

READING AND DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR

The Problem of Pain

by

C. S. Lewis

1. C. S. Lewis writes, “Christianity is not the conclusion of a philosophical debate on the origins of the universe. . . . It is not a system into which we have to fit the awkward fact of pain: it is itself one of the awkward facts which have to be fitted into any system we make. In a sense it creates rather than solves the problem of pain” (p. 14). Do you struggle with identifying the reason for pain? What are some conclusions you’ve arrived at?
2. The second chapter opens with what Lewis calls the problem of pain in its simplest form. The argument suggests that if God were good then we’d be happy, and if God were almighty He would wish us such perfect happiness (p. 16). Why isn’t happiness a chief virtue for the Christian?

3. We know the standard for goodness, and when Christ calls us to repentance, we understand our failure to live up to it. On pages 28–31, Lewis asks, what if there weren't any standard? Have you ever imagined that God didn't care what we did or who we became, but only cared if we were satisfied? How do you feel about an understanding of God in which his main goal for our lives is our happiness and satisfaction?
4. What is your definition of love? How is love different from kindness (pp. 32–33)?
5. Our every breath is drawn from God. "We are . . . a Divine work of art, something that God is making," Lewis writes, "and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character" (p. 34). Does understanding that we are God's "Divine work of art" change how you view God and the role He plays in your life? Why or why not?
6. Lewis says that God is, in love and through our pain, "trying to train us into something unlike our natural selves" (pp. 36–40). Why is love a key component in determining why pain is part of life?
7. God is in the process of refining us; the question is whether we trust Him in this endeavor (p. 42). Do we want a friend who confronts us about our dishonest behavior even if it jeopardizes our happiness, or would we rather have a friend who lets things go? How do you feel about God refining us in a similar way?

8. God doesn't lack in anything; He is in need of neither our affection nor our attention. Perhaps, as Lewis says, God desires us to love Him because we are in need of Him. "God wills our good, and our good is to love Him, and to love Him we must know Him: and if we know Him we shall fall on our faces. If we do not, that only shows that what we are trying to love is not yet God" (p. 46). How does this shape your view of God and your need of Him?
9. Lewis feels that the modern age has caused people to believe that sin is no longer an issue that requires us to turn to God. Instead, we believe that as long as we exemplify kindness, then our souls will be fine, and we subscribe to the idea that sin is natural and not shameful. The outcome is that we feel independent and satisfied with who we are. (pp. 48–50). Do you recognize these ideas in our society? What about in how you personally understand sin? How can we better understand our need for God?
10. Consider the eight nuances of behavior and thought that lure us away from the truth and into sin (pp. 52–62). Why is Lewis so concerned about these in relation to the problem of pain?
11. Chapter 5 addresses the fall of creation (pp. 63–66). The biblical story says that God's creation is good, and that God created humans as good creatures with freedom of choice. How do our free will and our fall from God's presence frame the problem of pain and God's need for justice?

12. When you see someone in pain, do you ever find yourself thinking, even momentarily, that he or she must have done something to deserve such treatment over and above someone else . . . or you? Where does this mind-set come from? What does Lewis say about it (pp. 90–91)?
13. Lewis says that pain is God’s “megaphone to rouse a deaf world” and that it “plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul” (pp. 91, 94). Have you experienced a season of pain that has brought about a fresh or different view of God’s truth? How does Jesus as the suffering servant help us understand pain?
14. Lewis writes that pain is the troubling that God gives in order for us to know Him the way we ought and, further, that “the full acting out of the self’s surrender to God therefore demands pain” (p. 98). If pain were not as constant an element (or at least a worry) in our lives, would we readily surrender to God, or would we rely on our own self-sufficiency?
15. How do you feel about the mercy of God and how it relates to the reality of hell? Do you agree with Lewis that, rather than looking at the possibility that someone else may be sent to hell, we ought to be conscious of the possibility of our own damnation (pp. 130–31)?
16. Lewis suggests that heaven and hell are tied to our greater or lesser existence: “To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth; to enter hell, is to be banished from humanity” (pp. 127–28). Hell represents the “remains” of a

whole person, while heaven completes us with our obedience to God. If we are to be ultimately refined in heaven, why is this life so painful at times?

17. Are we afraid that “heaven is a bribe, and that if we make it our goal we shall no longer be disinterested” (p. 149)? Lewis indicates that heaven is not like that. Rather, it becomes all we want; God becomes all we want. How does this help us as we work through difficult moments in our lives and within our communities?
18. After reading this book, what are your conclusions regarding the purpose of pain and suffering in our lives? Has your understanding changed about who God is? What else will you take away from what you read in these pages?