



SESSION 6 BROKENHEARTED

GOAL

The goal of this session is to introduce the teens to the idea of suffering and offer them a lens through which they can view and better understand suffering in their lives and the world.

KEY CONCEPTS

When we live in a relationship with God, we come to know God's greatness and want to live our lives for Him.

The problem of evil is a challenge to our faith, and there is not a simple answer.

There is no way to escape the reality of suffering. The difference between Christianity and all other world religions is that we worship a God who suffers with us and desires to bring good out of it.

KEY TERMS

Faith: Both a gift of God and a human act by which the believer gives personal adherence to God who invites his response, and freely assents to the whole truth that God has revealed.

Moral Evil: Results from the free choice to sin which angels and men have; it is permitted by God, who knows how to derive good from it, in order to respect the freedom of His creatures.

Natural Evil: A result of the state of journeying toward its ultimate perfection in which God created the world, involving the existence of the less perfect alongside the more perfect, the constructive and deconstructive forces of nature, the appearance and disappearance of certain beings.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:28, James 1:17, Psalm 34:18, Romans 8:28

CATECHISM: 222-227, 272-273, 306, 309-313, 1040

ABOUT THIS CONFIRMATION SESSION

The Engage is a modified *Summit* session followed by an activity where teens are challenged to solve riddles. The Reflect addresses the reality that suffering is inevitable while reminding the teens to not lose hope because God suffers with us. During the Respond, the teens are encouraged to serve those in their community who experience suffering and come up with a plan on how they will serve. The teens are then led through the Litany of Trust. The session ends with the Come, Holy Spirit prayer.

ENVIRONMENT

Gather in a comfortable environment where you all are able to sit in a circle facing one another. Consider meeting somewhere at the parish or at a local coffee shop, but always consult and follow your diocesan safe environment rules.

MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

Purpose Video: “The Hospital” (resources.lifeteen.com)
“Butterfly Circus” (thebutterflycircus.com/short-film/)

AS YOU GET STARTED

For different Engage, watch the short film, “Butterfly Circus.” After the video, facilitate a discussion about the main themes.

ENGAGE

Welcome and Opening Prayer (5 min)

Welcome the teens to the session, and begin in prayer.

Summit (20 min)

Use the modified *Summit* session to lead the teens through a lectio divina based reflection on the Sunday readings.

Riddles (10 min)

Divide the teens into pairs and then offer the following riddles. Instruct the pairs to solve as many riddles as they can in the given amount of time.

- I have no doors but I have keys, I have no rooms but I do have a space, you can enter but you can never leave. What am I? (Answer: a keyboard)
- What gets wetter and wetter the more it dries? (Answer: a towel)
- What kind of room has no doors or windows? (Answer: a mushroom)
- What weighs more? A pound of bricks or a pound of feathers? (Answer: neither, they both weigh one pound)
- What can travel around the world while staying in a corner? (Answer: a stamp)

Transition into the teaching, using the following as an example:

Sometimes answers are not always obvious. We have to look a little bit deeper to find the meaning. The same can be true when we face the reality of suffering in our world. When we question why there is suffering, the answers are not always immediate, but as we look to the cross and the suffering of Jesus, we can find meaning even in the midst of suffering.

REFLECT

“Brokenhearted” Teaching (20 min)

Use the following as a guide for a time of reflection:

Faith

Our faith in one God matters, and our relationship with God has implications in our lives. When we live in a relationship with God, we come to know God’s greatness and want to live our lives for Him.

CCC 222-223

When we live for God, we recognize the great things He has done for us and live with gratitude. Since everything we have is a gift, we cannot help but thank God for those gifts and blessings.
CCC 224, James 1:17

Our relationship with God has implications for our other relationships, as well. We see the unity of all people as created by the same God and born with the same dignity. When we look at our neighbor, we see people made in the image and likeness of God, just like we are.
CCC 225

When we view creation, we also make good use of the things God has created. We respect our world, the environment, and the whole of creation that God has given us. We use it ethically and responsibly.

CCC 226, Genesis 1:28

This faith in one God also means we trust God in every circumstance. This can be the most difficult part of our faith. It is easy to trust God in good moments and in moments when everything is going well. It is much more difficult to trust God when our lives feel like they are falling apart, when we suffer, or when we witness the suffering of others. It can be hard to trust God in a world filled with evil.

CCC 227, 272

- Name one person you are thankful for and one aspect of creation you are thankful for.
- How does your relationship with God affect your relationship with the person you mentioned, and how does it inform how you view creation?
- Do most people turn to God when things in their life are going well or when they are falling apart? Why do you think that is?

Struggles in Faith

When we hear about God being all-powerful, all-good, and all-knowing, we may at first agree with those statements but then come to ask important questions: What about suffering and evil? Does God know about that? And, if so, why does God seem so powerless against it?

The question of evil and suffering in our world is a big one. It does not seem fair. The problem of evil is a challenge to our faith, and there is not a simple answer. If you have experienced suffering or the effects of evil in your life, it may sometimes seem like there is not an answer that is good enough. Sadly, many people will say that the reason they do not believe in God is because of evil and suffering in our world.

- If you could ask God one question about suffering, what would it be?
- Does the reality of suffering in your life or in the world around you affect how you view God? How so?

There is a response to suffering and evil, though it is not a short answer. The story of Christianity is the response — it is a story of the creation of the world as good but the fall of the world due to human pride. It is a story about God, who does not give up on us, and the ways in which some people choose to follow God and others reject His law. The story culminates in Jesus, God's Son, who saves us by suffering on a cross.

CCC 309

To accept that answer, we need to enter into a relationship with God based on our faith that God is good and always wills our good. God is powerful and the master of all creation, but in His goodness, He allows us to determine our will. This, in itself, is a sign of how good God is.
CCC 273, 306

- Reflecting back on your question to God about suffering, how can the story of Christianity offer peace in the midst of this question?

Two Kinds of Evil

There are two kinds of evil that cause suffering in our world: natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is only evil in the sense that it causes human suffering, but there is nothing “evil” in the sense that something sinister is being chosen. Natural evil is the result of the natural realities of our world. We are biological beings who live in a world where viruses, bacteria, and diseases exist. We can get sick. Nobody caused the illness, but it still causes suffering.

Similarly, our bodies can develop diseases on their own because of a genetic predisposition or because they simply wear down. Natural disasters occur as a normal part of our weather patterns and the development of our planet.

This does not make these realities easy, and it is simple to ask, “Well, why does God refuse to stop those things?” God created the world in a state of journeying: The world is not perfect but is moving toward perfection, and it will not be perfect until the end of time when God unites heaven and Earth for eternity.

CCC 310

The reality that we suffer in a world that is not perfect comes from the introduction of original sin into human history. The natural realities that can end our mortal life are a reminder that we are not made simply for this world; it is not our final home.

- Do you know of a saint who experienced suffering either from illness or another natural cause? Did any good come from that situation?
- What are some resources that help us process our experience of suffering? How can they help us move forward and, eventually, see the good in our life?

Moral evil is far more devastating than natural evil because we choose it. We cannot determine when the next storm will strike or if we will develop a chronic illness, but we can choose to sin against others and others can choose to sin against us.

CCC 311

God allows for this kind of evil out of love. That may seem like an odd sentence, but think about the nature of love. Love requires a free choice. God could make us slaves to His will, but, instead, God allows us the freedom to choose our will. Since God is love, to make us slaves would go against His very nature.

CCC 306

While God permits moral evil to exist, He is never the direct or indirect cause of it. There is never a point where God enacts evil. It would go against who God is. God does, however,

permit evil in order to allow our freedom of choice to exist. God, in His infinite goodness, can bring good out of evil.

CCC 311

When we look at the cross hanging in our church, we understand this reality. The Crucifixion of Jesus, God's only Son, is the greatest moral evil committed. Yet, out of that evil God brings resurrection and new life. However, evil never becomes a good thing, even if God can bring good out of it.

CCC 312

- How does popular culture define love?
- How is this definition similar to how God reveals love? How is it different?
- Can God's permission of evil in the world reveal His respect and love for us? How? *(Do not offer answers for the teens or insist that they get to a certain place with their answer; rather, allow them to be honest and wrestle with this question.)*

A World of Hurt

Suffering is a reality we must face, and, even if God can bring good out of it, it is not always easy. Many saints and holy men and women lived lives that included suffering. Saint Paul experienced suffering and persecution in his life, ultimately being martyred, and yet still wrote, "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him" (Romans 8:28).

CCC 313

God does not will our destruction but only wills our good. That said, God is close to us when we suffer. In the Book of Psalms we read, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Psalm 34:18).

There is no way to escape the reality of suffering. All of us are going to experience it. The difference between Christianity and all other world religions is that we worship a God who suffers with us and desires to bring good out of it. We worship a God who is brokenhearted when we are brokenhearted.

We also believe that, one day, God will triumph over all of these injustices and restore what has been broken. Our response to suffering and evil is faith and a resolve to act to remedy injustice and evil where we see it.

CCC 270, 1040

There is no simple answer to suffering, but there is a response. Our first response is faith that God has not abandoned us. Over the coming sessions we will dive more deeply into the answer to evil that can only be known in Jesus. Our second response is to work in whatever way we can to combat injustice and evil and eliminate evil and sin from our lives.

If you are experiencing suffering from evil in your life, know that God has not abandoned you. God wants to heal where you have been hurt and walk with you. This does not diminish how difficult it might be or the gravity of the pain you may be feeling. It does offer hope that our suffering and pain in this world is not the end of the story, but it is one way God can be present to us and, ultimately, make us whole.

- What organizations do you support or follow who do something in response to suffering or injustice in the community? Why is their work important?
- Is there someone in your life who is an example of suffering that produced hope? What can you learn from this person?
- What are some of the crosses you are currently carrying? Why does Jesus give us different crosses to carry?
- How can we support one another in our suffering?

RESPOND

Alleviating Suffering (25 min)

Begin by explaining the importance of supporting one another in our suffering, especially those who are most vulnerable in our society. Invite the teens to brainstorm different populations in the community who experience suffering and ways they can help alleviate that suffering. Give the teens time to plan a service project for this group of people. Some service projects include assembling sack lunches for individuals who are experiencing homelessness, making care packages or cards for elderly individuals who live in a nursing home, serving a meal at a local soup kitchen, or volunteering their time at a camp for youth with special needs. Encourage the teens to plan the details of their service project and follow through on their commitment that week or at a specified, later date.

Litany of Trust (10 min)

Invite the teens into the time of prayer by encouraging them to clear their space, sit up straight, and take a few deep breaths. Then, use the following to introduce the time of prayer:

Confronting suffering is not easy. Many times we avoid suffering by ignoring things that are happening or seeking distraction because it can be painful. But God calls us to not be afraid and reminds us that He is in the midst of suffering with us; He is brokenhearted when we are brokenhearted. While this is true, it can be hard to recognize God in our suffering and believe He is there. In order to grow in our relationship with God, we have to learn how to trust Him, even when things are difficult. To help us do that today, we will pray the Litany of Trust.

Use the *Litany of Trust* handout to lead the teens in prayer.

Closing Prayer (5 min)

Pray the Come, Holy Spirit prayer together, and give any final comments or instructions for upcoming meetings.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the Earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, through Christ, our Lord. Amen.