



WHAT ABOUT...? • COMMUNITY GROUP STUDY • WEEK 7

But What About Suffering?

A guided conversation from the May 24, 2026 sermon by Pastor Kent Keller • 1 Peter 4:12-19

SUMMARY

If you read the news with any honesty at all, sooner or later you find yourself shaking your head and asking the question out loud. We are in the fifth year of a bloody war between Russia and Ukraine. We are still mourning October 7, 2023, in Israel. Our brothers and sisters in Nigeria face violence that rarely reaches Western news. And every day, somewhere on this earth, fifty million people are trapped in human trafficking — treated as property when Scripture says they must not be. A beautiful world. A fallen world. And one question keeps surfacing in every honest mind, Christian and skeptic alike: if God is all good, all loving, and all powerful, why is there so much suffering in the world?

This past Sunday, Pastor Kent Keller took the question head-on from 1 Peter 4:12-19, the words of the Apostle Peter to Christians scattered across the Roman Empire — believers being insulted, beaten, and sometimes killed for the name of Jesus. Peter's first word is not a strategy. It is a posture: do not be surprised. The road of faith is not a road around suffering. It is a road that passes through it. The Bible is a book written by suffering people to suffering people.

Kent walked us through three movements. First, don't be surprised by suffering — God's most faithful saints spent more of their lives in dungeons, deserts, and chains than in palaces, and the gospel does not promise us a pass. Second, don't be unprepared for what comes next — the question is not why me, but why me, Lord; not the absence of pain, but the presence of purpose. And Ben Sasse, facing stage-four cancer, named it: there are no maverick molecules in the universe. Third, don't lose sight of the final outcome — the cross-shaped pattern of the Christian life is always suffering, then judgment, then glory. Jesus walked that road first so that we would not walk it alone.

The sermon landed where every honest sermon has to land — not in clever theodicy or stoic acceptance, but in the gospel itself. The God who allows or sends our suffering is the same God who stepped into it, took the worst of it onto Himself, and turned even the cross into a road home. The story does not end at the cross. It ends at the empty tomb. And if the resurrection is true — and it is — then suffering does not have the last word over your life. Glory does.

PRAYER OPENING PRAYER

Father, You see what each of us has carried into this room tonight. Some of us are walking through something hard right now. Some of us love someone who is. Some of us have unanswered questions about Your goodness and the world's pain. Meet us here. Open our hearts to Your Word. Make this conversation honest. And remind us together that we are not alone in our suffering, because Jesus walked this road first. In His name, amen.

START ICE BREAKER

Think back to a season in your life that felt fiery — a real trial, big or small. What helped you survive it? And what (or who) made it harder than it needed to be?

SCRIPTURE KEY SCRIPTURES

1 PETER 4:12-13, 19 • ESV

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed... Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

JOB 13:15 • ESV

Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face.

ROMANS 8:28 • ESV

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

DISCUSS DISCUSSION

01 DON'T BE SURPRISED.

Peter says the fiery trial is not strange — it is the lot of God's people. What story did you grow up with about whether Christians should expect to suffer? Where did that story come from, and how is it holding up?

02 THE WRONG QUESTION.

Kent reframed the question from 'why me?' to 'why me, Lord — what is Your purpose in this?' What's a hard thing in your life right now you've been asking 'why me?' about? What changes if you ask it the second way?

03 NO MAVERICK MOLECULES.

Ben Sasse, facing stage-four cancer, said there are no maverick molecules in the universe — nothing is outside God's care. What in your life feels random, senseless, or wasted? How does it reframe that thing to remember that?

04 THE WOUNDED HEALER.

Kent said no other faith system tells you that God himself entered our suffering — only Christianity says God has scars in His hands. Why does that matter for the way we walk through our own pain?

05 JOB AND THE QUESTION GOD DIDN'T ANSWER.

For 35 chapters, Job asks God why he is suffering. When God finally speaks, He never tells Job why — He tells Job who. Why was that enough for Job? Why is it so hard for us?

06 ANDREW MURRAY'S FOUR ANCHORS.

Murray's catechism for hard seasons: God brought me here, He will keep me here in His love, He will make the trial a blessing, in His good time He can bring me out again. Of those four anchors, which one do you most need to hear right now — and why?

07 SUFFERING, JUDGMENT, GLORY.

Kent named the cross-shaped pattern: Jesus suffered so our suffering is not meaningless, submitted to judgment so we might stand un-condemned, died so we might live. Where in your week is suffering hard to see as part of that pattern?

08 A FAITH FAMILY IN THE FIRE.

If our group is going to be a place where suffering can be honest — not hidden, not performed — what does that look like in practice? What's one way this group could be different from the cultural script of 'I'm fine'?

APPLY LIFE APPLICATION

Kent gave us three honest moves this week. Walk through them out loud as a group, then bring back specific answers next time you meet:

- 1 Reframe one question this week.** Pick one hard thing in your life and ask 'why me, Lord?' instead of 'why me?' Write it down. Pray it. Be ready to share next time — not because you got an answer, but because the question changed.
- 2 Memorize the four anchors.** Andrew Murray's catechism is short enough to carry in your pocket: I am here by God's appointment, in His keeping, under His training, for His time. Repeat it daily this week. On the hardest day, repeat it twice.
- 3 Show up for one person who is suffering.** Don't try to fix them. Don't quote a verse at them. Just show up — a text, a meal, a call, a sit. Be the body of Christ in someone else's hard week. Come back and tell the group what happened.

Don't try to solve the problem of evil by Friday. Just do one honest move. Christ has walked this road, and He walks it with you now. The beauty of this faith family is that suffering doesn't have to be hidden among us — and that we don't have to have all the answers to keep walking together.

REMEMBER KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Don't be surprised by suffering — it is the weather of a fallen world, not a sign of failed faith.
- ▶ The Bible was written by suffering people to suffering people. You are in good company on a well-worn road.
- ▶ The wrong question is 'why me?' The better question is 'why me, Lord — what is Your purpose in this?'

- ▶ There are no maverick molecules in the universe — nothing in your story is outside God's care, and nothing is wasted.
- ▶ Christianity is the only faith that says God Himself entered our suffering — He is the wounded healer.
- ▶ Andrew Murray's four anchors: I am here by God's appointment, in His keeping, under His training, for His time.
- ▶ The pattern of the Christian life is suffering, then judgment, then glory — and Jesus walked it first so we would not walk it alone.

There are no maverick molecules in the universe.

PRAYER

CLOSING PRAYER

Jesus, You walked the road of suffering before You ever asked us to walk it. You bore the worst of it on Yourself so that even the cross became a road home. When we don't understand, give us faith to trust You. When we cannot see what You're doing, give us grace to hold onto what You've said. And when one of us in this group is in the fire this week, make us the body of Christ to one another. We are not alone — and we walk together. In Your name, amen.

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