

God, Pain, and Suffering - Part 2

John D. Wilsey

Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

Assignment One

Read the comments related to John 11:17 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answer to the following question: How was Martha's expression of faith limited by her human perspective?

Assignment Two

Read the comments related to John 11:35 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What is Jesus's response to the death of Lazarus? Why?

Assignment Three

Read the comments related to John 11:42 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What was Jesus' goal in raising Lazarus from the dead? How do you think you would have responded?

Scripture to Memorize *Jesus wept.* John 11:35

Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will understand how Jesus is the answer to the problem of pain and suffering.

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It's in the Book

30 minutes

Real-Life Scenario

Imagine you are experiencing a great loss in your life—the death of a close friend. This friend died in the prime of life, and you are struggling with grief and perplexity. Perhaps you are beginning to doubt the goodness and the power of God. How does the ministry of Christ in the death of Lazarus apply to your experience of profound loss and the pain and suffering that attend that loss?

Read John 11:17–44 out loud.

Studying the Passage

Verse 17. Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. We know that Jesus delayed two days before heading out to Bethany, but He must have delayed even more while en route because in the time it took Him to get to Bethany, Lazarus died, they prepared him for burial and then they buried him. Four days had elapsed. Sometimes God's delays when we're experiencing painful trials cause great confusion—as we will see in Martha and Mary.

Verse 21. Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. It is possible, but not certain, that Martha was angry with Jesus and rebuked Him for delaying. In any event, she was definitely giving voice to her perplexity at Jesus' delay. She felt comfortable being transparent because she had a fundamental trust in Jesus, even though her human perspective was limited.

Verse 24. I know that he will rise. Martha gave a "Sunday School answer" to Jesus' assurance to her that Lazarus would rise again, but Jesus was about to do something she was not prepared for, even though she had faith in Him. Often, God reveals Himself in ways that go far beyond what we think we already know about Him. It is important to remember that.

Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now share an answer to the following question: How was Martha's expression of faith limited by her human perspective?

Discussion Question

What "Sunday School answers" do we rely on when we think about Christ's person and work? Is it possible that His ways might be totally beyond what we think we've figured out?

On Your Own

What makes a miracle a miracle? In the space below, write several aspects of a miracle that make it recognizable as such.

Studying the Passage

Verse 25. I am the resurrection and the life. We know from verse 39 that Martha did not completely understand what Jesus meant by this saying. But He was about to explain the statement by performing the most amazing miracle prior to His own resurrection.

Verse 26. Do you believe this? Along with the description He gave of Himself, Jesus posed to Martha the single most important question she had ever been asked in her life. How would you have responded?

Verse 27. Yes, Lord, I believe. She had believed and continued to believe in Jesus. Her response was obviously sincere. She responded to Jesus' question from her heart and mind in the midst of her grief, perplexity, ignorance, fear and confusion. Even though she may have even been angered by Jesus' delay, her faith was unshaken on a fundamental level. It is indeed possible to be angry and confused but still trust in the Lord.

Verse 32. Lord, if You had been here. Mary confronted Jesus and said the same thing Martha had said when she first saw Him. Perhaps Mary was also giving Him a rebuke, but, like Martha, her fundamental faith was unshaken.

Verse 35. Jesus wept. "Jesus wept" is the verse we all love to memorize because it is so easy. But in reality, here we have one of the most amazing passages in the entire Bible. But think about this: Jesus knew that in a few minutes Lazarus would be alive and they would all be celebrating. Why then weep? Jesus wept because of His deep love for His own, His unfathomable care for them and His hatred of sin and death—even though He knew the outcome would be for the best.

Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: What is Jesus' response to the death of Lazarus? Why?

Discussion Question

If you were making up this story from scratch, how do you think you would have presented Jesus in this situation? What do the differences between how you would have presented the story and what really happened say about the truth of the gospel?

On Your Own

In the space below, write several aspects of the glory of God as seen in John 11:1–44.

Studying the Passage

Verse 39. Take away the stone. The stone was the line between belief and unbelief. The removal of the stone would be the demonstration of genuine faith. The potential uses of the stone as a metaphor for our own realities are limitless.

Verse 43. Lazarus, come out. This is the miracle, and the result was that many put their faith in Christ.

Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now share answers to the following questions: What was Jesus' goal in raising Lazarus from the dead? How do you think you would have responded?

Discussion Question

How is Jesus the answer to the pain and suffering Lazarus and his family experienced? How is their situation relevant to our own experiences?

Heart and Hands

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** at the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

Since Last Week

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to. . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

Grace-Filled Accountability

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

Prayer

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

At Home: Nail It Down

This is part 2 of our consideration of God, pain, and suffering. In John 11, we see that Jesus' power and love were far more profound than anyone present in that situation could have foreseen or understood.

Jesus' purposes in our own sufferings are not going to be the same for everybody, but we can know Jesus is moving in ways we do not know and could not understand. In other words, things are a lot more complex than "Jesus loves me/He loves me not" type explanations. Every circumstance has invisible and unrevealed considerations.

From John 11, we can draw the following eternal truths:

- Christ has His own purposes, and much of the time (if not most of the time), those purposes are hidden from our view. His purposes are always good purposes for those who love Him and are moving under His direction (see Romans 8:28).
- Of primary importance in any situation is our response to Christ, the resurrection and the life. We are to trust Him and to believe in Him, even when our knowledge and perspective are severely limited.
- Christ's love is more profound than the human mind can imagine, and He sympathizes with us in our weaknesses (see Hebrews 4:14–16).

These are just some of the reasons we can know Jesus is the answer to our pain and suffering as we live in this fallen world.

Follow up Question

How do you handle your own doubts when you are suffering?

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.