

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

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We live in a culture that goes to great lengths to avoid discomfort. Don't want to wait in line for your coffee? Order ahead and by the time you get there it's sitting nicely on the counter ready for you to grab and go. Don't want to go out in the cold to buy groceries? Have your groceries delivered for a small fee while you stay comfy cozy in your home. Don't want to be put on hold for the next representative? Just enter your phone number and one will call you back. Are these bad things? Not necessarily, but they are an outgrowth of a much deeper problem—how our culture views suffering.

Look at how many pharmaceutical ads there are on TV, how many shortcuts or easy outs are pitched to us on social media. It's clear that humanity's willingness to stand tough, to do hard things, to face down an adversary, is eroding. To be fair, no one wants to endure pain, whether it's physical, mental, or emotional. But hiding or running from suffering doesn't mean we come out unscathed. Brokenness still happens because the experience of suffering, whether or not we've managed to truncate it, still causes a soul-level wound.

To his listeners, Kevin Matthews had it all. He lived a charmed life making people laugh and palling around with the rich and famous. One medical diagnosis later, his world began to crumble, but this wasn't the beginning of Kevin's suffering. That started decades earlier.

- He went through childhood with an undiagnosed learning disability that caused his teachers to give up on him.
  - His father was an alcoholic who physically abused him and his mom.
  - He had plans as a college athlete but suffered a career-ending injury.
1. How did Kevin handle his own suffering early on?
  2. Can you recall how he referenced himself and his friends and how that title dictated his actions? (*Junkyard dogs – fight your way out of things*)
  3. How did this work for him?

Suffering and brokenness are not synonymous. One is the experience: suffering. The other is the result: brokenness. How we view suffering can have a deep impact on the brokenness that results from it.

Jesus' suffering changed everything for us. He showed us, through His Passion, that suffering has redemptive value. That suffering, when we abandon ourselves to the will of God within it, will sanctify us and ready us for heaven. That suffering, when we see that nothing happens to us without first passing through the will of God, empowers us with deeper empathy for others and dependency on God. That suffering, when we stop fighting it, draws us into God's embrace and brings us closer to His divinity.

How do we know this is true? Let's look at the Blessed Mother and consider her example. Mary chose to suffer with Jesus, to be present during all of His persecution, not to turn away or abandon Him, though her pain as His mother must have been unimaginable. Mary, in her complete humanity, embraced the will of God, accepted the will of God, remained within the will of God. Why? Because she knew the bottomless love God had for her and trusted that love.

4. How do you handle suffering?
5. What defense mechanisms do you have in place that help you ignore, deny, or numb suffering?
6. How might Mary serve as an example and an inspiration for you in the midst of suffering?
7. Do you know someone who suffers well—someone who faces and embraces suffering? What fruit do you witness in that person’s life?

St. Paul wrote to the people of Ephesus, “I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, *and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*” (Ephesians 3:16–19; emphasis added)

8. What are the things that Paul is praying for the Ephesians? (*Strengthened with the power of the Spirit; Christ will dwell in their hearts; Rooted and grounded in love; Power to comprehend and know the love of Christ; Be filled with the fullness of God*)
9. How might those things help in times of suffering?

So, suffering is an experience, and brokenness can be the result of that experience. What do we do when we’re broken? Let’s look at Paul’s letter to the Ephesians again.

10. How might the things Paul prays for help to heal brokenness?

## REFLECT ON THE FOLLOWING TEXTS



The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,  
 because the Lord has anointed me;  
 he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,  
 to bind up the brokenhearted,  
 to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
 and release to the prisoners...  
 to provide for those who mourn in Zion –  
 to give them a garland instead of ashes,  
 the oil of gladness instead of mourning,  
 the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.  
 They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
 the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

**ISAIAH 61:1, 3**



Faith is an interior act, not an interior feeling.

**COLIN MACIVER**, “*St. Pio of Pietrelcina and 5 Tips for Making Suffering Redemptive*”, *Ascension*



Pain and suffering have come into your life, but remember pain, sorrow, suffering are but the kiss of Jesus—a sign that you have come so close to Him that He can kiss you.

**ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA**



In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption.

**ST. JOHN PAUL II**, *Salvifici Doloris*



In the Cross of Christ not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed.

**ST. JOHN PAUL II**, *Salvifici Doloris*



Eternal God, in Whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence submit ourselves to Your holy will which is Love and Mercy itself.

**CLOSING PRAYER FROM THE DIVINE MERCY CHAPLET**



So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

**2 COR 4:16-18**

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After reflecting on these passages, consider the following questions.

11. Do you believe God has a purpose for suffering?
12. Can something broken become something beautiful? Why or why not?
13. Have you ever experienced beauty coming from suffering or brokenness?
14. Think of a time when you experienced both suffering and brokenness. How did you respond to each? Did you stuff it, cover it up, embrace it? Why did you make the choice you did? What was the result of your choice?
15. "We are all broken, but we are loved by God." What does this mean to you?