

## 20. John 11:1-45

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### Getting started

What songs would you like played at your funeral, and why?

### Observation and interpretation

Read 11:1-16

- Why might Jesus have delayed going to see Lazarus?

Read 11:17-45

- If you had to pick two adjectives to describe the picture we get of Jesus in this section, what would they be?

### Implications

How does the raising of Lazarus differ from Jesus' resurrection?

Mary struggles with Jesus' absence in her time of need (verse 32), and the crowd wonders why Jesus didn't prevent him from dying (verse 37). We often struggle to understand why God seems to sit back while terrible things happen to those we love.

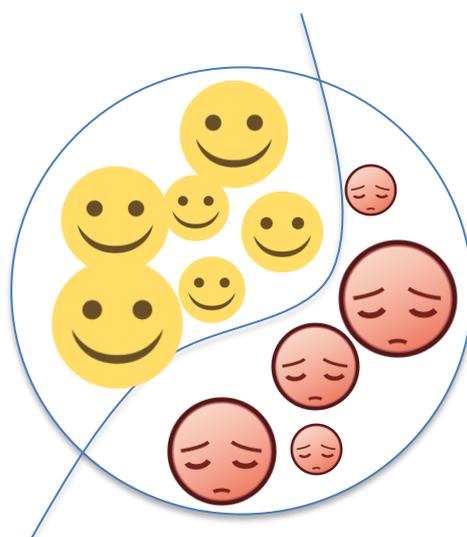
>> See the emoji activity on the next page.

### Prayer ideas

- Pray for those in your group, or who you are aware of, who are experiencing grief at the moment.

## The emoji guide to God and suffering

This exercise is a good way to help us process the possibly explanations for the suffering we experience in the world. Draw the following:



- The big circle represents the world. Now, does our experience of the world involve goodness, or evil? (Both! So draw the line down the middle and put happy faces on one side, and sad faces on the other).
- Each box represents a possible explanation for how God fits with this broken and divided world. Either work through them one by one, or get the group to suggest theories and draw the appropriate box as they suggest explanations.
- Biblically speaking, what are the strengths or weaknesses of each explanation? Which one(s) do you find most likely?

If you don't want to draw, you could get an artistic member of the group to do it. Or just print out a stack of emojis which you then arrange in the right order during the activity.

Note also: on the next page I've given references to other religions, but note that these are massive generalisations, and even within these religions there would be different understandings of these questions. The best bet when engaging with someone of another religion is to ask *them* how they think about these things.

## Explanation of the boxes:

Emoji	Meaning	Strengths & weaknesses
[No emoji]	<p>There is no god (atheism*), and/or evil is an illusion based on our desires or attachments (Buddhism*).</p> <p><i>"In a universe of electrons and selfish genes, blind physical forces and genetic replication, some people are going to get hurt, other people are going to get lucky, and you won't find any rhyme or reason in it, nor any justice. The universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is, at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference." (Richard Dawkins, River Out of Eden)</i></p>	<p>This explains the random nature of our experience – some things are good, other things are bad, and there is no rhyme or reason to it.</p> <p>However, it does not adequately explain the <i>moral</i> dimension which is inherently part of our experience of the world (i.e., it fails to explain the outrage of evil). Biblically, evil is much more than just 'something I don't enjoy', and we rightly cry out for justice (Ps 13:1-2).</p>
	<p>God is evil.</p> <p>Or God is angry (Islam*), and our suffering is not evil but actually according to his will, e.g. as proper punishment.</p>	<p>This explains the bad things in the world, but it doesn't account for the good things we receive from him. Biblically, we know that God has gone to great lengths to bring humanity back to himself. It wouldn't make sense for him to do this if he is evil.</p> <p>On the other hand, the idea that God is punishing us is half true – the suffering we experience is partly a result of God's judgment on this world. But much of the suffering in the world is disproportionate, with the poor suffering more than the rich (Psalm 73, Luke 13:2).</p>
	<p>God is horrified by evil but he is not in control, or is otherwise unable to do prevent it (this is close to some types of Open Theism*).</p>	<p>This explains how God can be good but the world still be such a mess.</p> <p>However, it cannot be reconciled with the demonstration of God's power in creating the world (or indeed Jesus' power over suffering in John 11:37)</p>
 	<p>There are multiple gods (polytheistic religions*) or good and evil are rival forces (dualism*).</p>	<p>This explains the mix of good and evil, but it also makes evil 'natural', and gives little reason to hope that good will win over chaos in the end. It is incompatible with the biblical one God (Ps 96:5) who created the world good (Gen 1).</p>
 	<p>God is good so he mourns over evil and suffering, but has good reasons for allowing evil to continue for the moment. These reasons are partly revealed to us, but he also knows things we don't know.</p>	<p>This explains the incongruity of a good world marred by evil – while all the other explanations are 'stable' (i.e. the world just is the way we should expect it to be) this one is 'unstable' (things cannot stay how they are now). God has experienced suffering in this world, and mourns over it.</p> <p>While we have helpful clues as to what God is doing in the world (c.f. the fall, patience in judgment, the cross, the kingdom to come, etc) the hard thing about this view is that it requires us to trust God with what we don't know.</p>