

CREATION

Featuring downloadable clips
from the film *Creation*,
in cinemas 25th September 2009



Housegroup

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Creative Suffering

Darwin and the Book of Job

Introduction

The film *Creation* (certificate PG, to be confirmed; in cinemas 25th September 2009) gives us a ring-side seat for Charles Darwin's struggles to write *On the Origin of Species*. We see how his own religious views departed from those of his devout wife Emma, and how the death of their daughter Annie left a deep impression on each of them.

To those of us who just associate Darwin with the theory of natural selection, the link between a film of his life and a study of the book of Job may not seem an obvious one. However, *Creation* raises many questions about the nature of suffering and the place of God in a far-from perfect world. Like Job, Darwin knew the pain of family bereavement and personal ill-health. Like Job, he had friends whose visits were not always as helpful or welcome as intended. Like Job, Darwin experiences reconciliation with family and a renewed sense of peace in place of turmoil, although – unlike Job – without any reconciliation between himself and God.

In this study, three clips from the film *Creation* will stimulate discussion and help us to a greater understanding of the book of Job. The first clip sees Darwin angrily confronting his local vicar about God's so-called benevolence in the face of a world seemingly full of inbuilt cruelty and suffering.

The second clip shows Darwin allowing his memory of Annie's death to surface, prompting an outpouring of pent-up grief. Like Job, when face to face with God, Darwin seems to find a new perspective on his own ongoing suffering.

In the third clip, Charles and Emma Darwin exchange painful, honest words and begin to move forward through their shared grief. The pain is still there, as is the division between her faith and his disbelief. Somehow they learn to accept each other, live with each other, love each other and learn from each other. The cause of their suffering is not taken away, but Charles and Emma both find new hope in the midst of it.

Suffering is one of the greatest challenges to faith in God. However, it is also a source of growth and strength for believers who, like Job, choose to cling to God throughout their ordeal. It is up to us whether our experience of suffering turns us against God in anger, or towards him in humility.

Extra Video Resources

Everything you need to lead this study – these leader's notes, handout sheet and downloadable video clips from the film *Creation* – can be downloaded from www.damaris.org/creationmovie. As an optional extra, you may find it helpful to show some additional video clips from Damaris' *Talking About: Prayer* DVD, which you can buy online from www.damaris.org/shop.

Bible Briefing

The book of Job tackles the subject of suffering head on. While it doesn't give us all the answers, it does provide a glimpse into the Court of Heaven (Job 1:6-12, 2:1-7). Much as we might like to, most of us don't get the same perspective on our suffering. The book of Job is a vital tool for us as we seek to understand what happens when everything is going wrong.

The first thing to notice from Job's experience is that questioning God in the face of suffering is understandable (Job 13:1-14:2). Throughout the book of Job we find him expressing a variety of emotions towards God; he shows fear in 9:33-35, frustration in 13:3 and despair in 3:11, for example. One emotion that, arguably, he doesn't direct at God is anger. Job certainly gets angry, but that anger tends to be in response to the barbs of his so-called friends (13:4-5). What Job wants from God is an end to his suffering and an explanation of the reasons for it (13:20-23). Job is asking the hard questions, but he still trusts God enough to say, 'though he slay me, yet will I hope in him' (13:15).

Meeting God in the midst of suffering provides perspective (Job 40:1-5, 42:1-6). When Job finally gets the opportunity to argue his case, he chooses not to speak (40:4-5). More significantly, his focus shifts from examining God to examining himself and repenting in dust and ashes (42:6). Although Job never gets the answer to his question, he does find satisfaction in the knowledge that God has spoken to him and that he has 'seen' him (42:5). Having found that perspective and stopped his questioning, Job now receives his blessing.

When we trust God in spite of our suffering, we find the way through that suffering to peace and wholeness (Job 42:7-17). Job's later blessings did not replace his losses or make them of no account. Like a scar over an old wound, Job learns to live in the present. He neither forgets the past, nor feels trapped in it. His family, formerly a source of ridicule (2:9-10), now become a source of blessing and consolation (42:11). We are often called to recognise that we have not yet reached the blessing of the end of Chapter 42 – its full expression will not be felt this side of eternity. Nevertheless, God's blessing starts now. For us to reach the beginning of chapter 42, to know that God is real and speaks to us, can transform us as it did Job.

Session notes

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Section One: Questioning God; Job 13:1-14:2

Show *Clip I: Mysterious Ways*

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You may want to explain that previously in the film Darwin's daughter, Annie (who is dead by the time this clip occurs), was disciplined in Sunday School for contradicting the teacher. Her punishment was to be made to kneel in rock salt until she repented and stopped asserting that dinosaurs really had existed. At the time Darwin reluctantly refrained from complaining, but in this clip his anger and resentment surfaces.

- 1 How might you answer Charles Darwin's comment about the brutality of nature? How much does the brutality of nature challenge the Christian belief in the goodness of God?

Optional extra: *Clip D: Time Lapse*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips

- 2 How easy is it to 'disagree without feeling animosity'? How can differences of belief become an additional burden for people experiencing great suffering? Can anyone in the group share any examples of this?
- 3 What different emotions does Darwin express during the clip? Read Job 13:1-14:2. Which emotions does Job share with Charles?

Optional Clip: *Talking About: Prayer Topic 2 Video 4 (God builds our understanding)*

- 4 How would you contrast Job's faith with Darwin's lack of it?
- 5 Where do Job's friends go wrong? Does the Reverend Innes make similar mistakes in the clip? What are the most important things to bear in mind when talking with someone who feels overwhelmed with suffering? When you have gone through hard times, what responses from other people have you found most helpful?

Optional Clip: *Talking About: Prayer Topic 3 Video 4 (Get right with God)*

Use this, if you wish, to give the group some extra input to reflect on.

Section Two: A New Perspective; Job 40:1-5 and 42:1-9

Show *Clip K: Tell Me About Jenny*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips

You might like to point out that this clip begins in flashback. Charles Darwin has gone to visit the guest house where his daughter, Annie, died. The beginning of the clip shows him remembering his last conversation with Annie. When the clip cuts away from Annie's dead body, the reaction from Darwin that we see takes place back in the film's present (i.e. no longer part of the flashback).



- 6 Through the use of Charles Darwin's story about the death of Jenny the Orangutan, the film implies that Annie was reconciled to the prospect of her death. How does her peace in the face of death contrast with Darwin's obvious grief after the event? Remind people of the second quote on the worksheet. How do we know when illness and suffering is something to be fought against, and when it is something to be accepted?

Read Job 40:1-5 & 42:1-9

- 7 What answers does God give concerning the reasons for Job's suffering (40:6-41:34)?
- 8 What do you think Job was 'repenting' of in 42:6?
- 9 How important are our feelings in our relationship with God? How important are they in our understanding of ourselves? What else should we take into account in these areas?

Optional Clip: *Talking About: Prayer Topic 1 Video 2 (Because we are built for a relationship with God) or Topic 3 Video 1 (Focus on God)*

Use this, if you wish, to give the group some extra input to reflect on.

Section Three: Peace Through Trust; Job 42:1-17

Show *Clip L: What Do You Want From Me?*

Download from www.damaris.org/creationfilmclips

Explain that this clip occurs after Darwin has spent some time in Malvern receiving treatment for his illness. If you didn't show *Clip K: Tell Me About Jenny*, explain that during his time away, Charles has visited the room where Annie died and he has spent time reflecting on her death.



- 10** What has changed for Darwin as a result of his time in Malvern? How does this impact on his relationship with Emma?

Read Job 42:8-17

- 11** Job spoke of the difference 'seeing' God had made to him (42:5) and is reunited with his family (42:11). Charles and Emma's reconciliation is shown to be a powerful moment, marking a turning point for them and their relationship. How important are our close relationships in helping us to cope with suffering?
- 12** Which of the 'blessings' that Job received in verses 10-16 do you think were the most important?

Optional Clip: *Talking About: Prayer Topic 1 Video 1 (Because God calls us to trust him)* or *Topic 2 Video 3 (God builds our trust)*

Use this, if you wish, to give the group some extra input to reflect on.

Additional Notes for Leaders

1 This is a question where it is easy to fall back on pat answers, rather than honestly grappling with difficult issues (and hard to provide anything more than pat answers in the space permitted here!). Be sensitive to the possibility that this may be a significant personal issue for one or more members of the group. As Innes suggests, God's wisdom is far beyond human understanding, although this answer on its own is not necessarily a helpful one. It is important to stress God's love as well as his wisdom. Remind the group that God himself is not remote from our pain, suffering with and for us. You could also point out that whereas our perspective easily sees this world as the be-all-and-end-all, that view ignores the reality of the New Heaven and New Earth that is to come.

2 Remind the group of the first quote on the worksheet. As Darwin looked at the brutality of nature and experienced life's difficulties, both in the physical pain of his illness and the emotional pain of losing two children, he finds that he cannot believe in a God who would either ordain or allow such things.

Encourage the group to re-examine their own experiences of conversations with non-Christians. It may be that they have experience of the views of others (Christian or otherwise) adding to their own suffering, or of a time when they were aware of suffering friends who reacted badly to expressions of Christian belief. Encourage the group to consider the most helpful way to for us to respond to either of these situations.

3 We find Job (like Darwin) struggling at the relentless onslaught of suffering and without the necessary space to try to come to terms with it.

As noted earlier, Job experiences a range of emotions through the book. Encourage the group to use their imagination to enter into the experience of Job and to use both the passage and the clip to draw further parallels and distinctions between Job and Darwin.

4 Job wants to argue with God, pointing out that his understanding of God's character is at odds with what he is personally experiencing. By contrast, Darwin seems to have decided that his scientific research casts doubt on the possibility of a loving God existing. Could it be that Darwin's ability to make these discoveries are part of the answer – unlike lesser animals, human beings are made in the image of God and, as a result, can ask the question 'why?'

5. Note the support of Innes, expressed in the arm around Darwin's shoulder and his suggestion that he still considers that he has acted without animosity towards him. Unlike Job's friends, Innes is not remotely accusatory towards Darwin, but still provokes a hostile response. You could discuss which factors are most influential in Darwin's reaction: Innes' words, Innes' previous actions in the rock salt incident, Darwin's theories about evolution by natural selection, or his grief over Annie's death.

- 6 There is a difficult balance to be found here. Medical research suggests that a positive attitude to fighting illness can be a significant factor in recovery. Equally, Christians have a different perspective on death to many others today, seeing ultimate healing only coming through the death of a believer, who then experiences absolute peace and wholeness with God in eternity.
- 7 Encourage the group to dip into these verses. They all make the point that God's knowledge of creation goes far beyond our ability to comprehend it – basically, we are out of our depth. Job accepts this and Darwin seems to come to terms with the fact that Annie is dead.
- 8 Job seems to recognise that some of his words have been rash and inaccurate, as he demonstrates by putting his hand over his mouth (40:4). Job could be said to have been provoked into his impetuous words by the behaviour of his friends, and their divine admonition in verse 7 supports this view.
- 9 Job makes a decision to move beyond trusting only his experience of suffering, and trusts instead in God's sovereign majesty. As he came face to face with God (significantly, without receiving the answers to his questions), he found a new perspective on the suffering that he was enduring. The story of Jenny the Orangutan acts like a switch to release Darwin's buried emotions and begins the process of healing for him too.
- 10 Having released his pent-up feelings in the guest house, Darwin now seeks to bring things to a head with Emma. The clip starts part of the way through their confrontation. In the part of the scene not shown here, the couple argue as Darwin insists that they talk about the things that have been so long left unsaid. Sometimes in relationships it is necessary to face difficult, honest conversations in order to make any progress on difficulties.
- 11 Remind the group of the final quote on the worksheet. Relationship allows us to draw strength, companionship and reassurance, enabling us to cope more easily with life's difficulties. That is the significance of Job being given a new family and the touching truth behind the Darwin's reconciliation.
- 12 Quite simply, encourage the group to end by 'counting their blessings' and reassure them that the end of our lives is not yet written – who knows what God has in store for each of us? Prayers along these lines, or starting to keep a journal may be two suitable ways to end and extend the session.



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