



SESSION 3

CHRIST CAME TO DIE

Jesus came to suffer and to sacrifice—
and to call us to do the same.



WORSHIP

READING PLAN

Continue exploring the Book of Acts throughout this week. Use the space provided to record your thoughts and responses as you read.

Day 1

Acts 9:1-19

Day 2

Acts 9:20-43

Day 3

Acts 10:1-16

Day 4

Acts 10:17-48

Day 5

Acts 11:1-18

Day 6

Acts 11:19-30

Day 7

Acts 12:1-25

JESUS CALLS US TO SUFFER

It's important to understand that disciples of Jesus haven't cornered the market on suffering. All people suffer. And yet it is true that Christians should differ from the rest of the world in terms of their response to suffering. While many people suffer hopelessly, desperately, or bitterly, Christians suffer purposefully.

Specifically, we suffer for the spread of the gospel and for the advancement of good.

How have your responses to suffering changed throughout the different phases of your life?

The apostle Paul is perhaps the greatest example we have in the Bible of suffering for the spread of the gospel. Paul's writings proclaim to believers of all ages that not only have we been given the glorious gift of belief in Christ, but we've also been endowed with the privilege of suffering for Him (see Phil. 1:29). While we never suffer to redeem the world—that's already been accomplished by Christ—we do suffer as part of our efforts to reach the world with the gospel message.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about suffering for the spread of the gospel.

Philippians 3:7-9

Colossians 1:24-26

2 Timothy 1:8-12

Paul was willing to go anywhere and to suffer any persecution for the privilege of sharing God's message about Christ. For this Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, imprisoned, sleep deprived, hungry, thirsty, cold, and without adequate clothing (see 2 Cor. 11:24-28). Eventually, he was martyred.

Read Philippians 1:12-18. How would you summarize Paul's conclusions about his own suffering?

When Paul wrote the Book of Philippians, he was a prisoner in Rome. He'd been labeled as a criminal, and he knew such a label could cause others to feel ashamed of him or withdraw from him—or worse, withdraw from active participation in the church.

Paul wanted the church at Philippi to have the proper perspective on the trouble he was experiencing. It wasn't something to be ashamed of or discouraged about. He wanted them to know not only that God was at work in the circumstance of his incarceration, but *how* God was at work. He wanted them to understand how God uses our sufferings—the dangerous and stressful and heartbreaking and life-threatening circumstances in our lives—to spread the gospel to those who don't know Him and to strengthen others who would become more emboldened to speak up about Him.

God can also use your suffering as a means to bring about good in your life and in the lives of others. We don't always like to think about it, but it's true. Whatever God allows to come upon you, He also determines what its use will be in drawing others to Himself and His purposes. The circumstances in your life that have hindered you, bothered you, or frustrated you may actually be magnifying His presence and power in the eyes of those surrounding you. Knowing that doesn't make those circumstances any more fun, but it can help you endure suffering with purpose and resolve.

When have you seen personal suffering result in something good?

Read Philippians 1:21-30. What principles does Paul offer in these verses for enduring suffering with purpose?

As we live out our faith to the best of our abilities, we will experience suffering. Yet, we need not be broken or crushed by the weight of that suffering. Through God's power, we can endure it. Better still, we can live purposefully in the knowledge that our suffering may be used by God to spread the message of the gospel and to advance the cause of good in this world.



JESUS CALLS US TO SACRIFICE

There's no way to avoid the truth: Living as disciples of Jesus will require us to make sacrifices. And let's be clear, we're not talking about vague or general sacrifices, such as giving up the pleasure of immorality or releasing the opportunity to be filthy rich. Instead, the sacrifices we make to follow Jesus will be both real and concrete.

Read the following passages of Scripture and record what they teach about making sacrifices in order to follow Christ.

Matthew 10:37-39

Matthew 16:24-27

Luke 9:57-62

Luke 14:31-33

Let's dig deeper into the specific types of sacrifices required to follow Jesus.

First, followers of Jesus must sacrifice possessions. While God does not forbid us from having things, He does want to be sure that *things* don't have *us*. To ensure that God has first place in our hearts, we must untie our affections from the things we own. We must be able to part with material possessions and wealth whenever God leads us to do so.

What are some of your most prized possessions?

Next, followers of Jesus must sacrifice relationships. God will have no rivals for our affections. If we're ever forced to choose between honoring God and honoring our loved ones, we must be ready to choose God unequivocally. Those who would stand in the way of God's interests in our lives or try to discourage us from obeying Him are to be denied the authority to dictate our direction. God is our most sacred relationship, and God alone.

What symptoms indicate that one of your personal relationships is taking precedence over your relationship with God?

In addition, followers of Jesus must sacrifice their plans. There will be times when following Christ requires us to sacrifice our plans in favor of God's plans. He reserves the right to change any of our plans, including our family plans, vacation plans, education plans, retirement plans, financial plans, and even our lunch plans. Followers of Christ humbly allow God to order their steps, giving Him authority over every plan (see Jas. 4:13-15). We submit our intentions to Him each day, surrender our way of doing things to His way, and submit our ambitions and future goals to Him.

How will you intentionally submit your short-term and long-term plans to God?

Finally, followers of Jesus must sacrifice their positions. Surrendering position means being ready to descend from whatever rank we think we've achieved or rise from whatever rest we think we've earned in order to fulfill God's present agenda. It involves relinquishing any honor or role we have, instead yielding to Christ who is to be honored above us (see John 3:30). It involves refusing to use our God-given role in the body of Christ or our social status for personal advantage, but only for the public good as a servant to others (see Luke 22:27).

What steps can you take to prepare yourself for any change of position, location, or status that God may require of you?