

# Week 10: Obstacles to Faith - Suffering and Hypocrisy

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Objective:

Equip believers to respond biblically and thoughtfully to two major objections to Christianity – the problem of suffering and the problem of hypocrisy – while strengthening their own integrity and hope.

## A. Introduction – 5 minutes

Ask:

- “Why does a good God allow suffering?”
  - That question usually isn’t asked in a philosophy classroom. It’s asked in a hospital room. Or at a funeral. Or by a parent sitting beside a hospital bed
- “Have you ever heard someone say, ‘The church is full of hypocrites?’”

Explain:

- These are two of the most common and personal objections to Christianity.
- One questions God’s character.
- The other questions God’s people.

Goal:

- To provide biblical answers to both.
  - To help us live in a way that strengthens our witness.
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## PART 1 — The Problem of Suffering (25 minutes)

### B. The Reality of Suffering – 5 minutes

- Did God promise we will have wonderful, care-free lives?
- Scripture does not deny suffering - it confronts it
  - **Psalm 34:19** “The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all.”
  - **Job 1-2**
  - **John 16:33** “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”
  - **2 Timothy 3:12** “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
  - **1 Peter 4:12-13** “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice

inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”

- Everyone suffers in a fallen world
    - Genesis 3
  - Christianity uniquely offers honesty and hope.
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### C. Why Does God Allow Suffering? – 10 minutes

1. For some, suffering is emotional. For others, it is intellectual. In philosophical terms, it can be stated like this:
  - a. Premise one: A God who is all-powerful would be able to prevent evil in the world.
  - b. Premise two: A God who is all-good would want to prevent evil in the world.
  - c. Premise three: Evil exists in the world.
  - d. This results in a logical conclusion: Therefore, an all-powerful, all-good God cannot exist.

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2. Free will allows love - and the possibility of evil
  - a. Cliff Knechtle: “God chose to limit his power by creating us with a free will.”
  - b. Genesis 2–3
  - c. We sin because we think we know better than God; that our way will make us happier.
    - i. We don’t always sin because we are trying to be evil, but because we just want to be happy.
    - ii. The problem is that we think we know better than God on how to make ourselves happier.

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3. Suffering produces spiritual growth
  - a. **Romans 5:3-5** “Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”
  - b. **James 1:2-4** “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”
    - i. Use the image of gold refined by fire:
      1. Fire doesn’t destroy gold - it purifies it.
      2. The heat reveals impurities.
      3. The refiner never leaves the furnace.
    - ii. Tie to:
      1. **1 Peter 1:6-7** “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”
    - iii. Application: God is not wasting your pain.

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4. God may use suffering for greater purposes
  - a. **Genesis 50:20** (Joseph) "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."
5. We don't always understand - but we trust His character
  - a. **Isaiah 55:8-9** "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."
    - i. Describe a tapestry:
      1. From the back: knots, loose threads, confusion.
      2. From the front: beautiful design.
    - ii. Point:
      1. We see the back.
      2. God sees the front.

Emphasize: Christianity does not give shallow answers – it gives deep trust.

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#### D. God's Response to Suffering – 10 minutes

- Christianity's answer to suffering is not ultimately an explanation – it is a Person. Jesus entered into our suffering:
  - **Isaiah 53** (sample v.4-6) "Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."
  - **Hebrews 4:15** "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet he did not sin."
    - We do not worship a distant deity. We worship a crucified Savior.
    - Ask:
      - What kind of God bleeds?
      - What kind of God allows Himself to suffer?
- God is near to those in need
  - **Psalms 34:18** "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."
- The cross is the ultimate example of God bringing good from suffering.
- Final justice and restoration are promised
  - **Revelation 21:4** "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."
- Present suffering is not the end of the story.
  - **Romans 8:18** "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."
- Historical figure: Corrie ten Boom (*The Hiding Place*)

- Suffering did not destroy her faith.
  - It deepened it.
  - Christianity has not only survived suffering – it has often grown strongest in it.
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Transition:

- The problem of suffering asks: ‘Can I trust God’s heart?’ The problem of hypocrisy asks: ‘Can I trust God’s people?’
  - One challenges God’s goodness.
  - The other challenges the credibility of His followers.
- If suffering makes faith feel doubtful, hypocrisy makes faith feel unbelievable.

## PART 2 — The Problem of Hypocrisy (20 minutes)

### E. What Is Hypocrisy? – 5 minutes

- Definition: Saying one thing and doing another; pretending to be what you're not.
- Jesus strongly condemned religious hypocrisy
  - **Matthew 23** (sample v.2-5) “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for people to see:”
- Struggling with sin is not hypocrisy – pretending is.

Crucial Distinction: Struggling sinner ≠ Hypocrite

- Struggling sinner:
    - Admits weakness.
    - Repents.
    - Seeks growth.
  - Hypocrite:
    - Hides sin.
    - Pretends righteousness.
    - Protects image.
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### F. Why Hypocrisy Hurts Our Witness – 7 minutes

- Common public examples:
  - A fallen pastor.
    - Jimmy Swaggert “I have sinned”
  - A moral scandal.
    - Catholic priests and sexual abuse
  - Social media Christianity vs. private life.
  - When leaders fall, the watching world concludes the gospel isn’t real.

- These failures are real. They are grievous. They damage lives. And Christians should not minimize them.
- Damages credibility
- Pushes people away from Christ
- Distorts the gospel into image management
- Romans 2:21–24 – Paul addresses the Jews, saying that having the Law and knowing God’s commands does not make someone righteous. What matters is actually obeying God. Paul is exposing religious hypocrisy – the danger of trusting in religious identity and knowledge while failing to live consistently with it.

Key point: The existence of hypocrites does not disprove Christianity – it proves we need it.

Ask: So how do you respond to “The church is full of hypocrites”?

- Agree partially.
  - Clarify.
  - Redirect.
    - Example: “You’re right – the church is full of sinners. It is not a museum for saints. It’s a hospital for sinners. But hospitals are meant to treat illness, not pretend it isn’t there.”
    - Reminiscent of **Luke 5:31-32** “But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.””
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## G. Jesus’ Response and Our Responsibility – 8 minutes

- Jesus boldly confronted hypocrisy (Matthew 23).
- He welcomed sinners but challenged the self-righteous
  - **Luke 18:** Pharisee & tax collector. (v9-14) To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people - robbers, evildoers, adulterers - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”
  - Ask: Who did Jesus say went home justified? Why?
  - Highlight:
    - God is drawn to humility.
    - God resists self-righteousness.

- **James 4:6** “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.”
  - He valued humility over outward performance.
    - What was the first beatitude? (Matt. 5:3) “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
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What we must do:

- Examine ourselves (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- Confess and repent quickly (1 John 1:9)
- Pursue authentic faith
- Fix our eyes on Jesus (**Hebrews 12:1-2** Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.)

Personal Integrity Test

- Where are you tempted to perform spiritually?
  - Do you pray differently in public than in private?
  - Is your online persona different from your real life?
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## H. Living with Integrity and Hope – 5 minutes

Bringing both issues together:

- In suffering – trust God’s heart.
- In hypocrisy – guard your own heart.
- God redeems suffering.
- God transforms sinners.

Scripture:

- Comfort others **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”
- Depend on His grace **2 Corinthians 12:9** “But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me.”

Christian apologetics is not just arguments – it is lived faith.

The anchor: Romans 8

- Creation groans (suffering).

- Christianity does not deny the reality of evil and pain; it explains them as part of a fallen creation that is not yet fully restored.
  - Believers groan (struggle).
    - Faith does not eliminate internal conflict or hardship.
  - The Spirit intercedes.
    - God is not distant from human suffering; He is personally involved, even when believers lack clarity or words.
  - Nothing can separate us from God's love.
    - Assurance - evil, suffering, persecution, or even death do not have the final word. Christianity's answer to suffering is not primarily explanation but unbreakable covenant love grounded in Christ.
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So when people look at Christianity, they are asking two questions:

- Can I trust God in suffering?
- Can I trust these people to live what they preach?
- Our answer must be: Yes – because He suffered for us. And yes – because we repent when we fail.

### I. Application and Assignment – 3 minutes

- Be honest about pain – bring it to God.
- Be honest about sin – repent quickly.
- Trust that God sees, cares, and will redeem.

Closing Point

- People reject Christianity for two main reasons:
  - They don't like what God allows.
  - Or they don't like how Christians behave.
- Ask: What if both problems are actually invitations?
  - Suffering invites deeper trust.
  - Hypocrisy invites deeper repentance.
  - And both drive us back to the cross.

Assignment:

- Read Revelation 21–22 (hope in suffering).
  - Read Matthew 23 (warning against hypocrisy).
  - Read Romans 8 (assurance and encouragement).
  - Reflect: “Where do I need deeper trust? Where do I need deeper integrity?”
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### J. Class Discussion – 7 minutes

1. How does knowing Jesus suffered help you respond to the problem of pain?
2. Why does hypocrisy damage people's view of Christianity?
3. How can we respond when someone says, “Christians are hypocrites”?

4. What practical step can you take this week to strengthen your witness?