

Confronting Christianity

Week Eleven: How Could a Loving God Allow So Much Suffering?

Pre-Group Reading Material: Chapter 11 (Pages 193-208)

Questions:

- What stories of human suffering have you heard in the news recently, and how did these stories affect you?
- What two things do Christians believe about God that some atheists say are incompatible with the suffering we see in the world? (193 last paragraph) Why do they say this?
- Do you know anyone who has walked away from God because of suffering in their life? If so, what have you heard them say about their decision?
- While some have turned away from God because of suffering, it is worth considering what suffering means apart from God. If there was no God, what significance would suffering have? (194-195)
- While some may advocate nonattachment as a way to respond to pain in this world, the author, drawing on the observations of Jonathan Haidt, thinks this isn't a good response. What things would we miss out on if we lived in a state of nonattachment? (197)
- Read **John 11:25-26** When Martha came to Jesus in grief after her brother died, where did he direct her attention? What might this indicate to us?
- Read **John 9:2-3** together. Why is it important to acknowledge that not all suffering is a result of our individual sins? (203)
- The author describes the death of Jesus as the "lynchpin" and the "central peg of reality itself". (204) How should the fact that unjust suffering was at the center of Jesus's life shape how we think about suffering in our own lives? (see **1 Peter 2:21-24**)
- What hope can a Christian find from knowing the end of the story? (205) How can knowing this help us respond to suffering?
- McLaughlin says that "Christians... have done more in global terms to alleviate suffering than any other movement." (206) What beliefs do Christians have that might motivate them to combat suffering?
- On page 206, Rebecca mentions that "As Jesus's "body" on earth, therefore, Christians must throw themselves into fellowship with sufferers." What is one way you might join in fellowship with sufferers?
- What potential purpose for our suffering do we see reflected in **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**? (read and discuss) What is something a Christian has done or said to you that was comforting to you during a time of suffering?