

# LENT 3 SERMON NOTES AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

## SUFFERING AND HOPE



## PT 3. HANDLING HARDSHIP

### WELCOME

As you gather it is important to be a community – eat and drink together. Don't let things become 'intellectual' without being grounded in real life. We pray that you might be comfortable to discuss real life – even your own. So let's "keep it real"!

Some Opening Discussion Questions...

- *Is there such a thing as suffering well?*
- *Have you seen someone suffer well (or poorly)? Tell us about it.*
- *What does suffering well look and feel like?*

Remember the world's most pessimistic philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860AD)? He said we should address each other as "my fellow sufferer". We should acknowledge that the biggest thing we all have in common is that we suffer. What do you think of his idea?

## THE TOUGH ONE MEETS HARDSHIP... ALONE.

*1 Corinthians 12:13a,26-27. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

At the heart of following Jesus and being a Christian is the idea of healthy dependence. Firstly we are dependent on Jesus Christ for forgiveness, grace and spiritual life. Secondly when we are baptised into Christ we are dependent on each other for strength to follow him. This is a healthy thing. Rather than toughing out things alone we have become deeply connected to other Christians.

*Discussion Starters:*

- *Read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27 then spend some quiet time reflecting on it.*
- *What have you noticed or really found important here?*
- *Can one be a Christian 'on their own?' Why?*
- *Have you seen someone tough and independent*

## THE PAIN AVOIDER MEETS HARDSHIP... WITH FEAR.

Saint Augustine wrote: *"We are certainly in a common class with the beasts; every action of animal life is concerned with seeking bodily pleasure and avoiding pain."*

Kierkegaard (1813-1855) was a Christian, a Danish Lutheran, and a great teacher. Kierkegaard had the idea that as we mature spiritually we experience different stages. Obviously this set of stages isn't a perfect idea – but it might be useful to help us think about things! Kierkegaard's first stage of spiritual development is when we live life seeking pleasure and avoiding pain and we're not really concerned with bigger things like right, wrong or morality, or the meaning of our actions or life. The great enemies of the person at pain/pleasure stage are: PAIN and BOREDOM. This is where so much of Australian culture exists. When Aussies - who avoid pain and boredom suffer - it's a terrifying thing.

### **Kierkegaard's Spiritual Stages**

- 1. Pain/Pleasure Stage.**
- 2. Morality Stage.**
- 3. Grace Stage.**

*Discussion Starters:*

- *Can you work out what these stages might mean?*
- *How do you see that first stage?*
- *What's wrong with existing simply to seek pleasure and avoid pain?*
- *Read and reflect quietly on Romans 3:3-5 then discuss what you are hearing...*

***Romans 5:3-5. We rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces endurance. And endurance builds character, which gives us a hope that will never disappoint us. All of this happens because God has given us the Holy Spirit, who fills our hearts with his love.***

## **THE MATERIALIST MEETS HARDSHIP... WITH HOPELESSNESS**

C.S. Lewis said that the entire Bible was written “in a world without chloroform (anaesthetic)” and yet even in the face of more suffering without modern medicine they believed that God is love. Tim Keller says that modern people don’t cope with suffering as well as their ancestors because they “have given up on the idea of eternity”.

Discussion Starters:

- *What do you think of the above ideas from C.S. Lewis and Tim Keller?*
- *Why don't modern Aussies cope with suffering as well as our ancestors?*
- *Reflect on and discuss the following (you might look it up and read a bit wider!)*

### ***1 Corinthians 15:19***

***If our hope in Christ is good only for this life, we are worse off than anyone else.***

### ***1 Timothy 6:6-9 (CEV)***

***... they are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth thinking that religion is for gain. And religion does make you rich, by making you content with what you have. We didn't bring anything into this world, and we won't take anything with us when we leave. So we should be satisfied just to have food and clothes. People who want to be rich fall into all sorts of temptations and traps. They are caught by foolish and harmful desires that drag them down and destroy them.***

Now a bit of Sunday’s sermon for you... Jesus did not die to make you comfortable. Jesus did not die to make you materially prosperous. Jesus did not die so you could pay your mortgage and live in apathetic comfort. He died to save you from Satan, from death, and from hell. He died that you might become like him!

## **JESUS CHRIST MEETS HARDSHIP... WITH LOVE!**

Discussion Starters:

- *Try to make a list. Don't bother to make it the same as Martin Luther's. Make it your own. Keep it as short as possible. Can you all agree? Yes this is hard!*
- *What are the marks of the true church of Jesus?*

Obviously it is dangerous if we are making lists to judge people with. But it might help us to realise what is most important and hold onto it too. It would be especially dangerous if we all make lists that look just like our own church! In 1539 in “On the Councils and the Church” Luther wrote his list of the basics of a true Church of Jesus....

### **Luther’s “Seven Marks Of The Church” (1539AD)**

- 1. God’s Word**
- 2. Baptism**
- 3. Communion**
- 4. Forgiveness**
- 5. Servant Leaders**
- 6. Worship**
- 7. Suffering**

For Luther (and many before him) suffering was a mark of true Christianity. A community that follows Jesus suffers and hopes together. We suffer for the love of others. We suffer because the world rejects Christ. We suffer because we stand with the poor and the rejected. We suffer because we share in the identity of Jesus Christ.

Read the following two Bible passages. Sit quietly with them for a while. Then discuss what you hear.

***Romans 8:17-18 (CEV). We will also share in the glory of Christ, because we share in his sufferings. I am sure that what we are suffering now cannot compare with the glory that will be shown to us.***

***1 Peter 4:12-16,19. Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name... Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.***

What does it mean to you that ‘we suffer because we share in the identity of Christ?’

Pray that we will be a true suffering church. Suffering with those who hurt. Suffering together. Caught up in the love of Christ which leads us to suffer with the oppressed and poor. Suffering in Christ can lead to hope and joy. This is true because of the cross, because of Easter Sunday! May your suffering be in Christ, and may it be and become a place of his love and hope!

Pray that our small corner of Christ’s Church may all the more share the identity of Christ!