

Man of Sorrows

Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Matthew 27:33-50; Psalm 22

PART ONE · LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE

SESSION OVERVIEW

Discovery Aim. The sealed question is opened tonight, and the group discovers the Bible's answer to it: on the Cross, God is not above our suffering or outside it but inside it, a Man of Sorrows who has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Catholic Touchstone. CCC 603: Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned; rather, in the redeeming love that united him always to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Our summary for tonight: the Cross is God joining us, not God abandoning God.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the fourth and climactic of Isaiah's Servant Songs, written centuries before Golgotha. (On the traditional dating it stands roughly seven centuries earlier; much modern Catholic scholarship places chapters 40 to 55 in the exile, some five and a half. The Church has not defined the question, and nothing tonight turns on it.) Its portrait is deliberately shocking: a figure with no beauty that we should desire him, despised and rejected, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief (53:3), from whom men hide their faces. The Hebrew behind sorrows and grief (*makoboth*, *holi*) carries pains and sickness: this is someone whose acquaintance with suffering is intimate, from within rather than from a distance. And the song's engine is a great exchange, carried by its pronouns: surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; he was wounded for our transgressions; with his stripes we are healed (53:4-5). What is ours moves onto him; what comes back to us is what his wounds accomplish, our wholeness and our healing.

Notice what 53:4 says the onlookers concluded: we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. The crowd runs the theology of Job's friends on the Servant: he suffers, therefore he must deserve it. Isaiah does not let that estimate stand: the surrounding lines say the sufferings are ours, borne by him and for us, and that is what overturns the crowd's verdict. Session 3's discovery fires again at the foot of the Cross: the reverse inference from suffering to guilt misfires catastrophically at the one place it was most confidently applied.

Tonight also harvests the seed planted hardest in Session 2. From the Cross, Jesus prays: *Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Matt 27:46). That is Psalm 22:1, the psalm your group prayed in Session 2, complaint braided with creed. It is often argued that quoting a psalm's opening line invokes the whole psalm; the historical evidence for a fixed convention is thin, so treat it as a reading rather than a fact. What is not in doubt is that the evangelists heard Psalm 22 all over Golgotha, and the psalm Jesus chose ends in vindication and a worldwide feast (22:22-31), with an astonishing verse on the way: he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him (22:24). Let the group find all of this themselves; the discoveries are the session.

On the cry of dereliction, hold the Church's balance and give the group its two rails. What the cry cannot mean: the Trinity was not ruptured, the Father did not hate or damn the Son, and Jesus did not despair; on the night before, he himself said, yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me (John 16:32), and the Cross is the Father and Son's shared work of love (John 10:17). What the cry does mean: CCC 603's astonishing sentence, that he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? How deep the experienced desolation reached into his human soul, saints and theologians probe reverently and differently; the Church has not closed that question, and tonight does not need to.

Pastoral note: the sealed sheets come back tonight, and the moment they open is the emotional center of the whole study. Have the sheets ready, keep the ritual unhurried, and keep tissues within reach without ceremony. Some answers written back in Session 1 were angry; some were bleak; receive whatever surfaces without correction. The Cross is not an argument that out-suffers anyone in your room. It is God getting into their suffering with them, and that is the only point tonight needs to land.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

The Servant Songs build across Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 52-53, a figure who is Israel and more than Israel, until the fourth song shows him suffering vicariously and prospering through it (52:13; 53:10-12). The New Testament treats this text as the master key to the Passion: Matthew quotes 53:4 over the Galilean healings (Matt 8:17), Peter preaches 53:5-6 (1 Pet 2:24-25), John sees Zechariah's pierced one on the Cross (Zech 12:10; John 19:37), and in Acts 8 an Ethiopian official reads this very passage and asks the question your group will ask tonight. Beginning with this scripture, Philip told him the good news of Jesus: the apostolic Church's own answer key, preserved inside the Bible.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Leo the Great *sermons on the Passion (summary)*

St. Leo preached the Passion year after year, and his constant teaching, in substance, is that the one hanging there is true man, truly suffering everything ours, and true God, truly saving: the one who assumed our weakness never laid down his power, and the weakness and the majesty belong to one and the same person. The Cross, for Leo, is not the interruption of God's plan but its unveiling. Our own way of putting it: this is what almighty love looks like when it goes to work inside a broken world.

St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) *The Science of the Cross, and her own path (summary)*

A Jewish philosopher who became a Carmelite nun, she wrote *The Science of the Cross* while the Third Reich closed in, teaching, in substance, that the Cross is not a doctrine to admire from a distance but a reality one enters, and that those who suffer with Christ are given a share in his work. She was arrested in her convent and died at Auschwitz in 1942, having offered her life with and for her people. Her science was not theoretical.

St. Ignatius of Antioch *Letter to the Romans 4 (English renderings vary)*

Bishop of Antioch, condemned to the beasts around the year 107, he wrote ahead to Rome begging the Christians not to rescue him. In a common English rendering: I am the wheat of God, and I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of Christ. The earliest generations

did not merely endure suffering for Christ; they had learned from the Man of Sorrows to let it be made into something.

CATECHISM CONNECTION

- CCC 599-600: the Passion was not an accident that overtook Jesus; he was delivered up according to the definite plan of God.
- CCC 609: Jesus freely embraced the Father's redeeming love, and his human love for us was one with the Son's eternal love for the Father.
- CCC 603: he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, so that he could say the cry of abandonment in our name from the cross. The cry is our cry, taken up, not the Trinity breaking.
- CCC 618: the Cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ, and yet he calls his disciples to take up their cross and follow him: a door this session opens and next session walks through.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

DO NOT REVEAL · TRACK ACROSS SESSIONS

- *The sealed sheets open tonight*, in Send, after the Psalm 22 discoveries, in silence. Do not open them earlier; the discoveries must come first so each person reads their old answer in the light of the Cross.
- *Psalm 22 harvest*. Q4 is the payoff of Session 2's restraint. If anyone remembered across the weeks, celebrate them.
- *Tears thread (develop, do not resolve)*. The Servant is acquainted with grief; Heb 5:7's loud cries and tears may be recalled from Session 2. The resolution is still two sessions of promise away; say nothing.
- *Job 19:25 (first harvest)*. The Redeemer who lives now has a face. Touch it lightly if the group makes the connection; the verse returns once more at the end of the study.
- *Session 5 plant*. Live It item 3 asks each person to bring one small suffering next week. Do not explain why.

SESSION GOALS

1. Read the fourth Servant Song closely and trace its great exchange of pronouns.
2. Watch the crowd's Job's-friends verdict (53:4) get overturned by Isaiah's yet.
3. Harvest Psalm 22 from the lips of the crucified Christ, and read the whole psalm he invoked, including verse 24.
4. Hold the Church's balance on the cry of dereliction: our cry truly assumed; the Trinity unbroken; no despair.
5. Open the sealed sheets and let each person answer the question again at the foot of the Cross.

THE 90 MINUTES

Opening prayer and settling in	5
Win: two opening questions	10
Build: Isaiah 53, the Passion reading, the Psalm 22 discoveries, the steelman	50

Send: the opening of the sealed sheets, in silence, then sharing	15
Live It This Week, memory verse, closing prayer	10

This plan uses the full 90 minutes. If the room runs long, drop in this order: (1) the Dig Deeper box, (2) Win question W1, (3) the Psalm 22:14-18 detail work in Q5. Send is longer tonight on purpose and may not be shortened: the sealed sheets need room, and the silence there is the most load-bearing minute of the study.

PART TWO · DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, Man of Sorrows, we have spent three sessions learning to tell you the truth about suffering. Tonight, tell us yours.

Open the Scriptures to us as you opened them on the Emmaus road, and let everyone who carries a hidden grief into this room tonight leave knowing you carried it first. Amen.

WIN

W1. When you have been in real pain, what did the presence of someone who had suffered the same thing do for you that no one else could?

W2. If a stranger asked you, point blank, where was God when that happened to me: what is your honest first instinct: defend God, share the question, or change the subject?

BUILD

Read Isaiah 52:13-53:3 aloud.

Q1. Build the Servant's résumé from 53:2-3: list every credential the text gives him. What kind of figure is Isaiah describing?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

No form, no comeliness, no beauty that we should desire him; despised, rejected, a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief; one from whom men hide their faces. His credentials are sorrows. The Hebrew behind acquainted is the ordinary verb to know, and here it suggests intimate familiarity: whatever else this figure is, he is inside suffering, not observing it from above. Isaiah's portrait of God's chosen instrument is a portrait of someone who knows grief from within.

Read Isaiah 53:4-6 aloud.

Q2. Trace the pronouns in these verses like a bookkeeper: what is ours, and where does it go? What is his, and where does it go? And do not miss the middle of verse 4: what did the onlookers conclude about him, and where have we heard that logic before?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Ours: griefs, sorrows, transgressions, iniquities; all of it moves onto him: he has borne, he carried, he was wounded, he was bruised. And the chastisement and the stripes stay his; what crosses back to us is what they win, the wholeness and the healing. A great exchange, and the traffic is not symmetrical: he takes the wounds, we take the peace. And verse 4's middle is Session 3 firing again: we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. The crowd runs the friends' theology on the Servant: he suffers, so he must deserve it. Watch the grammar carefully. The word yet introduces their mistaken estimate, not its correction; what overturns them is the surrounding claim that the griefs he carries are ours and the wounds are for our transgressions. The inference from suffering to guilt misfires at the exact place it was applied most confidently in history.

Q3. DISCOVERY. Seven centuries later, a court official is riding home from Jerusalem reading this very passage aloud. Find Acts 8:26-35. What is he reading, what does he ask, and what does Philip do with his question?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

He is reading Isaiah 53:7-8 and asks the question of the ages: about whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else? And beginning with this scripture, Philip told him the good news of Jesus. The apostolic Church's own answer key is preserved inside the Bible: when the first Christians wanted to explain the Cross, this was the page they opened.

Read Matthew 27:33-50 aloud, slowly. Let the reading land before continuing.

Q4. DISCOVERY. At the ninth hour Jesus cries out: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (27:46). We have prayed those words together before. Find them.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Psalm 22:1: the psalm this group prayed in Session 2, complaint braided with creed. Dying, Jesus reaches for the lament tradition of his people and puts its bleakest opening line on his own lips: still addressed (My God, twice), still prayer, the address line holding even here. Everything Session 2 gave us permission to do, the Lord himself does from the Cross. The Church did not invent lament as a concession to the weak; she learned it from her Head at the hour of his death.

Q5. Stay in Psalm 22 and read verses 14-18 next to the scene you just heard. What details land?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Poured out like water, bones out of joint, strength dried up, thirst (my tongue cleaves to my jaws), a company of evildoers encircling, they have pierced my hands and feet, they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots. The evangelists heard this psalm all over Golgotha; Matthew 27:35 echoes verse 18 directly. One honest footnote for a sharp group: at verse 16 the Hebrew manuscripts differ (the Masoretic text reads like a lion, while the ancient Greek and a Judean Desert witness support a verb meaning pierced or dug, which is the line the Church's received reading follows); the psalm's fit to the Cross never depended on a single word.

Q6. The psalm Jesus invoked does not end at its darkest verse. Read Psalm 22:22-31, and then look hard at verse 24. What do you find there, and what does it do to the cry of verse 1?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

The psalm ends in vindication, testimony in the great congregation, a feast for the afflicted, and all the ends of the earth turning to the LORD; deliverance proclaimed to a people yet unborn, that he has wrought it. And verse 24 says the unthinkable in advance: he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. The psalm itself denies that the Father's face was hidden. Matthew records the first verse; he does not tell us that Jesus meant to recite the rest. But the psalm he reached for is this psalm, and its own trajectory runs to vindication. This does not flatten the real darkness of the cry; it locates that darkness inside a prayer that ends in Easter's direction.

STEELMAN · BUILD IT, THEN PRESS IT

Build it at full strength. A preacher says: on the Cross, the Father turned his face away. God is of purer eyes than to behold evil (Hab 1:13), so when our sin was laid on Jesus, the Father dealt with him as the guilty are dealt with; the cry of dereliction is the Son truly bearing, in his human experience, the judicial abandonment and wrath our sins deserved. Build the careful version, not the crude one: its best defenders insist the divine unity was never broken and that this is a judicial and experienced forsakenness, not a torn Trinity. Notice its strength: it takes sin with total seriousness, it quotes Scripture, and it matches the raw sound of Matthew 27:46. Many in your group have heard exactly this sermon.

Press it from the text and the Church. First: Jesus himself, the night before: you will leave me alone; yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me (John 16:32), and: for this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life (John 10:17). The Cross is the Father and Son's shared work of love; the Trinity cannot be ruptured, or nothing holds together, least of all our salvation. Second: the discovery the group just made: the very psalm Jesus prayed declares he has not hid his face from him (Ps 22:24). Third: read the friend's own proof text to its end. Habakkuk 1:13 says God is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and in the very same verse the prophet asks why God then looks on faithless men and stays silent. The line means God cannot approve evil, not that he must avert his gaze; it cannot carry a Father who had to turn away. Fourth: CCC 603: Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned; he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, so as to say our cry in our name from the cross. Last, with honesty: how far that assumed desolation reached into his human experience, the saints probe reverently and differently, and the Church leaves room. What is fixed: no rupture, no despair, no Father hating the Son. What is offered: a God who in Christ's true human suffering has taken the cry of abandonment onto his own lips, and can meet us in ours.

DIG DEEPER (optional)

Find Matthew 8:17, back in Galilee among the healings, long before the Cross. Matthew quotes Isaiah 53:4 over Jesus's ordinary days of healing the sick: he took our infirmities and bore our diseases. The bearing of our griefs did not begin at Golgotha; it was his daily work. Whatever you carry, he has been carrying it longer than you have.

SEND

S1. THE OPENING. The leader returns each sealed sheet to its writer. In silence, open your own sheet and read what you wrote back in Session 1: Where is God when we suffer? Read it slowly, next to everything you found tonight.

Hold a full minute of silence here. Do not rescue the room from it.

S2. Would you change your answer? Where is God when we suffer: tonight's answer? Share as much or as little as you wish; it is also completely permitted to keep it between you and the Man of Sorrows.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

1. Pray all of Psalm 22 once this week: both halves, verse 1 through verse 31, without skipping either.
2. Put a crucifix (not a bare cross) somewhere your day will collide with it. When suffering shows up this week, look at it and say the words of Psalm 22:24: he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.
3. Choose one small suffering of this week, a minor one, not the crushing one, and bring it with you next session. You will find out why.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."

Isaiah 53:5

Closing Prayer

Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief: you have borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, including the ones opened in this room tonight.

We asked where you were. You were on the Cross, crying our cry, with the Father who never hid his face. By your wounds, heal us. Amen.

PART THREE · LEADER REFERENCE CARD

Read aloud in session

- Isaiah 52:13-53:3; Isaiah 53:4-6; Matthew 27:33-50; Psalm 22:14-18; Psalm 22:22-31
- Isaiah 53:5 (memory verse); Isaiah 53:10-12 and Job 19:25 (leader prep only)

Discovery passages (group finds them live)

- Acts 8:26-35 (Q3)
- Psalm 22:1 via Matthew 27:46 (Q4)
- Matthew 8:17 (Dig Deeper)

Cited in answers and steelman

- Habakkuk 1:13 (steelman, build)
- John 16:32; John 10:17; Habakkuk 1:13 in full; Psalm 22:24; CCC 603 (steelman, press)
- Matthew 27:35 with Psalm 22:18; note on Psalm 22:16 manuscripts (Q5 answer)

Leader background

- Isaiah 42, 49, 50 (Servant Songs); Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37; 1 Peter 2:24-25; Hebrews 5:7 (if recalled)

- CCC 599-600, 603, 609, 618