



Doing Life Well – Doing Suffering Well

Date: Sunday 21st January 2018

Speakers: Jeff Stamps & Rick Williams

Key Verses: Romans 4:25-5:5

Summary

- Suffering is a part of life we all face, if we are to do life well then we need to know how to do suffering well. There is a tension in our culture - on the one hand we see all suffering as bad and to be avoided, and on the other hand we celebrate and admire those who persevere in the face of great suffering to achieve something of value.
- We all know from experience that like in child birth, through pain and suffering something invaluable can be brought to life. Jesus died and was raised so we could have a relationship with God and ultimately know a life in his glory forever (Romans 4:25-5:2). Through Jesus' suffering we have peace with God. Through our peace with God we can do suffering well.
- I am often asked, if the God you believe in exists, a God of love and power, then why does suffering continue to exist? This question assumes that if God is loving and powerful then he would protect us from any suffering. It assumes that there is no such thing as beneficial suffering...
- There is at least one instance of beneficial suffering, Jesus' death on the cross for us. Whatever the reason suffering exists, through the cross we can know that it's not because God is indifferent or unloving.
- Through the incarnation – God becoming man - and the resurrection - Jesus coming back from the dead - we know that God is both powerful and loving. He also proves that he deeply understands our suffering situation, as he has lived through it.

- Just because we can't think of a good reason that God hasn't stopped it yet doesn't mean that there isn't one. The reality is that when we face suffering "our comfort is not found in the why, but the who."
- The good news of Jesus, offers us exactly what we need to face suffering when we are going through it. At times of genuine suffering, a logical explanation is actually pretty useless. What we need is:
 - Understanding/empathy – God knows what it is to suffer (Hebrews 4:15)
 - Help/comfort – Holy Spirit and Prayer (Romans 5:5)
 - Hope – Jesus is coming back (Revelations 21)
- However, Paul's words in Romans don't just give us hope for enduring through suffering – Paul gives us reasons for rejoicing in suffering is because he sees it through a different perspective. For Paul suffering is not just an unavoidable inconvenience that we have to put up with. Paul sees suffering as an invaluable part of us becoming more like Jesus. In our suffering God is at work, mercifully birthing something precious.
- Through my experiences I have seen that suffering produces in us:
 - A greater level of trust in God, his love and his goodness.
 - A greater ability to live in the mystery.
 - A greater level of detachment, suffering more than anything else reminds us that this world is not how it should be. It creates in us a longing for the return of Jesus, when he will set everything right.
- These notes were written by Jeff Stamps, if you would like to hear about the personal experiences he drew on whilst writing the talk, he shared these during his sermon. You can find this on our website – www.birminghamvineyard.com/listen

Questions for Small Groups

- What did you think of the talk? Was there anything that you found particularly helpful or challenging?
- What do you think of the idea that we find our comfort in the who and not the why?
- How have you personally experienced the goodness and love of God in difficult times?

Final Thoughts and Reflections

- Small group is the perfect place to stand together in the face of difficult times.
- Is there suffering in your past or your present that you need a new perspective on? Have you been trapped in the Why and need God help to find comfort in him?
- Share and pray for one another.

Small Group Leaders/Discussion Leaders

All three talks this Sunday dealt with suffering and spiritual bondage. Talking about these topics is really helpful but it can also mean opening up issues which people need more help dealing with than can be done in a small group setting. We would recommend a SOZO appointment for anyone struggling with specific issues – you can find out more or ask for a SOZO appointment here: www.birminghamvineyard.com/sozo

If you have people in your group with complex issues or you find yourself out of your depth, please speak to your community leaders in the first instance.