

Lost for Words
Week 4
Suffering, when no one asks you questions

I know it can feel like information overload. After the course is finished we'll put the notes on the website. Also, listen with an attitude that says, "I won't get everything now but what can I take away with me." Start simple and then build on this.

What is the gospel? Ask questions.

Suffering

What does the Bible teach about suffering?

- *The world has been altered by our rebellion.*

Our ancestors sinned and the world was judged. We make the situation worse by our behaviour. The world is interconnected.

Throwing the captain off the ship.

Sometimes personal sin leads to personal suffering. But often suffering is caused because of life in a fallen world.

- *God has promised to end all the pain.*

On that day justice will be done. This leaves the question...

- *Why doesn't he end the suffering now?*

He wants people to be prepared for eternity.

Our God is so great and powerful that he actually uses suffering to achieve his purposes. Life is fragile, we are puny. To bring people to Christ and to mature believers in Christ.

Get our expectations right.

How do we answer questions about suffering?

- Asking questions is vital.
- Feel the pain of the person.
- Feel the force of the objection.
- Answer in a way that leads to Jesus.
- **John 11.** Jesus weeps. He also has the power to sort it out. Raises the dead. Heals the sick. Why doesn't he stop all the suffering now? Now is the time to be prepared for eternity.
- **Luke 13.** Jesus was once asked the same sort of thing. Do you know what he said? It's very surprising and shocking. Why did he say this? There is a day of judgement. Will you be ready for this? Cross the line. Shall I tell you how you can be ready for this?
- **Baby P tragedy.** How might we answer someone who was talking about this? Luke 13. Why does bad stuff happen? Who is to blame?

How to speak about Jesus when no one asks you any questions

Some general tips.

- Listen.

Listening is like rowing a boat round an island looking for a landing point.

- Be interested in people. Take an interest in **them**.

Ask them questions. What did you do at the weekend? What did you do last night? What are you reading? Anything interesting on TV or a film you've seen? They might ask you a question in return but don't stress if they don't.

Ask them questions about the bigger questions in life. Be interested in their answers. What do you think it's all for? What are your dreams? What do you think happens next?

- Link in a chain. Golden link in golden chain.
- Move people along one stage.

Keep on asking the 'What next?' question for this person.

Could it be a book? Could it be a Gospel? **Have these in your bag or in your car.** Could it be church? Could it be Identity? Could it be another course?

- Sowing seeds

Me at the hairdresser. What are you up to at the moment? Song of Songs. Not gospel. That is specific. Sowing seeds.

- Striking sparks
- Don't wait around for golden opportunities.
- Don't always agree with what people say.

Me at a wedding in Oxford. You either have faith or you don't. I then asked for permission to speak.

- Be intentional without being intense

We are not evangelizing objects. We are sharing the greatest news in the world with people.

- Be prepared to step out of our comfort zone.

Be prepared to cross the line. Think less about how people will respond and more about how God will respond.

- Remember God is sovereign. Enjoy the conversation.

- Speak about God in general conversation.

We live in a culture where God talk is weird. He is not mentioned naturally in conversation.

What about in our conversations? In our homes? Do you always pray before meal?

What about in church? Do you talk about God to each other?

Then speak about God as you discuss what you do and how you make decisions. I prayed about this.

Intentionally natural in our conversations. Raising a **faith flag**.

Observe peoples' responses. Silence often means they don't want to bite. Fair enough. God is sovereign.

For example, **What did you do at the weekend?** Don't simply mention church. Mention something specific about the great sermon in the context of your weekend. This shows that you doing all sorts and not simply turn up to church.

- The danger of friendship evangelism.

We don't want to put the friendship on the line by talking about Jesus. No one is asking us to batter people with the gospel but surely friends are supposed to be honest with each other.

Taking the initiative

- Pray.
- You know I'm a Christian and I'm really keen to tell what it's really all about but I know what it's like when people push stuff down my throat so I thought I would ask first of all.

Responding to what people say

- Questions don't always have a question mark

People make statements that we can respond to.

Ask permission to answer a statement

- More general topics of conversation

Recently the **Thought for the Day**.

How would you respond to these comments?

- I don't believe in God but I still like the morals.
- I don't mind if people keep their religion to themselves.
- A family member is ill.
 - Do you ever wonder why people get sick in the first place?
- Someone is anxious about the future
- Someone who seems perfectly happy with life.
 - You are obviously a pleasure seeker. Do you ever fear you might be settling for too little? You've obviously had a great time.

There will be lots of other examples. Why not talk about these among yourselves, at home groups, ask me. Let us sharpen each other.

Finish with some thoughts on 2 Corinthians 4:1-7.