone who prayed for us long before we said yes to Jesus. Now it’s our turn. No prayer is wasted, and God will bring the harvest in His time.

CHAIR TIME TOOLS

Reflection Questions for Chair Time: think about the following questions and pray through them with Jesus.

- 1) Where have I been pressed or knocked down lately? Ask God to show you where He has kept you from being crushed.
- 2) Each morning this week, ask God to remind you of His faithfulness and to renew your spirit for the day.
- 3) Who am I praying for that I may never see the answer for? Write their names down and keep praying.