



Group Discussion Guide

With Jesus In My Suffering

Sunday, September 25, 2011

Read

Read aloud through the story of Lazarus found in John 11:1-44. Go around the circle in the group with each person reading a few verses until you're done.

Discuss

As you hear this story read out loud, which parts seem to stand out to you personally? Which parts resonate with you? Which parts of the story make you uncomfortable or raise questions in your mind?

Suffering and death intersect all of our lives at some level, whether it's us personally or someone we deeply care about. How have you emotionally processed suffering in your past? (Our American culture doesn't help us very much. We cover suffering with facades and hide death in facilities. We don't know how to come alongside the suffering, much less how to process our own suffering in a healthy way.)

Read John 11:33-38. These verses paint a picture of Jesus' response to suffering. What do you think Jesus was feeling? How do you think Mary & Martha felt seeing Jesus' heart of compassion? Jesus weeps with us in our suffering. Does this change the picture of how you encounter suffering or death in your own life? If so, how?

Read verses 4, 14-15, 23-25, 40-42. These verses seem to show that Jesus was firmly grounded in a different reality or perspective than most of us live by. What do you think were a few of the main things Jesus wanted his disciples to see or understand from this event with Lazarus?

The question "why does God allow suffering?" has perplexed theologians and philosophers for centuries. Jesus seems pretty comfortable not directly addressing that question. Why do you think God allows suffering? How does John 11:4 inform our perspective – that Lazarus' suffering was "for God's glory"? Is it possible that "God's glory" and "our good" go hand in hand? If so, how? (Also see read Romans 8:28-29.)

If you're personally suffering in some way at this time, share with the group to the extent you're comfortable. Coach your group on how they can come alongside you and be praying for you in your process.

Pray

Reserve at least the last 15 minutes of group time to pray for the things that came up in your discussion and any other prayer needs.

Here's some background information on John 11:1-44:

Who were Mary, Martha and Lazarus? Where did they live? Where was Jesus?

They were siblings who were quite close with Jesus: "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus" (v. 5). They lived in Bethany, a village "near Jerusalem, about two miles away." (v. 18) For Jesus to visit a town so close to Jerusalem presented a real risk since the Jewish authorities intended to arrest him. Jesus was most likely on the other side of the Jordan River, where He had gone at the end of John chapter 10.

Why did Jesus wait instead of departing for Bethany right away?

So "that you may believe" (v. 15), and "for God's glory" (v. 4, 40).

How long had Lazarus been dead when Jesus arrived? What does this mean?

"He had already been in the tomb four days." (v. 17) Had He left right away, He would have arrived to find Lazarus already dead for 2 days. Chances are, Lazarus was already dead by the time Jesus received the message.

But still, why did Jesus delay for 2 days?

Possibly so that there would be no doubt that Lazarus was indeed dead. Given the way the days were counted back then, "two days" could have meant the morning after his death, and people could have said he was never dead. "Four days" (v. 17) meant at least 3 nights, during which decomposition would already have started, so there would be no doubt that Jesus raised someone who had died.

Why was Jesus "deeply moved in spirit and troubled"? Why did He weep?

The word for *deeply moved* (*embrimaomai*) in verse 33 can be used of snorting in animals, and in humans refers to anger. The second word, *troubled* (*tarasso*), is literally "troubled himself" (*etaraxen heauton*). So a better translation would be, "became angry in spirit and very agitated." Clearly the wailing (usually translated in v. 33 as "weeping") provokes his response, and some suggest Jesus is angry at death itself and the pain and sadness it causes. Jesus asks where they have laid Lazarus, and they reply, *come and see, Lord* (v. 34). Their wailing had triggered anger; now their invitation triggers weeping (v. 35). Jesus has not yet come to the tomb (v. 38), so he is not weeping over Lazarus. There would be no reason to do so anyway, at least on his part. It is their invitation that wrings his heart. He does not wail (*klaio*) like them. Rather, he weeps (*dakryo*), that is, sheds tears. He is not in anguish over the death of Lazarus, but rather saddened by the pain and sadness they feel. He is weeping with those who weep (Rom 12:15) because he loves them. The grief caused by death is one facet of death's evil that caused his anger. He is angry at death and saddened at grief. In both cases the reason is the same, namely, his love for his friends. The love of God for us and his wrath toward that which corrupts and destroys us are two sides of a single coin.

Did Martha believe that Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead?

Yes, but what exactly did she believe about Jesus? When Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:26), He was asking her if she believed in something specific about Him - His power over death. Her general response - "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world" (John 11:27) - doesn't really answer His question directly. It would seem that she does not really grasp what Jesus is saying, as will be clear from her response when he does raise Lazarus (v. 39). But her faith is still genuine and solid, for it is in Jesus himself. She is not grasping all that he is saying about Himself, but she is sticking with Him and confessing as much as she knows, which is what faith is all about.

The background information above was adapted from JustBible.net and IVP New Testament Commentary.