



## **ENTER** God's presence

**As for me, I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice. He rescues me unharmed from the battle waged against me, even though many oppose me.**

**-Psalm 55:16-18**

Heavenly Father, thank you that we can call out to you in our suffering and distress, knowing with confidence that you do hear us. Help us now, as we gather around your word, to know even more deeply your loving care and your power to save us. Amen.



## **SHARE** life together

- 1. Share your highs and lows with each other?**
- 2. Share how you went with your living purposefully from last time?**
- 3. How would you define suffering?**
- 4. What is the most memorable or significant suffering you have experienced? How did you get through it?**

We were not created to live stagnant lives. To be stuck, bound or broken. We were created with a pulse, to be fully alive with a single-minded purpose, a holy calling, a clear mandate and an explicit mission. Even in times that are uncertain, chaotic or incomprehensible, this calling remains. That's relatively easy when life is good, but what happens when suffering hits, or circumstances cause our heart rate to elevate, our anxiety levels to go through the roof, and we can no longer cope with the stress and distress that confront us? Jesus has some encouraging words for his disciples that not only redefines their circumstance and renews their strength, but reorients their hearts to a joy that is always life-giving and always life sustaining. It doesn't take away the suffering, the pain or the anxiety, but it gives a framework that enables us to respond to suffering with joy, embrace hardship with hope and overcome all things in the strength of the risen Christ. We'll explore and experience that today as we embrace life beyond suffering.

Week beginning:  
**Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

Worship series:  
**Life Pulse: Life Beyond Suffering**



## **VERSE** for the week

Jesus says, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 16:33b



## **REMEMBER** this week

Christ takes the very thing which causes us heartache and sorrow, and turns it into a cause of joy. Resurrection is an ongoing gift that continually transforms our everyday living and give us unimaginable life beyond suffering.



**LISTEN** attentively

**Read John 16:20-33**

5. **What key words/thoughts/ideas/questions arise for you as you hear this text?**
6. **What do you hear this scripture saying to you right now?**
7. **In verse 22, Jesus talks about a time of grief and a time of rejoicing. How would you describe your life at the moment, a time of grief/suffering or a time of joy and rejoicing?**

Suffering is one of the perennial problems of sin. It touches every life at one point or another. Overcoming suffering seems to have become a universal project for humanity. We have a global effort working to end the suffering of Coronavirus and also other diseases like cancer and heart disease. We have any number of gadgets advertised on television, designed to bring easy and comfort to our lives. Any device that promises to ease the burden of our work or to relieve us from the suffering of aches and pains seems to have a place in the market. It's no wonder really; suffering hurts, it's painful, most people don't go out seeking suffering, but it still seems to find us. While we all experience it at one time or another, it is not our only experience. Suffering happens for a time and then, usually, we get through it, move past it, or overcome it.

8. **What do you think of Jesus' picture of the birth of a child to describe the reality of suffering in this world? Can you offer a different picture/suggestion?**
9. **How do you successfully turn your grief and suffering into joy?**

Jesus knows, more than we can possibly imagine, the pain of human suffering. As we heard last week during our Easter celebrations, Roman crucifixion was one of the most cruel forms of human suffering humanity has ever imagined to inflict on another. God understands what it is that suffering can do to us on a physical, emotional, and spiritual level because of the suffering and death of Jesus. Yet beyond the suffering that Jesus endured there was life. This is also true of our own suffering. There can be, and in fact God promises, that there is life on the other side.

10. **How might you help those experiencing suffering to recognise that there is life on the other side of suffering?**

In this particular passage of John's gospel, Jesus talks a lot about a time yet to come. A time when our suffering will turn to joy and no one will be able to take it away from us. Jesus says at the end of this passage, "I have told you these things, so that you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus seems to be suggesting that there will be a time when all suffering ceases to be, but that there is also, right now, a way to have peace and security in the midst of suffering.



**GROW** deeper

**Read Philippians 4:8-9**

One of the problems with suffering is that we are wired to focus on it and find ways to relieve it. When we are met with something that threatens to cause us harm, or pain, we become fixated on it; it often becomes all that we can think about until we have found our way past or through the painful situation. When we lose a loved one, we tend to experience a point in our grief where we get angry that they are no longer with us to experience the good things that are happening in our lives. This focus takes the joy from a positive experience and makes it negative. Likewise, we could have to work with a really difficult and obnoxious boss or co-worker. This can make every day at the office seem like torture and we lose sight of all the blessings such as the positive relationships, sense of purpose and financial security which come through our employment. The problem with suffering is that if left unchecked, it tends to grow. It sucks joy out of the other areas of our life in which we are not really suffering at all.

You might have seen in recent years ‘thankfulness challenges’ popping up on various social media platforms and in other places on the internet. These kinds of challenges are also a regularly used tool of many psychologists, but at their root, they are essentially a practical application of this appeal at the end of the letter to the Philippians. Set your mind on the positive things, the good things, the blessings, that are in your life. In the midst of suffering this can be extremely hard to do, but we can do it because we do not need to worry about the solution to our suffering – Jesus is already the solution to our suffering. He is the positive things, the good things, the blessing in our life and no one and nothing can take that away.

**11. What are three things you can be thankful for in your life right now?**

**12. How does it change your thinking about suffering to know that it is something Jesus told us to expect, that it is normal and that it will not last forever?**



**LIVE** purposefully

We live in a world that has convinced itself that life was meant to be easy. In some ways this is true. In a world unaffected by sin that might have been the case. Yet God explained to Adam and Eve the kinds of hardships they would experience as a result of their rebellion; suffering should not come as a surprise to us. Yet it is one of the things that is commonly expressed by others as one of their major hurdles to faith. They ask questions like, “why do bad things happen to good people?” or perhaps even questions like this, “If God is all loving, then how can he allow all this suffering?” These are real questions for many people and can be significant barriers to people coming to faith in Jesus. They may have even been questions you have asked in the past or still wrestle with today. The reality is that we cannot definitively say why a bad thing happens to a particular person, or why God allows natural disasters, global pandemics and human violence to cause death and destruction rather than snapping his fingers and doing away with suffering altogether. But while we may not be able to supply an answer, we still need to offer a response to those questions. So...

**13. How would you respond to someone who asked you, “why does bad stuff happen to good people?” or perhaps on a more personal level, “Why is this happening to me?”**

**14. How would you respond to someone struggling with the question of a loving God who appears to allow all this suffering in the world?**

**15. How can the promises of Jesus make your life an answer to the suffering in someone’s life right now?**



**PRAY** intentionally

- Praise God for dealing with the problem of suffering by giving us life forever with him. Thank Jesus for overcoming the troubles of this world. Ask the Holy Spirit to pulse through you with resurrection life beyond any suffering you experience.
- Pray for the people of Myanmar as they continue to endure untold suffering



**BLESS** one another

You might like to address one person in your group and make the sign of the cross in the air as you say...

**[Name], the life of Jesus pulses in you. Amen.**