

# The Gospel Project® for Adults

## Daily Discipleship Guide CSB, Unit 15, Session 1

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### God Promises a Suffering Servant

Session in a Sentence: Jesus is the Suffering Servant who was rejected and struck down on our behalf in order to win the victory.

Background Passage: Isaiah 49–55

Walk around the NICU at a local hospital and listen to the babies crying, unable to vocalize their hurts and their questions. Pokes, prods, tubes, and shots. These are painful and surely confusing for an infant. The weight of a child's pain is felt profoundly by a parent, and its purpose may even elude us.

Now move to the Labor and Delivery Unit, where you hear a different sort of cry—laborious cries. What sounds like someone near an excruciating death are the pangs of childbirth. Moms endure the pain because they know what is coming—a beautiful, unique, wonderfully made baby. And moms are even willing to face this pain again for the sake of another child.

Our perception of pain often depends on what we hope for after the pain.

How do you tend to perceive your pain and suffering in this world?

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Pointless	Irritating	Redeemable	Purposeful
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### Group Time

#### Point 1: The Suffering Servant is despised and rejected (Isa. 52:13–53:3).

52:13 See, my servant will be successful; he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted. 14 Just as many were appalled at you—his appearance was so disfigured that he did not look like a man, and his form did not resemble a human being— 15 so he will sprinkle many nations. Kings will shut their mouths because of him, for they will see what had not been told them, and they will understand what they had not heard.

53:1 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 He grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of dry ground. He didn't have an impressive form or majesty that we should look at him, no appearance that we should desire him. 3 He was despised and rejected by men, a man of suffering who knew what sickness was. He was like someone people turned away from; he was despised, and we didn't value him.

For the overwhelming solemn, even negative, tone of this passage, one can almost miss the fact that it begins in victory. Honor would come to the Servant, yet this Man would suffer deeply. But His punishment would not be for His own sins but for those who would behold Him in faith. It's this pivotal act that would cause knees to bow. The Servant's **suffering** leads to **victory**. His broken body paves the path to glorification.

Why do people so often believe that suffering cannot be connected with glory?

We typically correlate leadership with charisma, power, and victory. With God's perspective, however, we must correlate leadership with servanthood and glory with the lowly. In this passage we see **three ways** God weaves together these polarizing concepts through the revelation of the "arm of the LORD," the Servant Jesus Christ: *First, He comes onto the scene in an unassuming way. Second, this "arm" has no extraordinary beauty to draw people to Him. Finally, the Lord's "arm" would be rejected because He would be marked by suffering.*

How should this prophecy about the Suffering Servant challenge our views about victory and success?

#### Point 2: The Suffering Servant is struck down as a substitute (Isa. 53:4-9).

4 Yet he himself bore our sicknesses, and he carried our pains; but we in turn regarded him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds. 6 We all went astray like sheep; we all have turned to our own way; and the LORD has punished him for the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughter and like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. 8 He was taken away because of oppression and judgment; and who considered his fate? For he was cut off from the land of the living; he was struck because of my people's rebellion. 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully.

Despite what many people would think when this prophecy was fulfilled—that the Servant deserved a punishment for His own doing—we see that an innocent Man would be killed due to “our” rebellion. The repetition of this first-person plural pronoun hammers home that the Servant would suffer in *our* place because in *our* sin, we have chosen to go *our* own way. His suffering would not be just any suffering either. We see four types of attacks against the Servant in verse 7: 1) He was **oppressed**; 2) He was **afflicted**; 3) He was **a lamb led to slaughter**; and 4) He was **sheared**.

What are some reasons people object to the need for a substitute to pay the penalty for their sin?

The Servant, Jesus, knew that His purpose was to be the perfect sacrifice, thus fulfilling a temporary sacrificial system the Israelites had practiced for centuries. All throughout the Old Testament we read about animal sacrifices given to bear the sins of the human offender. What repetitious and laborious work! There had to be a different way, and there was—the life and death of Jesus Christ. “We are healed by his wounds” (v. 5).

**Christ as Substitute:** Jesus perfectly revealed and did the will of God, taking upon Himself \_\_\_\_\_ nature with its demands and necessities and identifying Himself completely with humankind yet without sin. He honored the divine law by His personal \_\_\_\_\_, and in His substitutionary death on the cross, He made provision for the redemption of humanity from sin.

### Point 3: The Suffering Servant is exalted and victorious (Isa. 53:10-12).

10 Yet the LORD was pleased to crush him severely. When you make him a guilt offering, he will see his seed, he will prolong his days, and by his hand, the LORD's pleasure will be accomplished. 11 After his anguish, he will see light and be satisfied. By his knowledge, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will carry their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will give him the many as a portion, and he will receive the mighty as spoil, because he willingly submitted to death, and was counted among the rebels; yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the rebels.

How are we to take the comment that the Lord was pleased to crush His Servant severely, or as we further understand the situation, that it was the Father's will to crush His Son? The Father had a purpose for the pain, which the Son submitted to and agreed with: Through Jesus' wounds would come the redemption of people, along with our every tear, every battle, and every heartache. Jesus willingly submitted to death because He also knew the plan and what His future would hold: reward for His obedience.

How do you tend to perceive your pain and suffering in this world?

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Pointless

Irritating

Redeemable

Purposeful

Just as the Servant, Jesus, came in the most unassuming way, so does a satisfied life. Our culture will lure us in with tactics of living for oneself and the glory that comes with it. But God's economy is different and true. It is in serving by faith that we will be the most fulfilled. It is in laying down our lives that we will find satisfaction. Ultimately, it is in our participation in the redemption of souls that we will find eternal joy.

What temptations of the world distract us from following the pattern of the Suffering Servant?

### Voices from Church History

“The sorest afflictions ... when we see them in the hand of GOD, Who dispenses them; when we know that it is our loving FATHER, Who abases and distresses us, our sufferings lose all their bitterness, and our mourning becomes all joy.” 1

—Brother Lawrence (c. 1614-1691)

## My Mission

Because we have received life through the sacrifice of Jesus, we embrace a life of service and suffering on His behalf as we share the gospel with others.

- **How will you respond in faith to the Servant who suffered to justify sinners?**
- **What are some ways your group can serve and intercede for the rebels in your community?**
- **How will you sacrifice so you can share the good news of the Suffering Servant with others?**

### **Voices from the Church**

“The Lord’s solution to sin is for his servant to take human sin on himself and to offer himself as a sacrifice of atonement for the sins of others. He will be sinless, but by offering himself as a sacrifice, he will be the one through whom all others can receive forgiveness and salvation. Victory will come through suffering.” 2

—Paulson Pulikottil

## **Daily Study**

### **Day 1: Read Isaiah 49:1-26**

To feel forgotten is a desolate feeling, even if you have a promise of a future hope.

Isaiah 49 walks the exiled people of God through how they will be saved—through a Servant. Then it points them to what is to come—the redemption of Zion. Although the Lord describes their victorious future, the exiles still cry out, “Forsaken!” (v. 14).

Waiting is an issue that all of humanity wrestles with in general, but when Christians run ahead of God, we are saying that we think we know better than the Almighty. Forsaking the discipline of waiting can get us in trouble, but it also reveals our lack of trust in God’s promises.

In Luke, we are introduced to Anna and Simeon, two people in a long line of descendants who waited for Jesus, this highly anticipated Servant. Anna waited so eagerly that she never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying, prepared to meet the Messiah (Luke 2:36-37).

In the same way that Anna and Simeon looked to the future Messiah with eagerness, we are to look to the future for the day when all of heaven will come to earth, the day a great trumpet will sound and announce a land completely restored to its original order. The promise is clear: Heaven will come to earth; Jesus will reign in victory. Until then, we wait in holy anticipation.

When do you find yourself struggling to wait in faithfulness and with patience for heaven to come to earth?

### **Day 2: Read Isaiah 50:1–51:23**

The Servant was nothing but obedient. He had spoken what He was asked to speak (50:4-5), and because of His words, He was beaten (50:6). With Jesus, the Servant, as our example, we also will face persecution for our obedience. Many churches proclaim “getting wealthy” and “remaining comfortable” in the name of Jesus. But Jesus, in His own words, declared that His followers would suffer in this world (John 16:33).

Right after the fall of humanity, evil Cain killed his righteous brother, Abel (Gen. 4; 1 John 3:12). Later, Joseph was imprisoned for refusing to commit adultery with his master’s wife (Gen. 39:6-20). In another example, the Israelites wanted to stone Joshua and Caleb for their bold faithfulness, but God intervened (Num. 14:5-10).

Jesus instructed His followers: “You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me” (Matt. 5:11). Suffering and persecution are part of our story, but the weight of glory outweighs our earthly woes. Jesus asked for His cup of suffering on the cross to pass Him by (Matt. 26:36-46), but He still endured it because He fully understood what lay before Him: His obedience would result in joy and exaltation (Heb. 12:2).

How can you keep a heavenly viewpoint in the midst of suffering?

### **Day 3: Read Isaiah 52:1–53:3**

In this passage, Jerusalem is asked to dress up and take a seat in honor (52:1-2), opposite of Babylon who was told to go sit in the dust in rags (47:1). Similarly, God has a glorious position prepared for those who are in Christ, but people must know they

are lost before they can know they can be saved. We must first understand how enslaved we are to our own sins, from which we need to be freed (52:2).

When believers live as if they are captive to sin, what we are saying to a dying world is that God can't save us from it. Like it or not, we have been called to carry a divine reputation. We will only be able to do this through the power of the Holy Spirit. What a privilege and honor it is to be the feet that bring good news, but we can only swiftly carry that news if we stop holding onto the chains of sin that have already been broken.

How is repentance of sin revealed in your life, both privately and publicly?

## **Day 4: Read Isaiah 53:4-12**

The Servant was like a lamb led to the slaughter. Jesus begged the Father for the cup to pass Him by (Matt. 26:39), but He endured the cross and was cut off from the land of the living. Jesus' story is tragic, but it is primarily one of exaltation.

Perhaps the first hint of Jesus' exaltation came immediately after His crucifixion. Fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, Jesus was assigned a grave with the rich (Isa. 53:9). Joseph of Arimathea convinced Pilate to let Jesus be buried in his wealthy family's tomb (Matt. 27:57-60).

The road from humiliation to exaltation began at the cross, passed through the tomb, and burst forth in glory three days later at His resurrection. Since then, He has been seated at the right hand of the Father in heaven, interceding on our behalf (Heb. 7:25). Jesus gave of Himself once and for all, and God immediately exalted Him so that many could be exalted through Him.

How does God's ability to turn humiliation into exaltation encourage you to live in faithfulness to God's calling and mission?

## **Day 5: Read Isaiah 54:1–55:13**

The Lord does the humanly impossible. He redeems the widow and the childless. He builds her gates of sparkling jewels and gives her walls of precious stones. It's a real-life Cinderella story. What was needed to satisfy the righteous anger of God had been done, and there would be no more barriers to Him.

In fact, He has set a table before us and has extended us the invitation to come join Him at the feast. The readers of this message were faced with a choice: to stay where they were in unbelief or accept the invitation with no clarity for their next step.

Faith always involves letting go of security and control to do things God's way. Remember when Peter walked on water (Matt. 14:28-30)? He had to get out of the boat. God is calling us from hunger to feast, but in answering this call, we are to leave our worldly ways of comfort and launch out into the adventures God has designed for His people. His ways are higher—will you believe and obey?

What is a specific area where you believe God is calling you to step out in faith? Pray for God to help your unbelief, and then take your next step.

## **Encourage One Another**

*Join together with 2-4 people from your group, or with your family, sometime during the week to reflect on the session and to share how God is working and you are responding.*

Share your thoughts and reflections on the truths from Scripture in this session:

- The Suffering Servant is despised and rejected (Isa. 52:13–53:3).
- The Suffering Servant is struck down as a substitute (Isa. 53:4-9).
- The Suffering Servant is exalted and victorious (Isa. 53:10-12).

How have you responded to these truths from Scripture?

When has thinking about Jesus' suffering for the sake of our salvation helped you during a time of prolonged suffering?

What steps can your church or small group take this week to become more mindful of others' suffering?

#### **References**

1. Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Health Research Books, 1996), 50.
2. Paulson Pulikottil, "Isaiah," in *South Asia Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Brian Wintle (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 906.