

*This midweek study will explore the issue concerning the problem of evil. Use the following main points, Scriptures, teaching/discussion ideas, and questions to help students gain a better understanding of the essential doctrine for this session.*

### Essential Doctrine: The Problem of Evil

Many atheists have argued that if God is all-powerful, all loving, and knows everything, evil would not exist in the world as humans know it today. But because evil exists in the world, God must not exist (or if He does exist, then He is not good or all-powerful). Despite its powerful rhetoric, appealing to evil as an argument against God fails: first, because outrage over bad things in this world presupposes a “good” moral standard that does not exist apart from God, and secondly, because God could have a good reason (though unknown to us) for allowing evil and suffering to continue for a season. Given what we know about God’s character and purposes, Christians can rest assured that even in the midst of evil, God is working all things for our good (Rom. 8:28).

### 1 The argument that God can’t exist because of evil’s pervasiveness is self-referentially contradictory (Mic. 6:8).

- ▶ Answer the following statement: True or false: This statement is false.
- ▶ Why is it impossible to answer the above statement?
- ▶ What is an example of something evil? How do you know it’s evil?

#### Read Micah 6:8.

- ▶ Often people read Micah 6:8 to focus on the simplicity of what God wants from us. Today, we want to focus on the first part of the verse. According to Micah 6:8, how do we know what is good and what is evil?
- ▶ If we get our understanding of good from God, how can some people claim God doesn’t exist because the world is too evil? How is their argument like the “This statement is false” problem?
- ▶ Is it possible to get true, objective good or bad values from anywhere besides God?
- ▶ So how is the problem of evil actually self-contradictory?

### 2 The problem of evil fails to recognize God may have a bigger vision that we do not see (Lam. 3:20-26,31-33).

- ▶ When have you changed your mind? It could be something big or small.
- ▶ Why did you change your mind? It’s likely that at least some of the time, we change our minds because we get more information.

#### Read Lamentations 3:20-26,31-33.

- ▶ Look at the context around our verses. What kind of emotional state is the writer in? You can also share the historical context of Lamentations and how Jerusalem has just been sacked by Babylon.
- ▶ Why does the Lamentations writer change his mind in verse 21?
- ▶ We often change our minds because we get additional information. How does the realization that there is almost certainly additional information that God sees (and we don’t) guard us against the problem of evil?

- ▶ Does Lamentations 3:33 give you assurance? Why or why not?
- ▶ How does someone claiming God can’t exist because of all the evil in the world actually show great arrogance? It assumes we know as much as or more than God does.

### 3 The cross is the greatest answer to the problem of evil (Gen. 50:20; Ps. 119:75; Rom. 8:32).

- ▶ What are some ways someone can prove his or her trustworthiness?

#### Read Psalm 15:4.

- ▶ How does someone swearing to their own hurt and not changing show he or she is trustworthy?
- ▶ When has someone proven his or her trustworthiness to you by suffering for you?

#### Read Romans 8:32.

- ▶ According to this magnificent promise (note that it’s a rhetorical question, which means its answer is a strong yes), how are we absolutely guaranteed that God is always working for our good? What well-known verse comes just four verses before this one?
- ▶ So how does God show His absolutely trustworthiness to us? How then can we answer the problem of evil? Put simply, how does Jesus’ dying for us assure us that God is working even evil for our good? Because Jesus’ death was the greatest evil ever done, and it worked for the greatest good ever.

#### Read Genesis 50:20 and Psalm 119:75.

- ▶ How can we know that we can say Genesis 50:20 and Psalm 119:75 in any circumstance?
- ▶ How could you use Romans 8:32; Genesis 50:20; or Psalm 119:75 to love yourself or someone else this week?

### WRAP IT UP

The problem of evil is a real sticking point for many people. How could you lovingly use what you learned today to respond to someone struggling with the problem of evil?