



SHADOW SIDE

GROUP GUIDE

SUFFERING CAN STRENGTHEN

START UP

When suffering and pain come into our life, it can feel like it's evident that either God is not good, is not all-powerful, or doesn't exist at all. It's been a reason why many people have abandoned their faith. But what if there is a shadow side to suffering, where everything, even pain, is redeemed for a purpose?

- How would you rate your pain tolerance level? Is it high enough that you barely notice if you've broken a bone? Or is it low, where you can't stand the thought of getting a flu shot in the arm?
- One of the biggest reasons people abandon their belief in God is because of the existence of pain and suffering. Have you or someone in your life dealt with serious doubt because of pain and suffering? What questions did it raise in your or their life?

DISCUSS TOGETHER

Read **1 Peter 4:12-13**.

- Some well-intentioned people believe that truly godly people won't suffer because God will rescue His children from hardship. Have you heard this teaching somewhere before? Why do you think some Christians believe that?
- How would you respond to that belief? Why shouldn't we be surprised by suffering?

Read **Romans 5:1-5**.

- God certainly has the power to keep His people from hardship. Why doesn't He? What is the purpose of suffering for Christ-followers?
- Andy said, "One of the greatest gifts God can give to a Christian is an all-expense paid stint in the crucible of character. What will it take to force us into disciplined cultivation of the inner garden of our private worlds? History seems to say over and over again: those under pressure seek God." Have you experienced a time of hurt and suffering that forged your character? How?
- Why do you think suffering is such a powerful crucible for character-building, refining, and dependency upon God? What makes it more powerful than success?

Read **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**.

- How can suffering give us perspective? What hope can we cling to when we wonder what God is up to during today's troubles?
- Andy shared a quote: "Pain is inevitable; misery is optional." How do we avoid misery in the midst of pain? What have you learned about journeying well through suffering?
- Is there a pain, hurt, or challenge, big or small, where there is potential for you to lose heart in some way today? Share what is going on with the group.
- Do you know someone who is suffering? How can you represent Jesus to them this week?

LIVE BIG

If there are ways people in the group are hurting, talk about how you, as a group, can come around each other. Is it meeting physical needs, helping out in some way, showing up somewhere, or something else? Then pray for each other: that God would use each of you to bring comfort to those who are hurting and represent Jesus in the midst of a broken world.