



LIFEgroup Study Guide

April 28 - May 19



LIFEgroup Study Guide

This study guide follows along with LBF Church's current Sunday message series, and is intended to be a supplement in your daily passionate pursuit of Jesus.

- *Watch last Sunday's message video:*
[www.lbf.church/messages]

Is your group stumped? Did you come to a question that you feel needs clarification? Our church isn't too big, contact Pastor Dan with your questions.

- *Contact Pastor Dan:*
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Introduction

Pg. 5

Lesson 1: Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Job 40:6-14 • Pg. 7-9 • April 28

Lesson 2: Why Is Jesus the Only Way?

Hebrews 10:1-10 • Pg. 10-12 • May 5

Lesson 3: Is Faith Contrary to Reason?

Hebrews 11:1-2 • Pg. 13-15 • May 12

Lesson 4: What Are Biblical Masculinity and Femininity?

Genesis 2:18-25 • Pg. 16-18 • May 19

Introduction

For all of us, there are parts of the Christian faith that are hard for us to believe. These things serve as barriers to belief. They are teachings, practices, or beliefs that end up being obstacles for us. Either they keep us from placing our faith in Jesus at all, or they keep us from going deeper in our trust and love for God.

In this 4-part series, we will tackle four common barriers to belief. They each come in the form of a question: (1) Why does God allow suffering? (2) Why is Jesus the only way? (3) Is faith contrary to reason? (4) What are masculinity and femininity? These serve as barriers to belief because they conflict either with a prevailing cultural value or they simply seem like concepts that are difficult to reconcile.

As we walk through these four difficult questions, we will turn to Scripture. You will get a clearer answer to what the Bible actually teaches on these questions. The answers are unlikely to remove every bit of difficulty that the questions pose. That is to be expected because we walk by faith, and we are finite human beings who certainly cannot grasp every action of an infinite God. But, God-willing, the answers will help each of us take steps forward to trust Jesus more and more.



Why Does God Allow Suffering?

Lesson 1 • April 28 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

God has reasons for everything, even if we cannot see them.

Getting Started

1. What are some reasons why human suffering leads to a crisis of faith for many Christians?

2. How do questions about human suffering impact your personal view of God and your relationship with him?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Job 40:6-14.

¹⁶ Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm:

⁷ "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. ⁸ "Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?

⁹ Do you have an arm like God's, and can your voice thunder like his? ¹⁰ Then adorn yourself with glory and

splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty.

¹¹ Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at all who are proud and bring them low, ¹² look at all who are proud and humble them, crush the wicked where they stand.

¹³ Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. ¹⁴ Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you."

Job is a powerful book about human suffering. The book begins with Job, a righteous man, being tested to see if he will remain devoted to God when God removes a hedge of protection from him. Job suffers horrifically, losing his children, his financial stability, his possessions, and his health. He is brought low in suffering. Then he spends almost the entire book of Job arguing with his friends. Job maintains that he has done nothing to bring on this suffering, while his friends insist that God would not be afflicting him unless he had sinned in some way. Job wavers back and forth in his attitude toward God. On the one hand, he argues in favor of God's power and his justice. On the other hand, Job longs for an audience with God. He is convinced that he can bring his case to God, and that God will conclude that Job is in the right, and that he—God—has made an error in bringing this suffering.

Then Job gets what he asked for. Starting in chapter 38 (of a 42-chapter book), God speaks to Job. But instead of allowing Job to make his case

(which God has already heard him make), God does the talking. Chapter 40, verses 6-14 is the beginning of the second of two speeches that God makes to Job. In the passage, God zeroes in on the fact that Job is questioning God's justice. His response is to ask Job a series of questions. He asks Job whether or not he has the power to do what God is able to do. Then he invites Job to be the one to execute judgment on the world. He invites Job to unleash his wrath, to bring low the proud, to crush the wicked, and to bury them in the dust.

The core of God's message to Job seems to be that executing justice is a lot more complicated than it looks. God's words point toward both his wisdom and his mercy. In order to carry out justice on the earth, God must be wise enough to see everything that is going on. And, in order to keep every single human being from being crushed, God must show divine mercy. God seems to be saying to Job that all human life would be wiped out if God simply took Job's advice and gave a one-for-one consequence for every sin that has been committed.

Most of us struggle to reconcile God's goodness and his justice. We struggle to see how a good God could allow horrible suffering to people who don't seem to deserve it. In the end, God does not give Job a detailed answer for his methods. Instead he points Job to the fact that God, in his infinite power and wisdom, probably has access to more information than Job does. It is less of an explanation and more of a call to faith. It is a call to believe that God has a good reason for everything that he does, even if we don't always see his reasons.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Use one sentence to summarize what you see as God's message to Job in verses 6-9.

5. In verses 10-13, God basically invites Job to be the judge of the earth. But what kind of difficulties does it seem like Job would have in carrying out this task?

6. In verse 14 God says that after Job has successfully judged the world, then God will conclude that Job's "own right hand can save" him. How do you think Job's inability to judge the world is connected to his inability to "save" himself?

7. Read Job 42:1-6, where Job responds to God. How would you summarize his response?

Wrestling with Issues

8. If God has good reasons for all of the things that baffle Christians, why do you think he doesn't just explain these reasons to his people?

Taking it to Heart

9. If God chooses not to explain why he allows you to experience suffering and loss, what would help you to still be able to see him as trustworthy?

10. If it is unproductive to rage against God when we suffer, what do you think are some of the best ways we can respond to suffering and difficulties in our lives?



Why Is Jesus the Only Way?

Lesson 2 • May 5 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Jesus' sacrifice for our sins is the only thing that solves humanity's core problem.

Getting Started

1. What are some common objections you hear to the idea that Jesus is the only way to God?

2. How would you summarize in one sentence the purpose for which Jesus came to the earth?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Hebrews 10:1-10.

"The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming—not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. ² Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. ³ But those

sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. ⁴ It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. ⁵ Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; ⁶ with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. ⁷ Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, my God.' " ⁸ First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them"—though they were offered in accordance with the law. ⁹ Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. ¹⁰ And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

The book of Hebrews explores the ways that the Old Testament laws and rituals paved the way for the fulfillment that Jesus would later bring. This specific passage has to do with the Old Testament practice of animal sacrifice. The author begins in verse 1 by talking about the idea that these laws and rituals are a shadow of what would come later. Because these practices, including animal sacrifice, were shadows, they could never perfect those who draw near to worship. In other words, animal sacrifice could never truly make people acceptable to God. If they could, then people wouldn't keep making the same offerings year after year. They

would simply make the sacrifice and then move on. But the author says in verse 4 that it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

Then the author quotes from Psalm 40, and the passage is speaking about the idea of God valuing something over animal sacrifice. The idea is that when Christ came into the world, he brought something more than the sacrifices that the Israelites had been offering. Specifically, he brought a body. And, according to verse 10, the sacrificial death of that body has made people holy. When the author speaks this way, he is not saying that people were made sinless by the sacrifice of Jesus. Even the most mature believer still has falls and failures. What he means is that we are given a status that allows us to be fully reconciled to God. We are completely cleansed from our sins and set apart as God's people. What could not be accomplished by religious ritual was once-and-for-all accomplished through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. Verses 1-4 makes clear that the Old Testament sacrificial system was never meant to save us. According to these verses then, what were the purposes of the sacrificial system?

5. Verse 1 says that the sacrifices could never “make perfect those who draw near to worship.” What does this statement imply about the core problem of human beings?

6. According to verse 10, in what way (specifically) did Jesus succeed where the sacrificial system had failed?

7. Hebrews 10:14 says of Jesus, “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” How does the finality of Jesus' sacrifice impact your view of yourself and your relationship with God?

Wrestling with Issues

8. What is your gut reaction to the idea that the core problem for human beings is that we are estranged from God because of our sin and that our only hope is in a sacrificial death on our behalf?

Taking it to Heart

9. The gospel of Jesus is the only way to God not because it is a superior set of beliefs to other religions, but because only Jesus has provided a path to be cleansed and united with God. How does this impact the common objections about Jesus being the only way?

10. If Jesus is the only way to be saved, then Christians have a calling to share the message of Jesus with others. How do you believe God is calling you to share the gospel with others?



Is Faith Contrary to Reason?

Lesson 3 • May 12 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Faith is based on evidence, not on ignorance.

Getting Started

1. What do you believe is the relationship between faith and rationality?

2. What does it take to convince you to trust a person?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Hebrews 11:1-2.

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for."

Hebrews 11 is the great chapter on the heroes of the faith. Throughout this chapter the author chronicles the actions of Noah, Abraham, Moses, and many others who were at the center of great works of God

in the world. And the author specifically calls out the ways that these men and women took action "by faith." Faith is the center of the whole chapter.

In the first verse of Hebrews 11 the author gives a definition of faith. He says that faith is confidence in what we hope for. It is important to clarify that he is not using "hope" in the way that we often use the word today. He is not simply saying that faith is being confident that you will get into the college you "hope" to get into, or confident that the baseball team that you "hope" wins will be successful. Hope is about where we place our expectation. And hope is always about a future reality that we don't yet have in full. The author is saying that faith is when we act with confidence that a reality in the future will come to pass.

For example, a woman might stand at a platform waiting for a train to arrive so that they can take it to meet up with a friend. As she waits for the train, she might send a text to her friend saying that she will meet up with her in half an hour. She says this, even though there is currently no train to take her to her friend. But she has confidence that it will come (perhaps because the train arrival times are posted near the platform). This is faith.

Then the author gives another definition, saying that faith is assurance about what we do not see. Perhaps

the best illustration for this is a “trust walk.” A trust walk is an activity in which one person is blindfolded and then is guided through an obstacle course by a partner who is able to see. When the blindfolded person hears his partner call out, “There is a hole in front of you; you need to jump over it,” he has to act as if he is sure that the hole is really in front of him. He acts with certainty, even though he cannot see.

What both of these ideas have in common is that they deal with acting with certainty about something that is not certain. But in neither case is the person irrational for acting with certainty. The woman has good reason to believe that the train will arrive. The blindfolded man has good reason to believe that he is receiving accurate instructions. Faith deals with uncertainty, but faith still deals with evidence.

After this definition, the author says that faith is what the “ancients” were commended for. In other words, the heroes of old were applauded to acting with certainty about things that were not certain. This is reinforced in verse 6 when the author says, “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Faith is the center of how we relate to God.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. The author uses the words “confidence” and “assurance” as synonyms for faith. Give an example of how either of these words relates to the concept of faith.

5. When the author speaks of “what we hope for” and “what we do not see,” he is making clear that faith is about things about which we cannot currently be certain. What are some Scriptural teachings that require faith?

6. Verse 2 says that the ancients were commended for their faith. The author, throughout the chapter, speaks of these “ancients” by talking about Noah, Abraham, Moses, and others. Zero in on one of these heroes of the faith. What was the basis for their decision to act out of faith?

7. Hebrews 11:6 reinforces the teaching of verse 2 that faith commends us to God. How does faith show up in your everyday walk with God?

Wrestling with Issues

8. Critics of faith will advocate for a life of skepticism and rationality. Do you believe that a person can function in the world without exercising faith? Why or why not?

Taking it to Heart

9. As believers, our ultimate faith is in Jesus as Lord, and in him bringing us into a relationship with God through his life, death, and resurrection. How does faith specifically in Jesus set you apart from someone who has a generic faith in God?

10. Name one area of your life in which God is calling you to exercise risky faith, trusting him to fulfill his promises. How can you more fully embrace that call of faith?



What Are Biblical Masculinity and Femininity?

Lesson 4 • May 19 • by Dan Franklin

Main Point

Men and women are created equal, and yet different.

Getting Started

1. What, in your observation, are some of the differences between men and women?
2. Questions about gender dominate our culture today. What do you see as some positives and negatives about a more traditional view of gender, and what do you see as some positives and negatives about the current progressive view of gender?

Explanation of the Passage

Read Genesis 2:18-25.

¹⁸ *The Lord God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."*

¹⁹ *Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky.*

He brought them to the man to see what he would

name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. ²⁰ So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals. But for Adam no suitable helper was found.

²¹ *So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.*

²² *Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³ The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." ²⁴ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh. ²⁵ Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame."*

There is much that Scripture says about men and women, about manhood and womanhood. This passage in Genesis sets the stage for Scripture's teaching on this subject through the account of the creation of the first man and the first woman. Earlier in Genesis 2, God created the man and placed him in the garden in order to work and cultivate it. Then, in verse 18, God observes for the first time that something in his creation is not good. It is not good for the man to be alone. In order to solve this problem God decides to make a helper suitable for the man.

The Hebrew word that is translated as “helper” powerfully conveys something about God’s intention. The word does not imply inferiority. In fact sometimes the word is used of God. Furthermore, the “helper” will be like the man because she will be “suitable for him,” or corresponding to him. This is what the man reinforces in verse 23 in his poem about the woman being bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. At the same time, the term “helper” implies that the man and the woman will not be exactly the same, nor will they have exactly the same role. The man bears the main responsibility before God (a fact that is reinforced by God holding the man primarily responsible for the Fall in Genesis 3), while the woman will help by bringing support, aid, and partnership. It is a picture of equality and yet difference.

After God marches all the animals in front of the man, it is clear that none of them is the suitable helper. So God puts the man to sleep, removes one of his ribs, and fashions the woman out of the rib. Some have said that the woman was created from the man’s rib in order to symbolize that she was not meant to rule over him, nor to be trampled under his feet, but to be alongside him and close to his heart.

When the man sees the woman he rejoices in God’s goodness, seeing her as the ideal partner. Then the author of Genesis takes a moment to point out that this partnership will lead men to leave behind their families of origin in order to be united in marriage to a woman. Far from being an incidental fact, our manhood and womanhood are presented as core parts of who we are as human beings. Our manhood and womanhood are not to be set aside, changed, or disregarded. We are meant to embrace and celebrate the equality God has given us, and also the differences he has built into us.

Digging In

3. What struck you most about the passage—or about the sermon, if you heard it?

4. This chapter is overwhelmingly positive about both men and women. How do you think this is meant to shape our attitudes toward ourselves and to the opposite sex?

5. The key word that is used to describe the woman’s relationship to the man is “helper,” which sometimes elicits a negative reaction from people. However, how can this description be seen in a positive light?

6. If the woman’s role is described in the term “helper,” what kinds of things do you think this implies about the role of the man?

7. Throughout Scripture we see the reality of manhood and womanhood in Genesis 2 played out. Specifically, the New Testament authors play out this reality in terms of roles in the family (Ephesians 5:22-33, 1 Peter 3:1-7) and roles in the church (1 Timothy 2:11-15, 1 Timothy 3:1-7). How can Genesis 2 shed light on the ways men and women live out their identities in the family and in the church?

Wrestling with Issues

8. A key controversy of our time concerns men and women choosing to identify as the opposite gender, and sometimes even to have surgery done in order to attempt to change from one gender to another. How do you think Genesis 2—and the rest of Scripture’s teaching on manhood and womanhood—addresses this controversy?

Taking it to Heart

9. As believers, how can we embrace our God-given calls and roles as men and women, while also avoiding any forms of oppression or dehumanization that some fear will come from these teachings?

10. Name one specific way that you think God is calling you to take new steps in embracing your unique calling as a man or as a woman.