

Discussion Questions:

There is a question that has been asked since the dawn of time:

Why do bad things happen to good people?

- Is this a question that you have ever asked (either publicly or in the privacy of your own heart)?
- Was there a particular situation that caused you to ask this question?
- What are the basic assumptions that underlie this question?
- Is the question based upon a faulty premise?

The Old Testament Book of Job deals, in part, with this question. As readers of Job, we're able to see the bigger picture surrounding his life. We see that Job is an honest & upright man—and Satan is given permission to test him. We see four of Job's friends trying to explain the circumstances by placing the blame on Job. We see Job shaking his fist at God—but never renouncing his faith. And we see God answering Job in chapters 38-41.

- From what you know about the Book of Job—what answer is God giving us to this question of why bad things happen? How does Job respond (see Job 42:5-6)?

Philosophers and theologians down through the years have attempted to answer this question. Back in 1981, a rabbi by the name of Harold Kushner authored a book entitled *"When Bad Things Happen To Good People."* The book spent 8 months on the NY Times bestseller list, and was celebrated by Norman Vincent Peale as "a book all humanity needs." Rabbi Kushner wrote the book in response to his oldest son dying at the age of 14 from a rare and devastating condition called "progeria"—a condition that brings about rapid aging and early death. Rabbi Kushner's final conclusion was that even though he believes that God is good—he does not believe that He is all powerful. In Kushner's own words:

"I believe in God. But I do not believe the same things about Him that I did years ago, when I was growing up or when I was a theological student. I recognize His limitations. He is limited in what He can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom I no longer hold God responsible for illnesses, accidents, and natural disasters, because I realize that I gain little and I lose so much when I blame God for those things. I can worship a God who hates suffering but cannot eliminate it, more easily than I can worship a God who chooses to make children suffer and die, for whatever exalted reason.

Are you capable of forgiving and loving God even when you have found out that He is not perfect, even when He has let you down and disappointed you by permitting bad luck and sickness and cruelty in His world, and permitting some of those things to happen to you? Can you learn to love and forgive Him despite His limitations, as Job does, and as you once learned to forgive and love your parents even though they were not as wise, as strong, or as perfect as you needed them to be?"

- How do you respond to Kushner? Do you struggle with his answer? Is there a flaw in his thinking? Discuss his answer as a group.

Examination:

- Read **John 9:1-12**
 - Based upon verse 2, what was the disciples answer to why bad things happen?
 - Based upon verse 3, what was Jesus' answer to why bad things happen?
 - In The Message version of John 9, verse 3 is translated: *"You're asking the wrong question. You're looking for someone to blame. There is no such cause-effect here. Look instead for what God can do."* How hard is this to do? How helpful is this to do? How can our lives be changed when, instead of blaming God, we look for what God can do in our lives? Might this verse have helped Rabbi Kushner?
 - Why do you think Jesus made mud, placed it on the man's eyes, and commanded him to wash in the Pool of Siloam (vv. 6-7)?
 - How crazy is it that the blind man's neighbors didn't even recognize him (v. 8)? What does this tell us about how well they actually knew him?
 - Does this miracle give new meaning to the fact that Jesus is the light of the world?
- Read **John 9:13-34**.
 - Mud is mentioned in verses 6, 11, 14 and 15. It's clearly an important detail in what happened here. What is so significant about mud—and why does it take such prominence in the recounting of what happened?
 - Discuss the phrase in verse 15: "I washed and now I see." Might there be a connection between washing and seeing?
 - Why do you think Jesus keeps doing these miraculous signs on the Sabbath?
 - Do you think John wanted us to make note of the fact that the real blind people in this story were the Pharisees (see v. 16)?
 - What do you make of the blind man's answer in verse 17?
 - Are you disappointed with the blind man's parents (vv. 18-23)? How do you think their answer made the blind man feel? What does this tell you about how the parents felt about their son?
 - What do you love about the blind man's response to the Pharisees in verses 30-33?
- Read **John 9:35-41**.
 - Why do you think Jesus made the effort to go and find the man after he had been evicted from the temple grounds (v. 35)?
 - Verse 36 indicates why the man had earlier described Jesus as "a prophet." He truly didn't know who Jesus was. How difficult do you think it was for this man to believe that Jesus was the Messiah? What did he do as a result of his faith?
 - Verse 39 is a very powerful and important verse. Jesus came into this world to—in effect—draw a line in the sand. Who was Jesus referring to when he described the blind who see? Who are those who see that become blind?

Application:

Returning to the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? Might our first response be: Lord, I admit that I'm blind! I need you to open my eyes!" And then—might we see that even what we consider to be "bad things," God can use to for good. **Look instead for what God can do!**