

# REAL SUFFERING

*Finding Hope & Healing in the Trials of Life*

GUIDE





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## SESSION 1

# THE THREE KINDS OF SUFFERING

**I**n the case of real suffering . . . we have the example of our Lord. At the approach of his bitter passion, he made known the state of his soul to his disciples, saying: “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death.” Then he asked his eternal Father to deliver him from it: “My Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me.” But our Lord also taught us what we should do once we’ve made such a petition, when he added: “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.”

—ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI,  
*UNIFORMITY WITH GOD’S WILL*, 5



## SESSION INTRODUCTION

Though suffering comes in many different forms, all of our trials generally fall into one of three categories: pain, loss, and guilt. Virtually every kind of human suffering can be traced back to our physical ailments and illnesses, the emotional loss of the things we love most, and the spiritual guilt resulting from our sins.

In this program, we will examine each of these facets of human suffering, viewing them through the prototypes of Jesus, Mary, and Peter. Wrapped up in the story of the Passion and Crucifixion, we encounter the epitome of these three kinds of suffering: in the excruciating pain Jesus experienced on the cross, in the heart-wrenching sorrow Mary endured while watching her Son die, and in the remorse Peter felt at turning his back on the Lord. In these figures, we have a model for how to embrace our suffering and allow it to lead us to God.

# Session 1: Three Kinds of Suffering

Watch the first video, hosted by Dr. Bob Schuchts. Key highlights are provided below with room to take notes for assisting with group discussion.

- Pope St. John Paul II wrote, “Suffering is an experience of evil, a deprivation of a good from which we are cut off or have deprived ourselves, and yet Christ has redeemed human suffering and each one of us has a share in it.”

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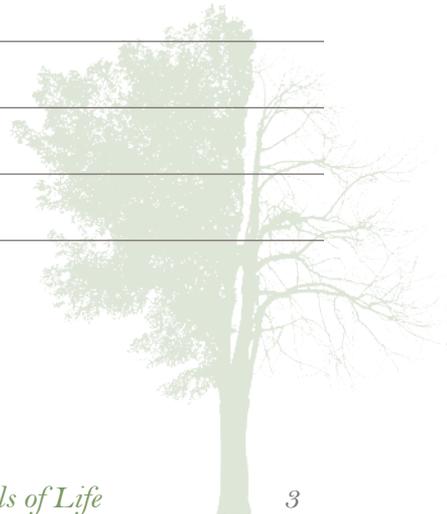
- The actual suffering we face at times pales in comparison to our *fear of suffering*. This hardens our hearts and cuts us off from God and our neighbors.

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- Embracing our suffering, conversely, softens our hearts and allows us to be more loving, compassionate, and understanding.

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- Every one of us experiences the three kinds of suffering: physical pain, emotional loss, and spiritual guilt.

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- In each of these three kinds of suffering, we have Jesus, Mary, and Peter, in the story of the Passion and Crucifixion, as our models.

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# Group Discussion

After watching the video session on the three kinds of suffering, gather as a group and review the following questions, or meditate on your own.

1. In what ways can suffering be a gift?

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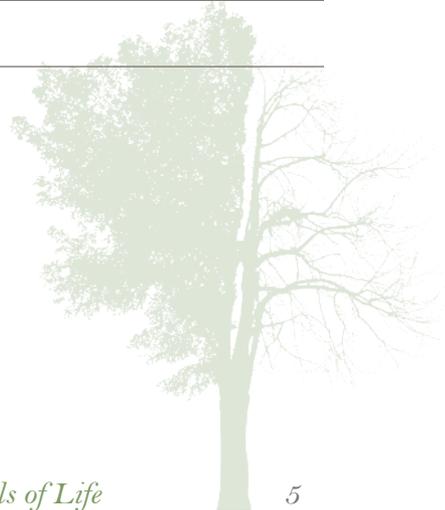
2. Which sort of suffering—pain, loss, or guilt—do you think is the most difficult to deal with? Why?

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3. Can you think of a time when your fear of suffering was more pronounced than what you actually went through? How did this increase your suffering?

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4. How does burying or ignoring times of pain, loss, or guilt, or growing bitter over these difficult times, weigh down the human spirit?

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5. Why does embracing suffering liberate the spirit? In what ways?

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## Personal Reflections

Can you share any personal stories of your own suffering, whether it be from pain, loss, or guilt, and how these lessons ring true in your life?

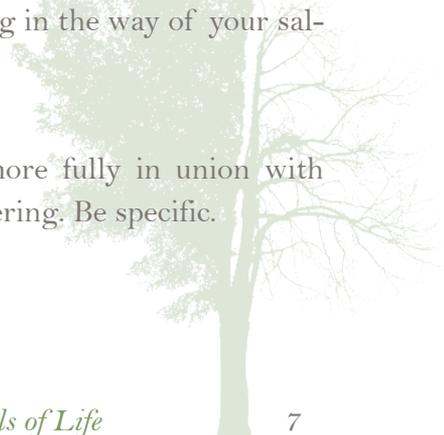
## Suffering Profile Video

Once your group discussion is complete, return to watch the suffering profile on the three kinds of suffering, titled *The Lost Brother*.

## Living With Real Suffering

To close out this session, take note of the following ways you can overcome your suffering and live joyfully through it. Add any other meditations that come to mind in the space provided.

- Think back to a time when you suffered and the circumstances surrounding it. How was this suffering a gift? Did any blessings follow? Were you changed by it? Did you overcome some obstacle standing in the way of your salvation through it?
- Think of ways you can live more fully in union with Christ in the midst of your suffering. Be specific.







# SUFFERING WITH THE SAINTS

Karol Wojtyta was born in Wadowice, Poland, on May 18, 1920. Very early on, he was forced to deal with a great amount of emotional loss. He lost his mother when he was only eight years old, all his siblings shortly after that, and his father when he was twenty. In addition to these family tragedies, his homeland of Poland was constantly under the threat of the great evils of Nazism and Communism. He lost friends during the Second World War, and many things that he loved—homes, churches, schools—were destroyed.

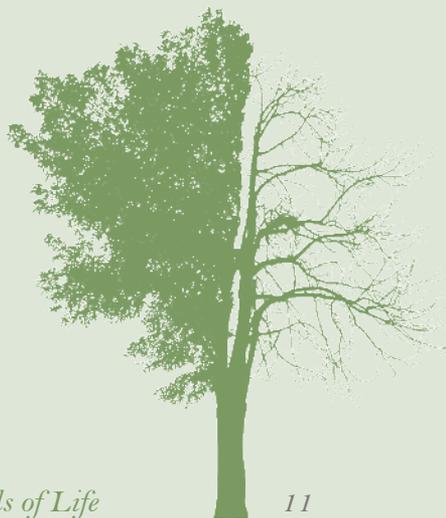
After his rise to the papacy, Karol, now known as John Paul II, was shot by a Turkish assassin in St. Peter's Square on May 13, 1981. He was critically wounded and rushed to a nearby hospital. Though he would live, his body would never be the same. He suffered from the effects of his wounds for many years, and he was later diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. He also had severe osteoarthritis and lost much of his hearing and ability to walk.

Though John Paul II became a saint, we should not assume he was free of spiritual guilt. In fact, it is the saints who often suffer the most because of their sins, for they are so aware of how much they offend God. It is said that John Paul went to confession weekly, which shows his level of remorse for any transgressions he had. As the leader of the global Church, he no doubt held himself to a higher standard and therefore suffered profoundly from even relatively minor sins. Additionally, as the Vicar of Christ, he acutely

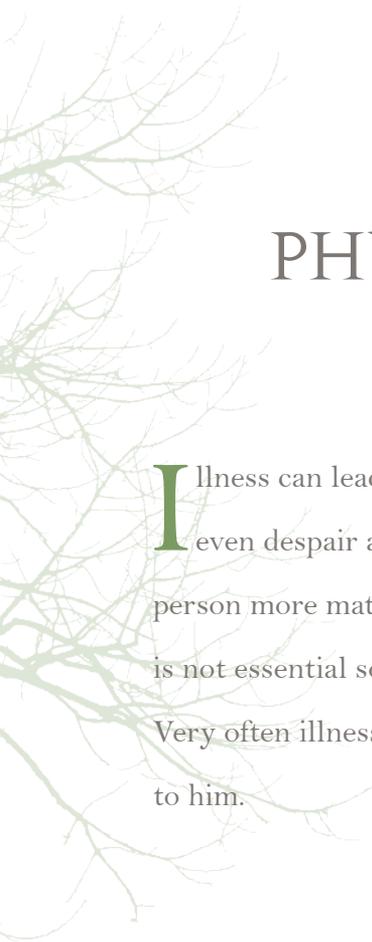
## POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II

felt the sins of the entire Church, just as Christ felt the sins of humanity on the cross.

Through all of these sufferings—his pain, loss, and guilt—he continually came back to the Crucified Savior, telling the faithful, “To share in the sufferings of Christ is, at the same time, to suffer for the Kingdom of God. . . . Those who share in the sufferings of Christ become worthy of this kingdom.” John Paul is one of the patrons of World Youth Day.







SESSION 2  
PHYSICAL PAIN

**I**llness can lead to anguish, self-absorption, sometimes even despair and revolt against God. It can also make a person more mature, helping him discern in his life what is not essential so that he can turn toward that which is. Very often illness provokes a search for God and a return to him.

—*CATECHISM OF THE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH* 1501



## SESSION INTRODUCTION

The reality of physical pain is unavoidable. We all experience it in varying degrees, from the common cold to a debilitating cancer. We often question God when our bodies go through agony, or even foster bitterness toward him. But God doesn't cause the cold or the cancer or anything else in between; any pain we feel is a result of our fallen nature and the sin of our first parents. God, in his mercy, gives us the grace to endure suffering and uses it to redeem us. If we trust in him, he will heal us, perhaps not physically (though that does sometimes happen) but spiritually. Such healing would often not be possible without the cross of physical pain.

Jesus Christ is our model for how to suffer physically. In his passion and crucifixion, he felt more torment than most of us will experience in a lifetime. Yet, in all his agony, he trusted in his Father's will, knowing that a much greater good would spring forth from his sacrifice. Through Christ's pain, God would heal humanity's wounds caused by sin, and in personally uniting our physical pain to his, we find strength and courage to carry our own crosses and come to experience a deep and mysterious joy through them.

## Session 2: Physical Pain

Watch the first video, hosted by Dr. Bob Schuchts. Key highlights are provided below with room to take notes for assisting with group discussion.

- Everyone experiences physical pain in varying degrees. Though we can question God for this, he does not cause the suffering. It was not a part of his original plan.

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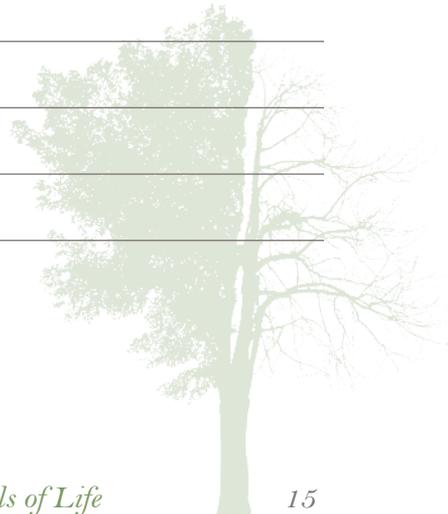
- Jesus, in his passion and crucifixion, is our model for how to suffer physically. Whenever we're tempted to think that God doesn't care or God caused our pain, all we need to do is look at Jesus.

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- Throughout his agony, Jesus poured his love out for others, rather than turning inward in complaint as we so often do.

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- We can get stuck in an earthly perspective in our suffering. But when we look from Jesus's perspective, we see hope rather than hopelessness.

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- Pain has the power to purify us, make us whole, and help us come into our true identity.

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- There are great graces that come to us through physical suffering. And we all have the promise that one day there will be no more pain.

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## Group Discussion

After watching the video session on physical pain, gather as a group and review the following questions, or meditate on your own.

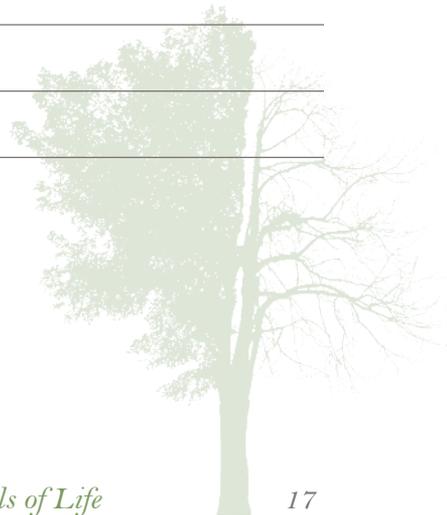
1. How does understanding that God did not cause your physical pain help you understand and accept it more?

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2. In what ways does Jesus serve as a model for enduring physical trials? What does it mean to unite your suffering to his?

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3. What does it mean to have an “earthly perspective” on our suffering? How does that perspective exhaust us? Conversely, how does a heavenly perspective give us vigor to persevere through times of pain?

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4. How does following Christ’s lead in offering our sufferings up for others help alleviate our pain? How does it turn our pain to joy?

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5. How does physical suffering purify us? How does it make us whole? How are we perfected in times of weakness?

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6. Why is it important to be open to receiving help when we are in need?

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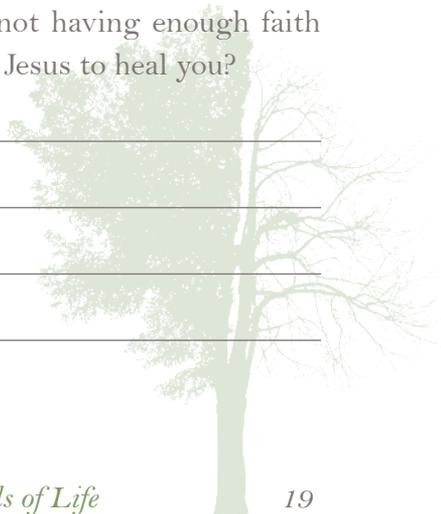
7. Do you believe Jesus is capable of healing you physically and that he desires it? Do you seek his healing? Does the fear of being disappointed or not having enough faith ever hold you back from asking Jesus to heal you?

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## Personal Reflections

Can you share any personal stories of your own physical suffering and how these lessons ring true in your life?

## Suffering Profile Video

Once your group discussion is complete, return to watch the suffering profile on physical pain, titled *Do With Me as You Wish*.

## Living With Real Suffering

To close out this session, take note of the following ways you can overcome your physical suffering and live joyfully through it. Add any other meditations that come to mind in the space provided.

- Make a conscious decision to offer up your physical pain to Jesus as a sacrifice for the benefit of someone else (think specifically about someone in your life).
- Refrain from complaining to others about the minor aches and pains that afflict you.
- Seek out someone else who is suffering physically and offer them consolation and compassion through your kindness, charity, and prayers.



# SUFFERING WITH THE SAINTS

Lidwina was born to a poor Dutch family in 1380. From an early age, she had a strong devotion to the Blessed Mother and was known to pray before a Marian shrine in her town all night long. On one such night, she was said to have had a divine revelation of the pain that would one day come to dominate her life.

In the winter of 1395, Lidwina had an accident while ice-skating with friends. She broke a rib in her right side and was bedridden for some time. Throughout her recovery, she suffered from intense headaches, nausea, and dehydration. Eventually, gangrene appeared in her wound caused by the fall and spread across her entire body.

For almost four decades, she suffered immensely. She was mostly paralyzed, parts of her body fell off, blood constantly fell from her mouth, nose, and ears, she went blind, her skin shed, and she was known to have one of the first cases of multiple sclerosis. Though not a result of her physical ailments, she also suffered from the stigmata (the wounds of Christ).

Despite her torments, Lidwina remained devout and trusted in God's will. She prayed constantly, had more spiritual visions, and many miracles took place at her bedside. Paradoxically, Lidwina's faith seemed to increase the more she suffered. She fasted throughout all her trials and was known to survive off such a small amount of food that doctors claimed she should not be able to survive.

## ST. LIDWINA OF SCHIEDAM

This holy woman is an inspiration to all those who experience physical agony in how she trusted in God's will and offered up her pain for the salvation of others. Today, she is known as the patron saint of those who suffer chronically from disease and illness, as well the patron of ice-skaters.

