REFLECTION GUIDE

8.6.23

INTRO

God's role in human suffering can be a troubling conflict for some. The Bible gives us insight into God's character that helps us begin to work through this issue.

THOUGHTS

PRAYER

God of love, though it is difficult to understand your ways at times, I trust in your goodness and mercy. Help me to hold on to my faith in who you are when I can't make sense of what is happening around me. Help me to understand that my actions have natural consequences as do the actions of others. Give me the strength it takes to follow the example of Christ in all I do. Amen.

DIGGING DEEPER

- Look up the definition of the word "providence." Have you ever thought about your beliefs regarding how God interacts with humankind?

- In Adam Hamilton's *Making Sense of the Bible*, he describes two extreme ways to look at God's role in the world. One is as an absentee landlord who set the earth into motion and then took a hands-off approach. The other extreme describes God as a micro-manager, specifically directing all that happens on Earth. What were you taught about how God works?

- The way the Bible describes God's role in the world "was shaped by what the biblical authors could know in their time". [Hamilton, 221] Hamilton uses an example of how we now understand meteorological science and can explain weather patterns, whereas the biblical writers could only attribute weather events to God, not having the knowledge to interpret it differently. How might that have influenced the way they understood God's character?

- Describe the difference between punishment and consequences.

- Some biblical writers believed that God blesses those who do right and curses those who do wrong. In Jeremiah 12:1, this picture of God is questioned. "If I took you to court, LORD, you would win. But I still have questions about your justice. Why do guilty persons enjoy success? Why are evildoers so happy?" [CEB] How does the writer's observation challenge the notion that God allows suffering as punishment?

- Read Romans 8:38-39. How does this assurance encourage you today?