

A Garden Prayer



TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. —*Psalm 145:11*
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —*Joshua 22:5*

Triangle Community Church aims to be a “transforming church”. We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent, action. I Timothy 4:7 instructs you to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Since “**Talking Points, Walking Points**” is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to “dive deep” too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled “**Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time**”, are perfect for private reflection.

Questions for Community Group Discussion

Pastor Doug labeled some of our theology as “*stupid and destructive*” and our prayers as “*pagan*”. Why do we believers **need** courageous pastors to lead us?

What happens when pastors tell us only what we **want** to hear?

Recently books purporting to be “love letters directly from Jesus to us” have become popular. Jesus **does** love us, but he **also** calls us to self-denial and rebukes us when we sin—things we **don't want** to hear. Do you think that such books are dangerous in any way? Why or why not? If so, how?

Read Matthew 26:31-56.

- What did **Jesus** predict about **all of the disciples** (v. 31)? What did **Peter** predict in v. 33?
- What did **Jesus** predict about **Peter in particular** (v. 34)? What did **Peter** predict in v. 35?
- **Who** was the **better** prophet—Jesus or Peter (v. 40)?
- What predictions of Jesus do you find difficult to accept? What should you do?
- According to v. 37-38, what **feelings/experiences** was Jesus having? (List the specific terms used.)
- What detail does Luke 22:44 add?
- When you're greatly distressed, what do you typically do? What did Jesus do (v. 39)?
- What did Jesus ask the disciples to do (v. 38b)? What do you think that means?
- **If** the disciples would have faithfully “kept watch”, do you think that would have been **an actual help to Jesus** in his distress? What does this teach you about the value of **your labors**?
- In v. 40, it could appear that Jesus is peeved with Peter, but according to v. 41, for whom is Jesus concerned?
- In v. 50, what did Jesus call Judas? Jesus never sinned—and sarcasm is sin (Ephesians 4:29)—so **how** should Jesus' use of the word “friend” be taken? How does John 18:7-9 also show Jesus' selfless love? How does v. 39 show this same attitude?
- So, Jesus is just about to suffer and die—but **about whose** suffering is he concerned in v. 52?
- **What do you think it will take** for us to become like Jesus—concerned about pleasing the Father and serving us, regardless of the cost to us personally? **How** do we do that?

God brought blessing of cosmic proportions out of the death of His son. Pastor Rick Warren is letting God bring blessing out of the death of his son, Matthew. How does one develop that sort of attitude?

What suffering in **your** life do you think God wants to use to bless others? How can your church help?

Sermon Summary

Notes

There were times when Jesus taught hard things. On the worst day in Jesus' life—those twenty-four hours between his Passover meal with his disciples and his death. For three years Jesus loved and taught Judas, who then betrayed and sold him out. That same night the rest of his followers abandoned him too (Matthew 26:36–41). From this encounter we learn three truths.

(1) If we follow God in a fallen world, we will experience grief and distress (v. 37). He was under so much pressure that blood began to ooze out of the capillaries that lay just beneath his skin. It is not unchristian to be grieved and distressed; in fact, Jesus guaranteed it (John 16:33). Suffering is the gap between your desires and your circumstances. And the greater the gap between your desires and your circumstances, the greater your suffering. What do you do when the gap seems more than you can bear? Sometimes we can change our circumstances, but other times we cannot or it would require that we disobey God. What then?

There is a stupid, destructive theology that says if you become a Christian, everything is going to be smooth. If you get God on your side, you will always be happy. You will be healthy and wealthy and you will prosper in everything that you do. That is a stupid, destructive theology; it is about as unbiblical as can be. And because it is not true, it won't work at the time when you most need it—during suffering. No believer is exempt from suffering, not even a godly man such as pastor and author Rick Warren, whose son recently died a suicide.

Not even the sinless Son of God. He wasn't just facing the agony of the cross; what caused Jesus the most dread was knowing that for the first time in eternity, fellowship with his Heavenly Father would be broken. What do you do when you are asked to drink a bitter cup that you don't want to drink? Do you medicate your pain? Do you opt out of the path God has for you? Or, do you do what Jesus chose to do: to pray.

The second truth is that (2) if we are to follow God like Jesus did, then we must pray as Jesus prayed. His prayer that has two parts. In the first he brought his heart's desire to God in a respectful way. The second part is "Not my will, but your will be done." A lot of our prayer today is pagan, not Christian, prayer. It says: "Help me, Do this, Fix this, Do that. You obey me God!" True Christian prayer honestly expresses our desires, but ends with "Not my will, but your will be done." We are afraid of those words because we think that we know better than God.

Our final lesson is, (3) If we suffer and pray like Jesus prayed, God will redeem it all (v. 45). Jesus rose from prayer and marched towards the cross knowing the suffering it brought him. He was resolved to do the Father's will. As Rick Warren said, "Isn't it great that in God's garden of grace that fruit even grows on broken trees?" Rick and his family are broken, but God is giving them grace, redeeming their suffering, and bringing good out of an evil.

Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time

In John 13-19 we have the solemn privilege of observing Jesus during his most difficult time: the 24 hours spanning from the Last Supper, through his garden prayer, the betrayal, six trials, condemnation, beating, and crucifixion. This often is called his “passion”, from the Greek, πάσχειν (paschein) which means “to suffer”. Jesus teaches us how to suffer in a godly way, as 1 Peter 1:21 says: “Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps”. Paul, who certainly followed Jesus’ example, added this: “It has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29). Well, if we’re going to suffer with Christ and for him (and we will!), we’d better learn how...

Monday—Read John 13 and the first two points of Welch’s article, *Ten Things to Do During Suffering*.

- What impressed you from Jesus’ story?
- How do you see Welch’s ideas reflected in Jesus’ example?
- How does your experience of suffering differ?
- How should you pray about this? What should you do today?
- How can you serve a fellow TCCer who’s suffering?

Tuesday—Read John 14 and points three and four of Welch’s article, *Ten Things to Do During Suffering*.

- What impressed you from Jesus’ story?
- How do you see Welch’s ideas reflected in Jesus’ example?
- How does your experience of suffering differ?
- How should you pray about this? What should you do today?
- How can you serve a fellow TCCer who’s suffering?

Wednesday—Read John 15 and points five and six of Welch’s article, *Ten Things to Do During Suffering*.

- What impressed you from Jesus’ story?
- How do you see Welch’s ideas reflected in Jesus’ example?
- How does your experience of suffering differ?
- How should you pray about this? What should you do today?
- How can you serve a fellow TCCer who’s suffering?

Thursday—Read John 16 and points seven and eight of Welch’s article, *Ten Things to Do During Suffering*.

- What impressed you from Jesus’ story?
- How do you see Welch’s ideas reflected in Jesus’ example?
- How does your experience of suffering differ?
- How should you pray about this? What should you do today?
- How can you serve a fellow TCCer who’s suffering?

Friday—Read John 17 and points nine and ten of Welch’s article, *Ten Things to Do During Suffering*.

- What impressed you from Jesus’ story?
- How do you see Welch’s ideas reflected in Jesus’ example?
- How does your experience of suffering differ?
- How should you pray about this? What should you do today?
- How can you serve a fellow TCCer who’s suffering?

Saturday—Read John 18-19 and review Welch’s article, *Ten Things to Do During Suffering*.

- What impressed you from Jesus’ story?
- How do you see Welch’s ideas reflected in Jesus’ example?
- How does your experience of suffering differ?
- How should you pray about this? What should you do today?
- How can you serve a fellow TCCer who’s suffering?



Ten Things to Do During Suffering

Ed Welch

We will all suffer, of that there is no doubt. It is strange, then, that we are often unprepared for it. With that in mind, a useful exercise is to summarize Scripture and identify what words of God can guide us when things are hard.

Here is my current list of ten things to do while suffering (it is always subject to ongoing refinement).

1. Don't be surprised by suffering (1 Peter 4:12). The Son suffered, so do those who follow the Son. You will not be spared the sufferings that the world experiences, but you will participate in them, both for the world's benefit and your own.
2. Live by faith, see the unseen (Hebrews 2:2). Normal eyesight is not enough. Your eyes will tell you that God is far away and silent. The truth is that he is close—invisible—but close. He has a unique affection for fellow sufferers. So get help to build up your spiritual vision. Search Scripture. Enlist others to help, to pray, to remind you of the Truth. Ask the God of comfort to comfort you.
3. Suffering will reveal what is really in your heart. It will test you (James 1:2). Where do you turn when tested? Do you turn toward Jesus or turn inward?
4. God is God, you are not (Job 38-42). This is important. Humility and submission before the King can quiet some of your questions.
5. Confess sin. There is nothing new here; it is a regular feature of daily life. Yet it always helps you to see the cross of Jesus more clearly. It is the quickest way to see the persistent and lavish love of God (Hebrews 12).
6. Keep an eye out in Scripture for the Suffering Servant. He has entered into your suffering, and you can enter into his. (Isaiah 39-53, John 10-21)
7. Speak honestly and often to the Lord. This is critical. Just speak, groan, have someone read you a psalm and say a weak, "Amen."
8. Expect to get to know God better while in this wilderness. That is how he usually works with his people (Philippians 3:10-11).
9. Talk to those who have suffered, read their books, listen to them. You are not alone. Insist on being moved with compassion as you hear other stories of suffering.
10. Look ahead. We need spiritual vision for what is happening now and for where the universe is heading. We are on a pilgrimage that ends at the temple of God (Psalm 84).

I have noticed that, during dire times, we can hear our own words repeated back to us more easily than we can hear words from other people. So I hereby authorize my wife, children, and anyone else, to speak these things to me when my hardships are oppressive.