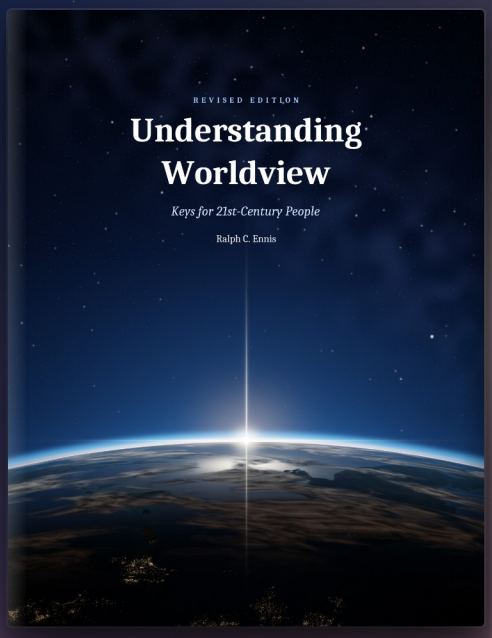
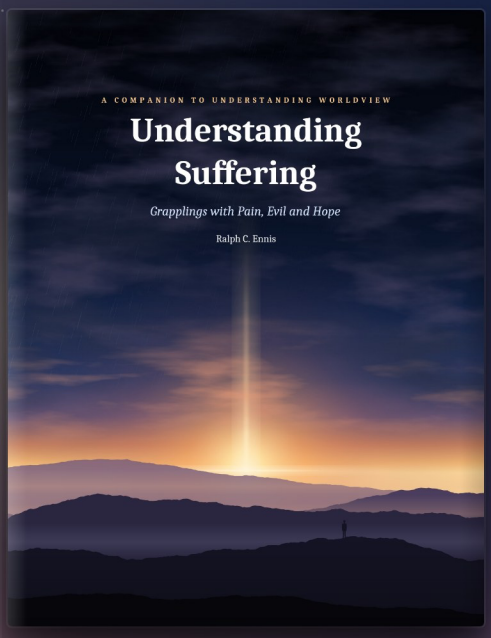
TWELVE SESSIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS

Head & Heart

A Reflection Guide for
Understanding Worldview and Understanding Suffering

Ralph C. Ennis





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How to Use This Guide

This guide is for small groups and friends reading two companion papers by Ralph C. Ennis. *Understanding Worldview* follows Sam, a lonely twenty-five-year-old, as he searches for meaning. *Understanding Suffering* follows Sam's journal as he grapples with pain, loss and his anger at God. Sessions 1–6 cover *Understanding Worldview*. Sessions 7–11 cover *Understanding Suffering*. Session 12 brings the two together.

Head and Heart

Understanding Worldview says a worldview works through two kinds of reasoning. Conceptual reasoning is what we *think* about the great questions of life. Emotional reasoning is what we *feel* about them: the deep convictions we may never put into words but recognize at once when they are challenged. This guide follows the same pattern.

- **Head questions** help the group understand the reading and weigh whether its ideas hold up.
- **Heart questions** invite each person to notice what they feel, fear and long for, and where God may be meeting them.

Both matter. A group that only discusses ideas can stay safely abstract. A group that only shares feelings can lose its footing. Sam needed both, and so do we.

What Each Session Looks Like

Each session takes 45 minutes and needs no preparation beyond reading the assigned section of the paper, which most people can do in 15 to 20 minutes. Every session follows the same rhythm:

- **Check in (5 minutes).** An easy opening question anyone can answer.
- **Head (10 minutes).** Questions about what the reading says and whether it is true.
- **Heart (10 minutes).** Questions about what the reading stirs in you.
- **Scripture (15 minutes).** Read several short passages aloud and talk about how they speak to the session's theme.
- **Take it with you (5 minutes).** One small step for the week, then time as a group or individually talking to God.

There are usually more questions than time allows. Choose the ones that fit your group. Skipping a question is not failing.

Sessions at a Glance

Understanding Worldview

#	Session	Read before you meet
1	Chaos at the Core	Part One, “Chaos at the Core” through “The Road Ahead”
2	How Our Age Answers	Part Two, all four answers and “What the Answers Have in Common”
3	The Questions Every Worldview Answers	Part Three, including “How to Weigh a Worldview”
4	The Story in Four Acts	Part Four, from its opening through “Act Four: Consummation”
5	How the Story Answers Our Questions	Part Four, “How the Story Answers Our Questions,” sections 1–6
6	Why the Picture Holds Together	“Why the Picture Holds Together,” “Back to Sam” and “For Those Who Walk Alongside Sam”

Understanding Suffering

#	Session	Read before you meet
7	Why, God?	Part One, “Why, God?” through “The Road Ahead”
8	Answers That Fall Short	Parts Two and Three
9	A Story That Holds Our Pain	Part Four, from its opening through “2. Love: Does God Feel My Pain?”
10	Power, Wisdom, Goodness and Joy	Part Four, “3. Power” through “6. Joy”
11	When Suffering Has a Name	“When Suffering Has a Name” through the end of the Conclusion
12	Head and Heart Together	“Back to Sam” in both papers

For Whoever Leads

No training is needed. The leader keeps time, reads the questions aloud and makes sure everyone has room to speak. A few practices help:

- **Keep it small.** Three to eight people lets everyone talk.
- **Let people pass.** Heart questions are invitations, never requirements.
- **Keep confidences.** What is shared in the group stays in the group.
- **Listen before fixing.** Resist answering someone’s pain with a quick verse or advice. Job’s friends did their best work when they sat in silence.

- **Welcome doubt.** Honest questions, even angry ones, belong here. Sam's journey began with them.
- **Know your limits.** Some sessions touch on suicide, abuse and grief. If someone is in danger or speaks of ending their life, help them call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) or emergency services, and involve a pastor or counselor.

If You Are Still Exploring

You do not need to believe anything to take part. Sam began with questions and a prayer that was barely more than "If You are there, I want to know You." Doubts, objections and "I'm not sure" are all welcome here. The Head questions give you room to test the ideas; the Heart questions give you room to notice what you long for. No one will pressure you to agree, and you can pass on any question.

Praying Together

Each session ends with a short prayer. If praying aloud is new to your group, keep it simple: one person can pray, or each person can offer a single sentence. If praying aloud is uncomfortable, a moment of silent prayer is good too. In the sessions on suffering, the Psalms offer a pattern for honest prayer:

- **Turn to God.** Speak to Him directly, even if all you can say is "God, I don't understand."
- **Tell Him the truth.** Name the hurt, the anger, the fear or shame.
- **Ask.** Say what you need, for yourself or for someone else.
- **Trust.** Recall one thing you know about who God is, even if you do not feel it yet.

Psalm 13 follows this pattern in six verses, moving from "How long, O LORD?" to "But I have trusted in your steadfast love" (Psalm 13:5).

Adapting the Guide

The sessions also work one-on-one, over coffee or as a mentoring conversation. A group with more time can share a meal first or give the Heart questions an extra ten minutes. On a retreat, two sessions can be paired: Sessions 4 and 9, for example, look at the same four-act story from two angles.

Where the Papers Meet

The two papers follow the same young man and share the same shape, so their sections line up. Use this table to look back at the matching section of the other paper, or to pair sessions for a retreat.

Matching Sections in the Two Papers

Theme	Understanding Worldview	Understanding Suffering	Sessions
Sam's questions	Part One, "Chaos at the Core"	Part One, "Why, God?"	1 and 7
Our age's answers	Part Two, "How Our Age Answers"	Part Two, "How Our Age Answers Suffering"	2 and 8
Testing a worldview	Part Three, "How to Weigh a Worldview"	Part Three, "How to Weigh an Answer"	3 and 8
The four-act story	Part Four, "The Story in Four Acts"	Part Four, "The Story in Four Acts"	4 and 9
Pain, good and evil	"5. Dilemmas of Reality"	"How the Story Answered Sam's Questions"	5, 9 and 10
Walking alongside	"For Those Who Walk Alongside Sam"	"For Those Who Walk Alongside Sufferers"	6 and 11
Back to Sam	Conclusion, "Back to Sam"	Conclusion, "Back to Sam"	12

Session 1: Chaos at the Core

> **Read before you meet:** Part One, from "Chaos at the Core" through "The Road Ahead."
>
> **Big idea:** Beneath our culture's noise lies an aching question: Who am I? Every answer that leaves God out leaves human dignity without a foundation.

> *"He talks to more people in a day than his grandfather met in a month, and he has never felt more alone."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. As a child lying awake at night, what big questions did you wonder about?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. The paper traces Rational man, Industrial man, Fragmented man and Curated man. What does each get right about being human, and what does each leave out?
3. Why might the generation offered more sexual freedom than any before it report more loneliness? Do you find the paper's explanation, that sex cannot bear the weight of a god, convincing?
4. Most young adults in one survey reported lacking meaning in the previous month, yet Bible reading among Gen Z adults jumped in 2025. How do you account for both trends at once?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Sam's online profile is "a better-lit version of his life." What does your better-lit version leave out?
6. Sam learned early that "the people you count on can come apart." Where have you learned to keep a careful distance from needing anyone too much?
7. If you had been beside Sam that Sunday night, which of his questions would have been yours?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"What is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?"*
> —Psalm 8:4

> *"O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar."*
> —Psalm 139:1–2

> *"God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity …"*
> —Psalm 68:6

8. What does it mean to you that God is mindful of you, not your profile but you?
9. Psalm 139 says God knows you fully. Psalm 68 says He settles the lonely in a home. Which do you most need to hear right now?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Put your phone in another room for one evening this week. Notice what you feel in the quiet, and offer God one honest question.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 2: How Our Age Answers

Read before you meet: Part Two, "How Our Age Answers—and Why the Answers Fall Short," including all four answers and "What the Answers Have in Common."

Big idea: Each of our age's answers takes something good, such as technology, politics, personal truth or beauty, and asks it to be God.

> *"The machine had read everything and believed nothing."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. What piece of technology would be hardest for you to give up for a week? Why?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. The paper says science and technology "make poor saviors." What can they do for us, and what can't they do?
3. The church grew under Roman emperors and endures under Chinese censors. What are the dangers of tying the gospel to any political program, including an American one?
4. Sam knew in his gut that the bombing of a hospital was evil. Why does relativism struggle to say so? How does Romans 2:15 explain his reaction?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Which of the four answers have you leaned on most, even if you would never defend it out loud?
6. Sam noticed people who "seemed to need their side to win in the way earlier generations had needed God." Where do you feel that pull?
7. Have you ever asked a screen a question you were afraid to ask a person? What did you hope to hear?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness."*
>
> —Isaiah 5:20

> *"For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."*
>
> —Jeremiah 2:13

> *"Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation."*
>
> —Psalm 146:3

8. Where do you see light and darkness being renamed today, around you or in you?
9. Which of our age's answers is a "broken cistern" you have tried to drink from? What would it mean to return to the fountain?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Watch for one moment this week when you look to something good to do what only God can do. Name it, and hand it back to Him.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 3: The Questions Every Worldview Answers

Read before you meet: Part Three, “The Questions Every Worldview Answers,” including “How to Weigh a Worldview.”

Big idea: Everyone has a worldview, a foundation hidden beneath a society like the foundation under a house. The question is whether it is examined, and whether it is true.

> *“Everyone has a worldview. The only question is whether it is examined, and whether it is true.”*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. If your life were a house, which room would you most like visitors to see? Which would you rather keep closed?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. In your own words, explain the paper’s picture of a house: institutions above ground, cultural identities in the basement, worldview in the foundation. Why is the foundation hardest to see?
3. Name a belief you hold more in your gut than in your head. How did it get there?
4. Apply the four tests (coherence, correspondence, livability and completeness) to one popular view of life you meet often. How does it fare? And is mixing worldviews a better option?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Look at the table of six questions. Which one have you been asking most lately, in your own words?
6. Which of your convictions would you be most afraid to have tested? Why?
7. Where have you quietly borrowed from a worldview you would not say you hold?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"But test everything; hold fast what is good."*
> —1 Thessalonians 5:21
>
> *"See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."*
> —Colossians 2:8
>
> *"In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."*
> —1 Peter 3:15

8. What would it look like to test your own assumptions as honestly as you test other people's?
9. Colossians warns against being taken captive by ideas, and 1 Peter asks for reasons given with gentleness and respect. How can we do both?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Write down one of the six questions and your honest answer to it today. Keep it; you will return to it in Session 12.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 4: The Story in Four Acts

Read before you meet: Part Four, from "The Biblical Worldview: A Story That Holds Together" through "Act Four: Consummation."

Big idea: The Bible begins not with rules but with a story of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation. Within it, our longings, guilt and hunger for love finally fit.

> *"Before there was a world, there was love."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. What story, from a book, a film or your own family, has shaped how you see the world?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. Why does it matter that the Bible begins with a story rather than a list of rules? How do the rules make more sense inside the story?
3. How does the love shared by the Father, Son and Spirit before creation change the way we understand relationship and loneliness?
4. The paper calls us "ruined masterpieces that still bear the marks of the Artist." How does that hold together both our dignity and our brokenness?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Which act of the story do you feel you are living in most right now? Why?
6. Sam's ache for connection is "not a malfunction" but "an echo of the God in whose image he was made." How does it feel to see your own longings that way?
7. "Redemption is not a reward for those who have their lives together; it is a rescue for those who do not." Is that easy or hard for you to believe about yourself?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good."
—Genesis 1:31

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."
—Romans 3:23

"God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us."
—Romans 5:8

"And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'"
—Revelation 21:5

"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."
—Matthew 11:28

8. Read the first four verses in order. How do they tell the story of Creation, Fall, Redemption and Consummation?
9. If you took Jesus at His word in Matthew 11:28, what weight would you most like to set down?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Read John 1:1–14 slowly this week. Notice where each of the four acts shows up.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 5: How the Story Answers Our Questions

> **Read before you meet:** Part Four, "How the Story Answers Our Questions," sections 1 through 6.
>
> **Big idea:** One story answers all six sets of questions. Reality is real, life is going somewhere, truth is a Person, Someone is really there, good and evil can be named, and our deepest needs can be met.

> *"Sam is not the sum of his clicks. He is known, wanted and loved."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. Which of the six sections surprised or helped you most?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. Sam's chatbot "could imitate understanding, but there was no one there to understand him." What is the difference between a simulated relationship and a real one?
3. "Meaning is not invented by each individual; it is given by God. That is not a burden but a relief." Why might received meaning be a relief rather than a constraint?
4. The gospel deals with guilt by forgiveness and with shame by welcome. Why does our culture struggle with both?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Which of the six questions does the story answer most powerfully for you? Which still feels unanswered?
6. Where do you usually look for security, significance and strength?
7. How would your week change if you truly believed your worth does not depend on "usefulness, intelligence or economic output"?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."*
> —Colossians 1:17

> *"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."*
> —Genesis 1:27

> *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"*
> —John 14:6

8. Where do you need things to hold together right now?
9. Genesis 1:27 speaks to who we are, and John 14:6 to what is true. Which of the six questions does each one answer for you?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Choose one area of life (work, relationships, money or rest) and ask God each morning this week what it is for.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 6: Why the Picture Holds Together

> **Read before you meet:** "Why the Picture Holds Together," the Conclusion, "Back to Sam" and "For Those Who Walk Alongside Sam."
>
> **Big idea:** The biblical worldview explains both our greatness and our brokenness, makes sense of our longings, names evil while offering hope, roots love in reality and can actually be lived.

> *"Sam's questions have not gone away. But they no longer feel like a void. They feel like a doorway."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. Who first invited you to "come and see" something that changed you?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. Which of the five reasons the picture holds together do you find strongest? Which would a skeptical friend push back on?
3. Lewis reasoned that a desire no experience in this world can satisfy suggests we were made for another world. How does that argument work? Is it persuasive?
4. Much of our theology still answers the Reformation's question, while many people today begin with "Who am I?" or "Is anything real?" How might that change the way we share the gospel?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Sam's first prayer was barely more than "If You are there, I want to know You." What would your honest prayer be right now?
6. Who is a "Sam" in your life? What would it look like to walk alongside that person the way Marcus did?
7. Where does your own restlessness point?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?' … He said to them, 'Come and you will see.'"*
>
> —John 1:38–39

> *"Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"*
>
> —Psalm 34:8

> *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*
>
> —2 Corinthians 4:6

8. If Jesus asked you today, "What are you seeking?" how would you answer?
9. Paul says God has "shone in our hearts." Where have you seen that light lately, in your own life or in someone else's?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Pray by name for one person who is asking big questions, and look for one chance this week to listen to them.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 7: Why, God?

Read before you meet: Part One, from "Why, God?" through "The Road Ahead."

Big idea: Suffering raises two problems, one intellectual and one personal. The Bible hushes neither. It hands sufferers the words to ask.

Leader note: This session touches on grief and suicide. Let people pass, and keep the 988 number handy.

> *"Honest complaint, addressed to God, is not the opposite of faith. It is one of faith's oldest forms."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. When you are hurting, do you tend to talk it out, withdraw, keep busy or something else?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. What is the difference between the intellectual problem of suffering and the personal one? Why might an answer to the first not help with the second?
3. C. S. Lewis feared not losing his faith but "coming to believe such dreadful things about Him." Why is that a realistic danger for many people?
4. Why do you think the Bible includes so many laments, from Job and Habakkuk to Jesus' cry from the cross? What Christian responses to suffering make doubt worse, and what helps?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Sam's first journal entry moves from small irritations to the world's horrors to his own losses. Which part of his list is closest to yours?
6. Sam admits he has "gotten numb." Where have you gone numb to suffering, in the world or in yourself?
7. Have you ever felt you were not allowed to be angry with God? Where did that idea come from?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"*
>
> —Psalm 13:1

> *"O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you 'Violence!' and you will not save?"*
>
> —Habakkuk 1:2

> *"Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us."*
>
> —Psalm 62:8

8. What would your own "How long?" be?
9. Psalm 62 invites us to "pour out your heart before him." What keeps you from doing that? What helps?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Like Sam, write one honest journal entry to God this week. No one will ask you to share it.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 8: Answers That Fall Short

Read before you meet: Parts Two and Three, "How Our Age Answers Suffering" and "The Questions Suffering Asks."

Big idea: Each popular answer to suffering gives up something true. The biblical view holds on to all of it, and so it must face hard questions about God's character.

> *"Every answer he had been offered asked him to stop feeling something he knew it was right to feel."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. Without naming anyone, what well-meant comment in a hard time did not help you?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. Lewis observed that "a man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line." How does our outrage at suffering point beyond a meaningless universe?
3. Karma and the prosperity gospel both treat suffering as payback. How did Jesus answer that view in John 9 and Luke 13?
4. Look at the "Kinds of Suffering" table. Why do different kinds of suffering call for different kinds of care?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Which answer have you reached for in your own pain: meaninglessness, numbing, blame or detachment?
6. Of Sam's six questions about God's character, which is hardest for you to trust right now?
7. Sam wrote, "Every day I wear a mask, and people think I'm happy." What does your mask look like?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"Jesus wept."*
> —John 11:35
>
> *"Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.'"*
> —John 9:3
>
> *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep."*
> —Romans 12:15

8. What does it mean to you that Jesus wept even though He knew He was about to raise Lazarus?
9. Romans 12:15 asks us to weep with those who weep. Who in your life needs that from you this week?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Notice one moment this week when you want to numb or detach. Instead, tell God honestly what you feel.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 9: A Story That Holds Our Pain

Read before you meet: Part Four, from "The Biblical View: A Story That Holds Our Pain" through "2. Love: Does God Feel My Pain?"

Big idea: Suffering is an intruder in God's good world. God entered our pain at the cross, and His justice, though delayed, is certain. The delay is mercy.

> *"The cross does not explain every suffering. It shows us what God is like in the middle of it."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. What is something broken around you that you instinctively know "is not the way it's supposed to be"?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. How does each of the four acts (Creation, Fall, Redemption, Consummation) change the way we see suffering?
3. John Stott asked, "In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it?" What difference does a suffering God make?
4. Sam realized, "If Your sense of justice were like mine, You would have destroyed the human race." Why do we want justice for others and mercy for ourselves?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Sam feared God might be like the man behind the glass in the Milgram experiment, coolly watching. What picture of God do you carry when you hurt?
6. Is it easy or hard for you to believe that God feels your pain? Why?
7. Is there a wrong done to you that you are still carrying? What would it mean to hand the case to God, while still seeking rightful justice?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"In all their affliction he was afflicted … in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old."*
>
> —Isaiah 63:9

> *"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."*
>
> —Isaiah 53:3

> *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin."*
>
> —Hebrews 4:15

8. Where do you need to be carried right now?
9. Isaiah calls the Messiah "a man of sorrows." How does it change your prayers to know Jesus understands grief from the inside?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Each day this week, finish this sentence in prayer: "Lord, You see …"

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 10: Power, Wisdom, Goodness and Joy

Read before you meet: Part Four, from "3. Power: Why Doesn't God Stop It?" through "6. Joy: Can I Ever Be Glad Again?"

Big idea: God's restraint is not weakness, and His wisdom often stays hidden. He can bring good out of evil without calling evil good, and beneath our bitterness His welcome can heal our shame.

> *"God permits what he hates to accomplish what he loves."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. Name one small beauty from this past week, like Sam's "taste of an apple."

HEAD

10 minutes

2. Sam understood God's restraint as a parent. What does that comparison explain well, and where does it fall short?
3. God never told Job why he suffered. Why might God's presence be a better gift than an explanation?
4. What is the difference between "all things are good" and "all things work together for good" (Romans 8:28)? Why call these truths "medicine for our own wounds"?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Sam asked why he was spared as a toddler and his friend was not. Have you lived with a "Why me?" or a "Why not me?"
6. Sam wrote that he might one day befriend his thorns, "But not yet." Is there a thorn you are not ready to befriend? That is allowed.
7. "Now I realize You were never grading me!" Where do you feel graded, by God, by others or by yourself?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love."*
>
> —Zephaniah 3:17

> *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."*
>
> —Romans 8:28

> *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'"*
>
> —2 Corinthians 12:9

8. What would it mean for God to quiet you by His love this week?
9. Romans 8:28 does not say that all things are good. What does it say? Where have you seen God's power made perfect in weakness?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Write your own short thanks list, as Sam did. Include one hard thing God may be using, and be honest if you cannot yet give thanks for it.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Session 11: When Suffering Has a Name

Read before you meet: From "When Suffering Has a Name" through the end of the Conclusion.

Big idea: The biblical story speaks to each kind of suffering differently, and the church is most believable when it suffers alongside people.

Leader note: This session names grief, suicide loss, abuse, illness and depression. Invite, never press. If someone discloses abuse or danger, safety comes first.

> *"It does not hand Sam a complete explanation. It hands him a Person."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. Who has been a "Marcus" to you, someone who showed up when it hurt?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. Choose one named kind of suffering. What does the biblical story offer it in particular?
3. Why does the paper insist that, with abuse, safety and justice come before any talk of forgiveness?
4. Psalm 88 ends in darkness, and it is still in the Bible. What does that tell us about God, and about depression?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Which kind of suffering has touched your life most closely? Share only what you choose.
6. Which practice for walking alongside sufferers comes naturally to you? Which is hardest?
7. Sam tells Lily, "God is sad about it too. And one day He's going to fix everything." What would you most like God to fix?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"And they sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great."*
> —Job 2:13
>
> *"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."*
> —Psalm 34:18
>
> *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."*
> —2 Corinthians 1:3–4

8. When has someone's silent presence meant more to you than their words?
9. Paul says God comforts us so that we can comfort others. How has comfort you received prepared you to help someone else?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Reach out this week to one person who is grieving or hurting, with a meal, a text or a visit, without trying to explain anything.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

BOTH PAPERS · SESSION 12

Session 12: Head and Heart Together

> **Read before you meet:** "Back to Sam" in both papers. Bring the question and answer you wrote down in Session 3.
>
> **Big idea:** The story that answered Sam's questions about meaning also held his pain. A worldview that is true for the head must also be livable for the heart, and the biblical story is both.

> *"But he no longer prays into a dark room. He prays to a Father."*

CHECK IN

5 minutes

1. Looking back over these sessions, what sentence, idea or question has stayed with you?

HEAD

10 minutes

2. How do the two papers fit together? Where does *Understanding Suffering* test the claims of *Understanding Worldview*?
3. With suffering included, how does the biblical worldview fare on the four tests of coherence, correspondence, livability and completeness?
4. Lewis believed in Christianity "as I believe that the Sun has risen," because by it he could see everything else. What has the biblical story helped you see more clearly?

HEART

10 minutes

5. Look at the question you wrote down in Session 3. Has your answer changed? How?
6. Sam moved from "talking into a dark room" to praying to a Father. Where are you on that journey?
7. Who is the "Sam" in your life, and what is one step you could take to walk alongside that person?

SCRIPTURE

15 minutes

> *"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"*
>
> —Romans 8:15

> *"And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."*
>
> —Mark 12:30

> *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*
>
> —Revelation 21:4

8. What does it mean to you to call God "Father"?
9. Jesus calls us to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength. After these twelve sessions, where is God inviting your head and your heart to grow?

TAKE IT WITH YOU

5 minutes

Close with each person praying one sentence to God: a thanks, a question or a request. Then decide together whether to keep meeting, and what to read next.

Spend time as a group or individually talking to God.

Notes

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. ESV Text Edition: 2025. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Quotations not otherwise attributed are from Ralph C. Ennis, Understanding Worldview: Keys for 21st-Century People *(revised edition, October 2026) and* Understanding Suffering: Grapplings with Pain, Evil and Hope *(October 2026). Sam is a composite character. Several questions in Sessions 7–12 are adapted from "Connecting to Your Life" in the author's* Grapplings: Why Do People Suffer So Much? *(2015). The quotation that opens Session 10 is from Joni Eareckson Tada, who credits the words to her friend Steve Estes.*

Quotations from C. S. Lewis, John Stott, Augustine, Corrie ten Boom and others are cited in full in the notes of the two papers. Each paper also points readers to the other and to this guide.

If you or someone in your group is thinking about suicide, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, any time, day or night. The National Sexual Assault Hotline is available at 800-656-4673.

About the Author

Ralph C. Ennis, who holds a master's degree in intercultural relations, is an independent researcher in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is the author of *Understanding Worldview* and *Understanding Suffering*, the two papers this guide accompanies. His latest co-authored work is *Minds That Matter: How Ethical DNA Can Save Us from Our Smartest Machines*.

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