

037 Go Deeper Guide

GO DEEPER: UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING AND HOPE

A Reflection Guide for "Why Does Suffering Happen? What I Tell Hurting Families"

INTRODUCTION

In this deeply personal episode of Making Sense of Faith, Adam Hamilton addresses one of humanity's most difficult questions through the lens of a listener's heartbreaking experience with her husband's Alzheimer's diagnosis. Rather than offering easy answers, Adam provides honest, pastoral wisdom about the nature of suffering and where hope can be found in our darkest moments. As you reflect on this conversation, use this guide to explore your own understanding of suffering and consider how these insights might transform your perspective on pain and hope.

3 REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Take a moment to consider what resonated most deeply with you from this episode:

1. Adam challenges the idea that God causes suffering like Alzheimer's, arguing that our pursuit of medical research reveals we don't truly believe God wants people to suffer. How does this perspective change the way you think about God's role in difficult circumstances?
2. Think about a time when you or someone you love has faced significant suffering. How did you wrestle with the "why" question? What would it look like to shift from demanding "why" to asking "how can I love better?"
3. Adam offers hope that "when your loved one can no longer remember anything at all, God still remembers them." What does this vision of God's memory and eternal restoration mean for how you approach loss and grief?

2 KEY INSIGHTS

1. We Can Understand Why Most Suffering Happens

"Most of the time we can understand why hurricanes happen. We can understand why earthquakes happen. We understand what happens in cardiovascular disease. We understand that there are terrible people that do horrible things."

Question: How might accepting that we can understand the mechanisms behind suffering change your relationship with difficult circumstances?

Reflection: Consider a situation where you've been told "we can't understand God's ways." What would it look like to seek understanding about the natural or human causes while still maintaining faith and hope?

2. God Remembers What We Forget

"When your loved one can no longer remember anything at all, God still remembers them. There is some part of that person preserved in their soul that will wake up in heaven fully restored."

Question: How does this promise of divine memory and restoration impact the way you view identity, loss, and hope?

Reflection: Think about someone you love who has changed due to illness, injury, or time. How might holding onto the truth that God remembers their fullness bring you peace?

1 PRACTICE EXERCISE

The Shift from "Why" to "How"

When you're facing a difficult situation, try this reframing exercise:

1. **Identify the "why" question** you're wrestling with (Why is this happening? Why me? Why them?)
2. **Acknowledge the question** without judgment - it's natural to ask why
3. **Gently shift to "how" questions:**
 - How can I love better in this situation?

- How can I find strength to care well?
- How can I be present in this pain?
- How can I support others who are hurting?

4. **Take one small action** based on your "how" question

5. **Repeat as needed** - this is a practice, not a one-time fix

Remember: This isn't about dismissing the pain or pretending the "why" doesn't matter. It's about finding actionable ways to respond with love even when we don't have all the answers.

QUOTES TO CONSIDER

"God doesn't look down and say, I'm gonna give this person Alzheimer's. I just don't think that's how God works."

"If it was Lavon, I can't imagine how much hurt and pain I'd feel, and I'd be angry with God and all of that. And then eventually I'd think I'd work through that and understand, okay, God, I know you didn't do this, but help me to have the strength to love and care for her well."

"I don't think it was God's will that your loved one has Alzheimer's."

CLOSING REFLECTION

Suffering remains one of life's most challenging realities, but it doesn't have to be a faith-ending experience. As you close this reflection time, consider how shifting from demanding answers to choosing love might transform not just your perspective, but your capacity to bring hope to others who are hurting. Remember that acknowledging the reality of pain while maintaining hope for restoration isn't contradictory—it's deeply human and deeply faithful.

This reflection guide was created to accompany the Making Sense of Faith podcast episode "Why Does Suffering Happen? What I Tell Hurting Families." For more resources like this, visit makingsenseoffaith.com.