



Links Players

SIX DEGREES FROM SUFFERING: JESUS

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:10-11, NIV)

TURNS OUT, THE OLD JOKE MAY BE THE ONLY SOLUTION to our suffering when it comes to golf: Take six weeks off, then quit. For all the pleasures the game can bring, we come to learn that the imperfections in our swing and unpredictable variables in weather and course conditions always cause disappointment and—if we are competitive at all—mental and emotional anguish.

None of what happens on a golf course matches what can happen in life, of course. The highs are not as high and the lows are not as low. But even golf’s sufferings can teach us that there are those who will come alongside us with understanding and compassion; moreover, we will be able to offer the same in return. Since it’s a day for old sayings, here’s another you may recall: “A shared joy is twice the joy, and a shared sorrow is half the sorrow.”

Yet, is this what it means to participate with Christ in his sufferings? Can we possibly understand what Jesus endured on the cross, where he bore our sins in willing sacrifice for the purpose of our salvation? Perhaps not, but we may in our pain come to appreciate that sacrifice all the more. We live through physical trauma, experience emotional pain, and suffer mental disturbances. Jesus added to these the spiritual weight of humanity’s failings. Jesus took on the punishment for the enemies of his own Father. He died for those who wanted nothing to do with him.

But when we are blessed with the Holy Spirit’s illumining insight into the purpose and value of that death, we suddenly realize that we must have him. We go from wanting *nothing* to do with him to wanting *everything* to do with him. And as his love indwells us, we actually become willing to suffer, too.

How can we do this? Only one way, really. We see the end as we begin. We know that the death of Jesus resulted in his resurrection. Martyrs have always held to this hope—that they would live again, in just a moment, with their Savior.

We are not all called to be martyrs, but we are all called to engage in death-defying acts, from baptism to sacrificial generosity, from proclaiming light in the darkness to going another mile when our legs have nothing left. For in this, we show others how Christ gives us life, now and then again when we are raised to eternity.

Written by Jeff Hopper ©2020 Links Players International. An introductory video for this study is available here: <https://youtu.be/6AD58qHDYt8>

Opening questions Have you ever spent hours in anguish after a round of golf? What caused it? How was it lifted?

READING Romans 6:1-14

Death and resurrection in Christ (Romans 6)

In what way is baptism a metaphor for death and resurrection in Christ?

What is put to death when we die with Christ (vv. 1-2)? If your old self was crucified with Christ (vv. 6-7), what freedoms has that brought for you? What freedoms are you still hoping to gain?

In what direction is our new life to be lived (v. 10)?

In what way is our new life to be lived (vv. 11-14)?

Looking back

In this six-week series, how has your perspective on suffering changed?
