



Homes of H.O.P.E. Prayer and Study Guide #4
Based on sermon: “Is God an Underachiever?”
Preached Jan. 10, 2009

Introduction

1. Read Job 23:1-5 and share when you’ve felt like Job.
2. Victor J. Stenger, author of *God: The Failed Hypothesis*, puts forth the following thesis:
 - If God exists, then the attributes of God are consistent with the existence of evil.
 - The attributes of God are not consistent with the existence of evil.
 - Therefore, God does not and cannot exist.

Stenger defines the attributes of God as “3O”—omnibenevolence, omnipotence, and omniscience. A God who is all love, all powerful, and all knowing cannot exist because these attributes are not consistent with the existence of evil.

Do you agree or disagree with this line of reasoning? Explain.

3. Consider the statement, “God did not create evil, but He did create choice.” Because choice allows for the possibility of evil, can God be rightly accused of creating evil?
4. Read and discuss this statement: “God created the world out of love and for the purpose of love. But love must be chosen. And choice means that a person can say No. Unless people can choose not to love, they can’t genuinely choose to love. The possibility of the one is built into the possibility of the other. Love simply cannot be coerced or programmed into people.”—Gregory Boyd
5. Read Genesis 2:16, 17. Why did God set up this situation?

Free will might explain suffering in the form of murder, war, crime, etc., but what about natural disasters? Babies don’t choose to be aborted. Innocent civilians don’t choose to be collateral damage in other people’s wars. We don’t choose earthquakes or pandemics. How are these explained? (See Gen. 3:17, 18; Rom. 8:20-22; Isa. 24:4-6.)
6. Explain how an omnipotent God can be limited by the free will of His creatures.
7. Read Luke 13:34 and Matt. 13:58 for examples of the above. Can you think of others?
8. “Augustine at one point encouraged Christians who had been victimized by others to find consolation in the knowledge that the perpetrators could not have harmed them unless God empowered the perpetrators and allowed them to do it for a greater good. Indeed...Augustine went so far as to suggest that when ‘beloved children’ die, God is either teaching the parents a lesson or punishing them or their child for sin.”

This is an example of the “blueprint worldview.” Is this consistent with your own worldview?

9. “Part of having all power includes the power to not use it all.” How does that statement change what you have believed about omnipotence?

10. Read 2 Peter 3:9, then discuss the statement: “suffering continues, in part, because God is not willing for any to perish (eternally).”

11. If the above is true, is God letting suffering continue too long? Do you want Him to end this now? What would be the implications if He did?

12. Discuss this statement:

“If we’re really honest, we only shake our fist in God’s face and demand He remove suffering when *we* are the ones suffering. Oh we wag our heads and feel sorry for the Tsunami victims, and we feel guilt when we watch the “Save the children” commercials late at night, and we cluck our tongues in disgust when a Joseph Duncan rapes and murders a Dylan Groene, or a suicide bomber blows himself up in a crowded marketplace. But aside from a few, fleeting moments of feeling bad, we go along just fine, living our lives and not giving God much thought—until the day comes when our loved one dies, when our diagnosis is bad, when our job is lost, when our marriage falls apart, when our child runs away from home. Then we want to impeach God. Then we demand answers and ask the why questions. Our suffering is selective, occasional, and limited, But God’s suffering is all-inclusive, all-the-time, and unlimited.”

13. What did God do that still preserves our freedom of choice and His freedom to love? Is it enough?

14. How do we hold on to faith/God when it’s our turn to suffer?

Pray together about what the Holy Spirit has revealed to your group. Remind members to pray for the Community Conversations Live meetings and encourage them to invite someone. God bless you!