



“Why, God?” Trusting in God’s Goodness in Times of Disappointment and Anger

Bible Study
Leader’s Guide

[Please provide: copies of this study, Bibles, and hymnals for each participant]

Opening Prayer: Lord, please bless us as we look at this study. Help each of us to be open to all that Your Holy Spirit will provide for us individually and as a group. Amen.

Everyone has had times when she had to ask, “Why, God? Something negative, disappointing or bitter happened and you really wanted to know why? How did you feel when you asked, “Why, God? As leader it is important that you do not allow anyone to share her feelings in detail. The question is asking participants to remember how they felt at a moment when they didn’t completely trust God. Expect answers of hurt, loss, sorrow, anger, rejection, etc. These are feelings from the past but for some it may not be the distant past.

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20). This dialogue between Joseph and his brothers took place after their father Jacob/Israel died. Let’s take a few minutes and look quickly at the life of Joseph for context.

Genesis 37:2-8	The jealousy of Joseph’s brothers.
Genesis 37:26-27	Joseph is sold into slavery by his brothers.
Genesis 39:4-5	Joseph entrusted with everything by his master.
Genesis 39:16-20a	The trap of Potiphar’s wife.
Genesis 40:6-8	Joseph used by God to explain dreams.
Genesis 41:41-43	Joseph promoted to Pharaoh’s second in command.

At what points in Joseph’s timeline might he have asked, “Why, God?” Joseph could have asked this question of God at any point in the timeline.

What good did God work out of Joseph’s troubles and disappointments? Many people were saved from death in the famine. The actions Joseph took while second in command to Pharaoh also led him to be reunited with his father and brothers.

Stuck In The Emotion

It is very common to experience times when you need to ask, “Why, God?” It happens to everyone when he or she is learning to develop the mind of Christ and to listen to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 2:12–14, 16b. How does the Holy Spirit help us when we ask, “Why, God?” The Holy Spirit helps us to understand God’s truths and His actions in our lives. While this understanding may not be complete, it is only by the Holy Spirit that we can even begin to understand God’s grace for us.

For most Christians, “Why, God?” questions come while we are immature in Christ. These questions come when what we anticipate God will do doesn’t occur as expected. As we mature in Christ, the “Why, God?” questions come in connection to extreme emotions of pain, sorrow, disappointment, anger or frustration. Some brothers and sisters are able to regain their trust in the Lord quickly but some Christians become stuck. The emotion is so extreme that some Christians struggle to recognize the Holy Spirit ministering to their hearts and minds. These Christians haven’t lost their faith, but neither have they experienced the healing needed to fully trust God and His guidance in their lives. Some emotions and experiences can be compartmentalized but real spiritual healing can sometimes take months or even years.

So how does a Christian become “unstuck”? How is she able to completely trust God again, and rejoice in His love and guidance in her life?

Remembering What God Has Done In Your Life

The prescription in God’s Word is very simple but effective. God knows that when His children get lost, stuck, or disillusioned it is always because of one thing; we have forgotten! We have forgotten all the amazing things God has done. We have forgotten all our prayers that God has answered, His blessings, His forgiveness of our sins, His miracles, and His never ending love. So the solution is to stop and remember everything, who you were, who you have become and who God always is. In remembering what God has done on our behalf, we are confronted with a story that moves us to tears, to unlimited joy, and to thankfulness beyond our capacity to fully grasp, explain, or ever repay!

Read Matthew 27:45–46. What is happening as the “Why, God” question is asked in verse 46? Jesus asks the “why” question as He suffers total abandonment from God, His Father. This is the ultimate point of Jesus’ suffering. He is completely alone as He suffers for all our sins and the sins of the world. Jesus suffered complete separation from God so that we will never have to face such terror. Jesus’ question is not asked because He doesn’t understand why such suffering was necessary. Instead, Jesus’ question expresses the horrific consequence that we would face for our sins without His sacrifice; that is, total separation from God for eternity.

How can these verses bring you comfort at the times when you ask, “Why, God?” At such times, we can remember that because Jesus suffered total abandonment on the cross when He suffered and died for our sins, God promises to never leave us or forsake us (Joshua 1:5b, Hebrews 13:5b). We can find comfort in knowing that Jesus understands our disappointments. We can find comfort in knowing that through His death and resurrection, Jesus overcame our every disappointment, pain, and sorrow to gain for us God’s forgiveness and the sure and certain hope of eternal life with Him through faith.

From where has God brought you? Far too many Christians want to completely forget their sinful past filled with shameful behavior and attitudes. When we try to forget our pasts, sadly it is very easy to downplay or erase the powerful actions of God to save, bless, heal and make us into new creations.

Read Romans 5:6–10. How do these verses describe the life changing power of God’s love and grace for us? Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are justified, saved from God’s wrath and eternal death, and we are reconciled to God.

These verses are very powerful because they don’t allow us to consider ourselves to be anything without Jesus. These verses declared us to be sinners and enemies so that there is no

room to be “nice”, “good” or better than our neighbors. Apart from God we are nothing and we owe Him everything.

Some people may feel uncomfortable thinking about who they were before Jesus made them new creations. However it is necessary to remember where you were so that you can appreciate where you are now. I have found that in moments of self-pity and when I am overwhelmed with emotions that I am almost convinced that no one including God understands me. In these moments the Holy Spirit will have me encounter a person who shames me out of my emotional pity party. Share a time when the Holy Spirit brought you out of an emotional funk and reminded you how incredibly blessed you really are? The participants can take several minutes to share these experiences because this sharing is part of the remembering process. There are no perfect answers but all should focus on being removed from self-pity or a stupor by being reminded that they are beloved and blessed by God.

Paul gives an excellent explanation of what sin does in our lives when we try to live without Jesus’ salvation. Read Romans 7:15–25a. In these verses, what does Paul acknowledge about himself? Paul acknowledges that despite will power and pharisaic perfectionism he can’t fulfill his good desires for God in and of himself. Paul was a Pharisee. Pharisees sought perfection in outward behavior and in Scriptural memorization. Paul realized that none of his effort was enough to be who God wanted him to be. Paul acknowledges that no one has hope except in the salvation of Jesus.

What else does Paul say about himself in 1 Timothy 1:15? Paul takes it further when he acknowledges who he was by declaring himself the *foremost* sinner so that never would anything distort who he was apart from the salvation of Jesus Christ.

How are you similar to the Apostle Paul? All of us *sin[ned]* and *fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). It is only by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus that our sins are forgiven and that we receive eternal life.

Paul’s thinking is very necessary for all of us because when we are stuck in a strong emotion it is easy to forget from where God has brought us and that He has been with us the entire journey. This truth that Moses told Joshua is true for us as well, “*Be strong and courageous . . . He (God) will not leave you or forsake you.*” (Deuteronomy 31:6)

During an emotional moment it is very normal to be caught up in the subjective, self-centered focus of the emotion. It is during this pain, disappointment, or sorrow that for a while everything is about you. A person may be overcome with the mindset that the situation is unfair or that God is indifferent to how he or she feels.

The emotion can cause us to negate God’s mercy and to diminish the grace and salvation of Jesus and the strengthening guidance of the Holy Spirit. However, when through Word and Sacrament we are reminded of all that God has done and continues to do for us, and when we repent of our sinful forgetfulness and self-centeredness, then we live in grace under the new covenant that depends completely upon Jesus and not anything within ourselves. *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast* (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Unstuck: Trusting God’s Goodness In Good And Bad Experiences

When a Christian remembers her past and God’s blessings, she recognizes that she is the collection of her experiences in Christ, both good and bad. Then all of her experiences become

opportunities to share God's love in Jesus. Regardless of her experiences, whether they were disappointing, sad, or even bitter, they all came with Jesus Christ at her side. Therefore they are experiences she can call upon when someone else is hurting, confused or stuck, and believes that no one else could possibly understand.

Paul gives a good example of using a bad moment when he discusses that Israel's troubles and problems were used to open the gospel to Gentiles. *So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!* (Romans 11:11-12)

Read Philippians 1:12–14. How did God use Paul's time of imprisonment to help spread the Gospel? While Paul was imprisoned, he shared the Gospel with the whole imperial guard and to all the rest (v. 13). Paul shared with everyone that his imprisonment was for Christ. Those brothers close to Paul saw how his imprisonment did not lessen his faith. This encouraged them to speak the Word boldly without fear (v. 14).

God enabled Joseph, Paul, and many others named in the Bible to share with others His love and salvation despite their suffering. Isn't it amazing that in both good and bad experiences, God can enable us to share the Gospel and find purpose? Everything we experience as a Christian becomes a resource for witnessing, teaching, compassion and understanding because we know that God was (and is) with us at every moment.

We started this study with memories of some raw emotions and some, "Why, God?" thoughts. Now we see that our experiences were not because we couldn't trust God's goodness but so that we might be witnesses and resources to others that God is ever-faithful!

The worst moment in my life was when my first wife suddenly died. I was in a fog for well over a year and was greatly troubled. As the Holy Spirit healed my sorrow I was also led to realize that this pain and experience would allow me to love, share with, and encourage people who earlier would have rightly thought, "You can't appreciate the pain and sorrow I'm experiencing"! Now I can tell of Jesus' love and better understand how that hurting person feels. Just as God uses me, He is able to use you because those bad, "Why, God?" experiences make you uniquely qualified to share His never-ending love and compassion with that person who is currently stuck in a fog and who is asking herself if she can trust God because of her pain, disappointment, and sorrow. God has blessed you to become a living witness to Him who is worthy of trust, love, and praise no matter what experiences life brings.

What painful life challenges have you experienced through which God has brought you to a greater understanding of the hurt and pain that others experience? Encourage participants to share.

Closing

Read responsively Psalm 136, a psalm of remembrance from your hymnals and then close with the following prayer: Thank You, Lord, for all my experiences in life, both good and bad. You have been ever-loving and trustworthy. Help me never to forget Your blessings and from where You have brought me. Thank You for making me Your child through the faith in Jesus with which You have blessed me through Holy Baptism. I rejoice that with Your loving care and wisdom, who I am today can be a blessing to a sister or brother who asks, "Why, God"? Bless me this day and everyday to rejoice in Your grace, mercy, and salvation. This I ask in the name

of Jesus, Your Son, my Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen.

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