

WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

LESSON OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of this lesson is to resolve the natural and understandable tensions surrounding the co-existence of an all-powerful, all knowing, all-good God, and evil. If God is who believers claim him to be, then why does he allow vile evil and suffering in our world? We want to submit that the presence of evil does not repudiate God's command to put our trust in him (Proverbs 3:5-6).



Set Up Info:

Supplies Needed:

- Computer or Internet connection to watch an online music video
- Copies of the Student Response sheet (printed below)
- Bibles so you can look up the Scripture story (or copy the ones below)
- A shoe or ball to help facilitate discussion
- A life of integrity where the leader's actions are in harmony with the words spoken. Teens need to see the difference before they hear the difference!

Instructive Prep:

Perhaps more so than the typical civilian teenage population, military teens regularly come face to face with the horrible reality of pain, suffering and evil in our world. Daily they must square with the unsettling possibility that a parent may not return from a deployment, or, equally traumatic, that they might return with psychological, mental or physical impairments. These examples are not meant to diminish the very real hurt caused by all the other typical hardships associated with teenage life. But, together, they can produce an overwhelming sense of numbness toward God and life in general. That is why it is important that we as leaders be prepared to handle this issue confidently and with compassion.

There are a number of different approaches we could take in addressing the problem of evil. For example, we could tackle the problem on logical grounds, showing that there is no logical contradiction between the existence of God and evil. We could also attempt to debunk the evidential problem of evil, which states that the probability of God's existence, given the vast amount of evil in the world, is really low; therefore, God must not exist. Or, the evidence of evil exceeds the evidence of God's existence. Both of these approaches, the logical and evidential,

address the critics' arguments against God's existence in light of pain and suffering along rational and philosophical grounds, and they have their place. Their weakness is that they fail to address the emotional, and more irrational, hurt that results from pain and suffering, which in most cases seems to be the real problem. So if the actual issue is an emotional one, then it makes sense to address this issue at emotional and spiritual levels. Thus, a more pastoral approach seems to us to be the most helpful one to take with students.

The tension for us as Christians is that we believe in the seemingly impossible reality that an all-powerful, all-loving and all-good God exists *alongside* the evil in our world. "Why doesn't God just stop evil? Why can't he prevent it? If he's so loving, then why does he allow bad things to happen to good people?" are perfectly natural and understandable questions. In fact, the biblical authors repeatedly wrestle with the inherent conflict of a sovereign God and the existence of evil.

The good news is that God is not bothered by our questions; he's big enough to handle them. The unsettling precedent from Scripture, though, is that neither is God obligated to tell us why he allows evil or his purpose for it. It's altogether possible that even if he did tell us, we wouldn't understand anyway. So, in his all-knowingness, he chooses to remain silent on this issue. By faith, we need to accept that fact that somehow and in some way God must have a legitimate reason for permitting evil.

Let us, therefore, enter into students' lives. Let us be happy with those who are happy and mourn with those who mourn. Let us meet them where they are. But let us also respond biblically and in a Christian manner to their concerns.

The progression of these studies is four-fold: *learn, feel, do and what next*. We want students to learn something new, connect at an emotional level, and participate in doing something during study that brings them to a point of decision. Finally, the *what next* focuses on a change of attitude and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember, the goal is a complete transformation in kids' lives (i.e., spiritual, emotional, mental and behavioral), so the application section based on God's truth is really the crux of the time together. Have fun and lead well!

INTRO:

Have you ever wondered how it's possible for God and evil to exist? Many suppose that the mere presence of evil in our world nullifies the existence of an all-powerful, all-loving, sovereign God. Yet others find comfort in turning to God when bad things happen. How are we to make sense of this paradox? This study will help to bring some clarity to a complicated topic facing our military's young people.

INTRO STORY:

Images are powerful. Consequently, a great way to introduce a topic such as this is to show your small group a music video. The song is by Tim Hughes, titled “He’s Got the Whole World in His Hands.” What’s interesting about this video is that it creates tension in the mind of the viewer. Images of pain, suffering and evil flood the screen. When set against the chorus of the song, it raises the question, “If God has the whole world in his hands, then why all this evil?” Invite your small group to pay particular attention to the lyrics being sung and the images being shown. You can check out the video here:

http://www.tangle.com/view_video?viewkey=9bc81bf26fff58fa39d6&mui=6974c0a9b90143e37db255f6dee6ff9d

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Take a shoe or a ball and give it to one student. He or she can pass or toss it to another student to begin the discussion on question one. After answering, each person gets to pass it to someone who hasn’t answered. Do the same randomness through all the questions.

- After listening to this song and seeing the images, what is your reaction to this video?
- What sort of tension does this video create within you? Do you believe this was intentional on the part of the creators? Why or why not?
- How do you reconcile the seemingly contradictory truths that God and evil both exist at the same time? How would you respond to someone who denies the existence of God because of all the pain and suffering in our world?
- If God is all-powerful and all-loving, then why doesn’t he just eradicate all the bad and painful things in our world?
- Do you believe it’s possible that God has a purpose in allowing evil? If so, what might that purpose be? Can we know for sure?

CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGES:

As you read through this passage together, have your friends identify the reason for Job's trials. The selected passages are intended to convey the angst and confusion Job felt over his "series of unfortunate events." As you read, pay attention to the verses in italics as they highlight all that Job lost.

Job 1:1 – 2:10*Satan Tests Job*

¹ There was a man named Job, living in the land of Uz, who worshiped God and was faithful to him. He was a good man, careful not to do anything evil. ² *He had seven sons and three daughters,* ³ *and owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, one thousand head of cattle, and five hundred donkeys. He also had a large number of servants and was the richest man in the East.*

⁴ Job's sons used to take turns giving a feast, to which all the others would come, and they always invited their three sisters to join them. ⁵ The morning after each feast, Job would get up early and offer sacrifices for each of his children in order to purify them. He always did this because he thought that one of them might have sinned by insulting God unintentionally.

⁶ When the day came for the heavenly beings to appear before the LORD, Satan was there among them. ⁷ The LORD asked him, "What have you been doing?"

Satan answered, "I have been walking here and there, roaming around the earth."

⁸ "Did you notice my servant Job?" the LORD asked. "There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil."

⁹ Satan replied, "Would Job worship you if he got nothing out of it? ¹⁰ You have always protected him and his family and everything he owns. You bless everything he does, and you have given him enough cattle to fill the whole country. ¹¹ But now suppose you take away everything he has—he will curse you to your face! "

¹² "All right," the LORD said to Satan, "everything he has is in your power, but you must not hurt Job himself." So Satan left.

Job's Children and Wealth Are Destroyed

¹³ One day when Job's children were having a feast at the home of their oldest brother, ¹⁴ a messenger came running to Job. "We were plowing the fields with the *oxen*," he said, "and the *donkeys* were in a nearby pasture. ¹⁵ Suddenly the Sabeans attacked and stole them all. *They killed every one of your servants except me.* I am the only one who escaped to tell you. "

¹⁶ Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Lightning struck the *sheep and the shepherds and killed them all.* I am the only one who escaped to tell you."

¹⁷ Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "Three bands of Chaldean raiders attacked us, took away the *camels*, and *killed all your servants except me.* I am the only one who escaped to tell you. "

¹⁸ Before he had finished speaking, another servant came and said, "*Your children were having a feast at the home of your oldest son,* ¹⁹ when a storm swept in from the desert. It

blew the house down and *killed them all*. I am the only one who escaped to tell you. ”

²⁰ Then Job got up and tore his clothes in grief. He shaved his head and threw himself face downward on the ground. ²¹ He said, “I was born with nothing, and I will die with nothing. The LORD gave, and now he has taken away. May his name be praised! ”

²² In spite of everything that had happened, Job did not sin by blaming God.

Satan Tests Job Again

¹ When the day came for the heavenly beings to appear before the LORD again, Satan was there among them. ² The LORD asked him, “Where have you been?”

Satan answered, “I have been walking here and there, roaming around the earth.”

³ “Did you notice my servant Job?” the LORD asked. “There is no one on earth as faithful and good as he is. He worships me and is careful not to do anything evil. You persuaded me to let you attack him for no reason at all, but Job is still as faithful as ever.”

⁴ Satan replied, “A person will give up everything in order to stay alive. ⁵ But now suppose you hurt his body—he will curse you to your face! ”

⁶ So the LORD said to Satan, “All right, he is in your power, but you are not to kill him.”

⁷ Then Satan left the LORD's presence and *made sores break out all over Job's body*. ⁸

Job went and sat by the garbage dump and took a piece of broken pottery to scrape his sores. ⁹ His wife said to him, “You are still as faithful as ever, aren't you? Why don't you curse God and die?”

¹⁰ Job answered, “You are talking nonsense! When God sends us something good, we welcome it. How can we complain when he sends us trouble?” Even in all this suffering Job said nothing against God.

LIFE APPLICATION:

- What was the basis, or grounds, for Job's trials (ans: His righteousness (1:8; 2:3))? Who permitted Job's trials (ans: God (1:12; 2:6))? Who directly caused Job's trials (ans: Satan (1:9-11; 2:4-5))? Why did Satan not level his attack on Job prior to speaking with God (ans: because God did not permit him to do so (implicitly conveyed in 1:7-12 and 2:2-7))?
- From the answers to the questions above, is there anything here that makes you feel uncomfortable? If so, what?
- Read Proverbs 3:5-6 together. What are we commanded to do from this passage? Will we ever be able to fully and completely reconcile this problem of evil (ans: no)? Does God's command to trust him still stand (ans: yes)? Are you willing to trust God even when you can't make sense of life? If not, what challenges still remain for you?
- What is something big coming up in your life -- something that causes you anxiety or concern? Are you trusting God with it? If not, we challenge you to give the situation over to God; trust him to work it all out according to his will.

STUDENT RESPONSES:

- What do you think is more important in God's eyes – that we reconcile to our satisfaction the problem of evil or that we trust him even if we can't make sense of everything?
- Do you find it easy or hard to trust others? God? Why?
- Is there anything that we discussed today that makes you uneasy, uncomfortable, or that just doesn't quite sit well with you?
- What is something big coming up in your life? Something that causes you anxiety or concern? Are you trusting God with it? If not, what's holding you back?