

# When Bad Things Happen to Good People

*Harold S. Kushner*

## ***Discussion Guide***

*When Bad Things Happen to Good People, by Harold S. Kushner (Avon Books, copyright © 1981), examines the relationship between God and suffering in the world. It looks at suffering in a world of good and evil and offers valuable insights about how and why things happen. Kushner explores many topics including prayer, pain, evil, miracles, and how God works through people in our world. The book is a life-affirming journey that comforts the reader and provides strength for hard times.*

*Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.*

---

## Chapter 1

### **Why Do the Righteous Suffer?**

*This chapter looks at reasons for the suffering of good people.*

1. Share your reasons for reading this book and what you hope to gain from it.
2. Why does unjust suffering cause us to question the goodness of God?
3. List and discuss some of the common explanations we have for suffering. Why is it so important for us to find rational and sensible explanations?
4. Does God never ask more of us than we can endure? Explain your answer.
5. Discuss the different ways that people try to make sense of suffering.
6. What is wrong with the idea that suffering is a punishment for sin?
7. What do you believe happens after death? Is that a comfort?
8. Why does Kushner suggest that asking “How could God do this to me?” is the wrong question?

---

## Chapter 2

### **The Story of a Man Named Job**

*This chapter explores the biblical account of the suffering of Job and makes some modern comparisons.*

1. How did the Book of Job come about? What is known about it?
2. Give a summary of the story of Job.
3. What is the greatness of the Book of Job?
4. How does Job view God? What does he believe? How does his view change?
5. How do Job's friends react to his suffering and tragedy?
6. What does the story of Job reveal about God?
7. How does the Book of Job challenge the idea that God is all powerful, all wise, and all knowing?
8. How does Kushner believe the author of Job ultimately answers the problem of suffering? Do you find this answer reassuring or troubling?

---

## Chapter 3

### **Sometimes There Is No Reason**

*This chapter looks at the issue of randomness in the universe.*

1. Do you believe everything happens for a specific reason? Why?
2. How does the arbitrariness of suffering challenge our view of God?
3. Talk about a time when you experienced bad luck. What or who was to blame?
4. Where do you see the hand of God in our world today?
5. Do you believe there is a reality that stands independent of God's will? Why?
6. Discuss the meaning of chaos, both as it relates to the creation of the universe and as it relates to current conditions.
7. In what way is chaos evil? Do you believe chaos is increasing, decreasing, or staying the same? Why?
8. Do you believe that creation is the ongoing work of God or that it has essentially been completed? (See Romans 8:21-23.) What effect does your view of this have on the question of suffering?

---

## Chapter 4

### **No Exceptions for Nice People**

*This chapter looks at miracles, the laws of nature, and mortality.*

1. Where do you find proof of God?
2. In what ways are human bodies miracles?
3. Discuss why pain is necessary.
4. If good people were immune to the laws of nature, what problems would be caused?
5. Discuss the difference between an act of God and an act of nature.
6. Do you believe in miracles today where God suspends the laws of nature? Why?
7. List things that are reliable and predictable in this world. How is this good and bad?
8. Discuss what the implications would be if people lived forever and never died.

---

## Chapter 5

### **God Leaves Us Room to Be Human**

*This chapter explores freedom of choice and what it means to be a human.*

1. What does the Bible tell us about what it means to be human and how we are to relate to God and the world?
2. In your own words, explain what it means to be human.
3. Discuss the reasons that God put human beings on this earth.
4. How are humans different from animals? What do humans share with God?
5. Humans know they will eventually die. How does this knowledge affect our actions?
6. What's good and bad about having freedom of choice?
7. What kind of God do you believe in?
8. How does the Christian belief that God suffers affect our understanding and acceptance of human suffering?

---

## Chapter 6

### **God Helps Those Who Stop Hurting Themselves**

*This chapter looks at sympathy, guilt, jealousy and other things that make a bad situation worse.*

1. Discuss the meaning and truth behind the title of this chapter.
2. Why did Job need sympathy more than he needed advice from his friends?
3. What two things did Job's friends do right in trying to help him?
4. When bad things happen to good people, what feelings are common and why?
5. Discuss what children need to know and how they need to be treated when someone they know dies.
6. Give some examples of when guilt is and is not appropriate.
7. When we are hurt or angry, what should we do with our anger?
8. How is jealousy also an inevitable part of being hurt? What is the cure for it?

---

## Chapter 7

### **God Can't Do Everything, But He Can Do Some Important Things**

*This chapter examines why we should pray and what it means for prayer to be answered.*

1. What new insights did you gain from this discussion on prayer?
2. Share a time when you prayed for a person's health. Discuss how you felt.
3. Discuss the issues involved when praying for someone's health.
4. List and discuss the examples given of bad prayers in the Talmud.
5. How do you explain that miracles sometimes do occur?
6. What can prayer do for us to help us when we hurt?
7. Discuss the kind of prayer that God answers. What expectations should we have when we pray?
8. Explain why prayer is not primarily a matter of asking God to change things.

---

## Chapter 8

### **What Good, Then, Is Religion?**

*This chapter looks at love and forgiveness as responses to suffering.*

1. Discuss how the author was changed by his son Aaron's life and death.
2. What is God's role when we are faced with tragedy?
3. How can senseless tragedies be redeemed?
4. How have your beliefs about God changed over the years? What caused the change?
5. List and discuss the ways that this book affirms life.
6. How does God make a difference if God neither cures nor kills?
7. Why should our discussions about suffering avoid asking "why did this happen?" and instead focus on how will we respond?
8. How should we respond when bad things happen to us? To others?
9. How has this book helped you?