

SACKED

**A LIFE NIGHT ON
THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING**

QUICK GLANCE

ABOUT THIS LIFE NIGHT

Suffering has never been easy. Oftentimes, we are tempted to think that if God is good and truly loves us, then he would protect us from pain, sorrow, and death. However, reflecting on Jesus' Passion teaches us a valuable lesson: suffering serves a greater purpose. In this Life Night, teens will explore the reality of suffering and be encouraged to trust God's greater purpose in the midst of it.

MAIN POINTS

1. Though difficult, suffering is an essential part of our lives. No human being can escape it.
2. The meaning of suffering is fully illuminated in Jesus' Death and Resurrection.
3. The witness of Christians who willingly undergo suffering and death shows us the power of God's love. Clinging to this love, we can accept the suffering in our lives and see its greater purpose.

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 26:39 | Luke 9:23-25 | John 15:12-13 | Romans 5:3-5 | Romans 8:18 | 2 Corinthians 4:17-18 | Colossians 1:24

CATECHISM

272 | 618 | 1500-1501 | 1505 | 2648

KEY TERMS

Character | Suffering | Trust

SAINTS

St. Maria Goretti | St. Maximilian Kolbe | St. Therese of Lisieux

RESOURCES

Music

Spotify: “LS - Game Day”

Video

Ascension Presents, “The Real Answer to Why God Allows Suffering” (youtube.com)

Augustine Institute, “What do Catholics Believe about Suffering? | A Catholic Professor Answers” (youtube.com)

GOAL

The goal of this Life Night is to explore the reality of suffering and encourage teens to trust God in the midst of it.

ENVIRONMENT

A large crucifix becomes the primary focus at the front of the room for this Life Night. The simple environment reinforces the need to stay with Christ in the midst of suffering. See the Getting Ready section for more detailed setup suggestions.

GATHER

Hot Potato With Consequences

Teens play a version of hot potato with a twist. Whoever the potato lands on is assigned a consequence. The wilder the consequence, the more fun the game will be!

PROCLAIM

Talk: Sacked

This talk is focused on the why and how of enduring suffering. As we see in the lives of Sts. Maximilian Kolbe and Maria Goretti, our lives are not defined by the suffering that comes our way but by our response.

BREAK

Small Group Discussion

Small groups engage in discussion about the stories they heard in the Proclaim, the reality of suffering, and how Jesus' suffering transforms our own.

SEND

Veneration of the Cross

Taking time to reflect on suffering in the presence of the crucifix, teens are encouraged to consider their own crosses. They are invited to come forward and take a nail, symbolizing their desire to endure suffering with Christ.

NOTES

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

GETTING READY

LIFE NIGHT DATE: _____

FOUR WEEKS BEFORE

- Read through the entire Life Night.
- Pray with the Scripture and Catechism references.
- Consult the Resources suggestions.
- Select a presenter for the Proclaim and contact them this week.
- Send the Proclaim Teaching Guide to the presenter.

TWO WEEKS BEFORE

- Assign core members to the tasks on the Core Meeting Worksheet.
- Check in with the Proclaim presenter and ask for an outline and slides, if applicable.
- Schedule practice time with the presenter if needed.

ONE WEEK BEFORE

- Distribute the Life Night outline to the core members.
- Pray with the core members over the Life Night.
- Review the highlights of the Life Night.
- Explain the core assignments.
- Encourage the core members to review the discussion questions and pray for their small group.

THE WEEK OF THE LIFE NIGHT

- Advertise the Life Night on the parish youth group's social media channels.
 - Schedule the Parent Letter email as a follow-up to the Life Night.
 - Make a plan for the Life Night Environment using the suggestions below.
 - Gather the supplies needed for the Life Night.
 - Inform core members of their roles during the session and provide them with the required materials and instructions.
 - Pray for the teens who will be present and experience the Life Night.
-
-

THE DAY OF THE LIFE NIGHT

- Test all audio-video elements of the Life Night.
 - Decorate the youth room using the Environment instructions below.
 - Project an Environment image found online at lifeteen.com.
 - Play the "LS - Game Day" Spotify playlist as teens gather.
-
-

ENVIRONMENT

Place a large crucifix in the front of the room to call to mind Jesus’ suffering. We can become very distracted in the midst of suffering, taking our eyes off Christ and essentially losing focus on the purpose of our own crosses. The environment should be simple and bare in order to emphasize our need to stay with Christ as we endure our suffering.

During the Send, dim the lights and shine a spotlight on the crucifix to draw greater attention to Jesus’ Passion. Place a bowl of nails at the foot of the cross. Consider playing soft background worship or instrumental music during the time of prayer. Adding some candles around the crucifix can help create an atmosphere of reverence for the time of reflection.

SUPPLIES

	Items for Hot Potato With Consequences (ball, stuffed animal, potato, etc.)
	Large crucifix
	Spotlight
	Bowl
	Large nails, one per person

LIFE NIGHT PLANNER

SCHEDULE

TO-DO

ROOM LAYOUT

CORE MEETING WORKSHEET

Use this outline for your core team meeting before the Youth Mass. The core meeting follows the Gather-Proclaim-Break-Send structure.

CORE MEETING START TIME: _____

GATHER

- Begin with a brief social time and rapid high points/low points of the week from each core member.
- Pray with your core team and include one of the Scripture passages from the Life Night.

Scripture choice: _____

PROCLAIM

- Review the Life Night outline.
- Assign core members to the tasks for this Life Night and write their names in the Core Assignments chart on the next page.

BREAK

- Review the Life Night small group questions with a core member discussion. Spend about 15 minutes on this section.
- Take questions.

SEND

- Conclude the meeting with a Hail Mary.
- Set up final details for the Life Night.
- Arrive early to the Youth Mass to greet teens as they arrive.

CORE ASSIGNMENTS

Setup	1.	2.	3.
	4.	5.	6.

Check-In	1.	2.	3.
----------	----	----	----

Audio-Video	
-------------	--

Opening Prayer	
----------------	--

Proclaim Presenter	
--------------------	--

Closing Prayer	
----------------	--

NOTES

[illegible]

GATHER

WELCOME AND OPENING PRAYER 5 min

Gather in the main meeting space and welcome the teens to the Life Night. Introduce any teens attending for the first time, and begin in prayer.

HOT POTATO WITH CONSEQUENCES 15 min

Gather everyone in small groups of eight to ten teens. Cue up a playlist of appropriate upbeat music. Each group selects one person to start with the potato. When the music starts, teens pass the potato around the circle. When the music stops, the person with the potato is assigned a consequence.

Consequences are announced each round by the youth minister or core member facilitating the game. The person holding the potato when the music stops must perform the consequence for the duration of the game. The more absurd the consequence, the more fun. If a player receives another consequence during the game, it does not replace their current consequence but rather is added to it. Play for as long as time allows.

Sample consequences:

- Howl like a wolf every time you touch the potato.
- High-five the person to your right before receiving the potato.
- Face backward for the rest of the game.
- Don't speak for the rest of the game.
- Whisper "I love you" to the potato every time it comes by.
- You can only touch the potato with the backs of your hands.
- When you get the potato, you have to run around the circle before passing it to the next person.
- Scream whenever you are in contact with the potato.
- Talk with your tongue out for the rest of the game.
- Do your best dance move when the potato comes to you.
- Yell "Woohoo!" when the potato comes to you.
- Pick one person in the circle. Every time they touch the potato, shout their name.

PROCLAIM

GETTING STARTED

This Teaching Guide is not just an outline; it's a tool to help you craft a powerful and personalized talk that will leave a lasting impact. Don't just prepare the main points — unleash your creativity and incorporate media and Going Deeper content to captivate your audience and inspire the teens. Whether you use any suggested media or find your own, make sure it's visually engaging, attention-grabbing, and thought-provoking. Consult the Going Deeper section at the back of this resource and highlight the points that most resonate with your teens. Whenever presenting in front of a group, use a Bible or Catechism to read any passage rather than a digital copy or paper printout.

Beyond these guidelines, the most important thing is to be yourself and let the Holy Spirit guide you. Practice your talk, pour your heart into it, and trust that your authenticity and humility have the power to make a difference in the lives of these teens. If possible, record yourself giving the Proclaim and make notes on what you can improve or avoid. This guide is just the beginning — the rest is up to you!

MAIN POINTS

1. Though difficult, suffering is an essential part of our lives. No human being can escape it.
2. The meaning of suffering is fully illuminated in Jesus' Death and Resurrection.
3. The witness of Christians who willingly undergo suffering and death shows us the power of God's love. Clinging to this love, we can accept the suffering in our lives and see its greater purpose.

KEY TERMS

Character - A person's habitual virtues and failings which, when ordered toward the good, make one a moral individual. **(CCC 1804)**

Suffering - A negative experience that comes from the presence of evil or the absence of a good.

Trust - Reliance on someone or something. **(CCC 2086, 2828)**

Main Point 1:
Though difficult, suffering is an essential part of our lives.
No human being can escape it

- As humans, we each have many great individual characteristics. Some of us are really fast, some are great at math, and some of us are experts at certain video games. Some have brown eyes and some have blue. Some believe pineapple should go on pizza, and others don't. There is great variety within our one human race.
- At the same time, there are certain experiences that are universal. They stretch across time, continents, and cultures. They are part of what it means to be human. One such experience is suffering.
- The presence of suffering has been a reality faced by every single person who has ever lived. It is inescapable.
- People have dealt with this reality in various ways. Some have tried to alleviate suffering by eliminating the concept of the self. If I can come to believe there is no "I" that exists, then there is no "I" that can suffer.
- Others have tried to accept all things in a calm, reasonable, and collected manner, no matter how much suffering it brought. On the other hand, some people spend thousands upon thousands of dollars throughout their lives trying to escape suffering, to no avail.
- The truth is that all of us will face suffering in our lives. It will be unfair, unjust, and unwelcome. It won't make sense to us, and it may even shake the core of who we are and what we believe. Sometimes, it will pass swiftly, while other times, it may endure for years. **(Going Deeper #1: "On Human Suffering")**
- Suffering is associated with pain, sorrow, and death. We tend to think of suffering as an oppressive circumstance or the worst-case scenario, most often out of our control and with no hope of escape.
- However, it may help us to take a closer look at the word suffering. It derives from two Latin words: *sub*, meaning "under," and *ferre*, meaning "to bear or carry." To suffer is to submit to, put up with, or endure death, pain, or distress.
- In this light, we see that suffering is not just a condition we find ourselves in or something happening to us, but it is something that requires action from us. When we suffer, we are responding to difficulty or pain by the way we submit to, put up with, or endure what is taking place in our lives.
- Because of our humanity and the nature of this world, it is impossible to avoid pain completely. It is normal and appropriate for us to wish, hope, and pray for protection from pain and deliverance from distress, but it is also important for us to be willing to receive it when it comes, just as Jesus was.

SCRIPTURE

Project and read **Matthew 26:39** or invite a leadership teen to read it.—

- To receive suffering means to accept that it is happening and to turn to God as our source of comfort, strength, and hope through the experience. As Christians, we believe that suffering has a purpose and leads us to something greater.
- In order to allow that purpose to come to fruition, we have to trust in God's plan. Although we may not perceive his goodness in times of trial or feel his presence under the weight of the cross we carry, we have to choose to trust that he knows best and is bringing about his purpose in our lives.

Main Point 2: The meaning of suffering is fully illuminated in Jesus' Death and Resurrection.

- Jesus' life, Death, and Resurrection enable us to find hope in our own sufferings. God the Father allowed Jesus the Son to be persecuted, beaten, mocked, scourged, and brutally hung on the cross. However, the story doesn't end with death. God also allowed Jesus to rise from the dead, conquering sin and death through his acceptance of and perseverance in suffering.
- Jesus chose to trust the plan that God set in motion, a plan that required him to undergo great but temporary suffering for an even greater and eternal glory.
- We are called to put on Christ, to follow in his footsteps, and to be conformed to his likeness. Jesus challenges us to take up our cross and follow him.
(Matthew 16:24, Romans 8:29, Galatians 3:27, 1 Peter 2:21)
- When we truly follow his example, trusting that our suffering has meaning and allowing God to bring about his work in us, we become sharers in Christ's kingdom.

SCRIPTURE

Project and read **Romans 5:3-5** or invite a leadership teen to read it.

- We will not always see the glory of suffering or the good that comes from it on this side of heaven. However, St. Paul reminds us that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character. In other words, suffering with Christ bears much fruit and transforms us from the inside out. **(Going Deeper #2: “What Is Lacking in the Sufferings of Christ?”)**
- Many of us are involved in something that demands a great deal of effort on our part. We push through yet another practice, a longer workout, or an extra rehearsal. We drive ourselves to the limit in order to form, strengthen, and perfect our talent so that we can overcome any opponent or challenge and see it through to the end.
- Oftentimes, this requires physical pain on our part: achy bones, pulled muscles, exhausted lungs, and sore bodies. We are willing to push ourselves and endure pain when we believe that it will pay off — yet the truth is that we never know for sure whether it will be entirely worth it. We are never promised the championship, never guaranteed the perfectly executed show, and never certain that we will make the team. Even so, few of us ever regret a moment when we pushed ourselves and formed our bodies in hopes of glory.
- The discipline we are willing to exhibit for our team or our skill is the same kind of discipline that we can apply to our spiritual life. Suffering is an opportunity for growth.
- When we are faced with suffering we are faced with choices: how will we respond to this difficulty, how will we manage this pain, how will we forgive this person? These trials of life are incredibly impactful in our formation as a person, and our responses to them often define the kind of people we become.
- When we remain close to God in the face of suffering we are able to receive his grace, which allows us to choose the righteous thing, growing in virtue through the process. This is how we develop true character.
- By receiving the little inconveniences of everyday life, such as being stuck in traffic or a restaurant running out of the food we wanted to order, we build endurance to persevere through the great sufferings. Each sacrifice is like a workout, a practice, that better equips us for a life of holiness and draws us closer to the eternal reward.
- In imitation of Jesus, we die to ourselves daily, knowing that resurrection and new life await us on the other side.

Main Point 3:

**The witness of Christians who willingly undergo suffering and death shows us the power of God’s love.
Clinging to this love, we can accept the suffering in our lives and see its greater purpose.**

- There are many examples of Christians throughout history who show us how to respond to suffering. Let's take a look at two of them.
- Saint Maximilian Kolbe was a Franciscan Friar who passionately worked for the conversion of sinners and enemies of the Church. He took on many projects to promote devotion to Our Lady and to serve the poor and ill. During World War II, he was taken prisoner by the German Gestapo and eventually sent to the concentration camp Auschwitz. He never abandoned his priestly ministries during his imprisonment but would lead prayers, celebrate Mass, and hear confessions.
- One day, one of the prisoners escaped. To set an example, Nazi soldiers randomly chose several prisoners to be victims of death by starvation as a warning against further escape attempts. One of the men chosen lamented the wife and children he would leave behind. Hearing this, Kolbe stepped forward and volunteered to take his place.
- Maximilian Kolbe went to the starvation bunker that day, leaving everyone, including the soldiers, in disbelief at his free choice to die in the place of another man. Reports from Auschwitz speak of how the cries and yells of prisoners changed to prayers and hymns, and that even the guards changed their extreme violent behaviors.
- Kolbe survived for two weeks in the starvation bunker and eventually was put to death by a lethal injection.
- We can ask why God did not save such a faithful, dedicated, evangelizing Christian from such horrible suffering. But Maximilian Kolbe didn't ask this question. In the face of suffering and evil, his response was not to question God. Rather, he acted on what he knew to be true and, through God's grace, offered his own life for others in imitation of Christ.
- Father Kolbe's acceptance of and perseverance in suffering left a legacy that has impacted millions.
- Saint Maria Goretti is one of the youngest saints ever canonized by the Church. She is an inspiration for a life of faith, purity, and courage. She was the third of seven children, and her father — a faith-filled, hard-working man — died from illness when she was only nine.
- Due to her family's financial struggles, they lived in close quarters with another family. That family had an older son, Alessandro, who was very attracted to Maria. He became so fixated on her that he made several attempts to violate her but was never able to do so. Finally, he came at Maria while her mother and oldest brother were out working in the field.
- Maria rebuked him and fought him back as best she could, claiming love for God and despising to sin against him. Alessandro stabbed her multiple times for her refusal, leaving her to die. Her family eventually found her and sought medical help, but her wounds were fatal.
- Reports state that before her death the following day, Maria said, "I forgive Alessandro Serenelli, and I want him to be with me in heaven forever." She was 11 years old.
- Alessandro went to prison. Years later, Maria appeared to Alessandro in a dream, changing his life forever. When he was finally released from prison, almost 30 years later, he went to visit Maria's mother in order to ask forgiveness. She forgave him, and they attended Mass together the next day. Alessandro went on to live a faithful life, serving the Church and the poor.

- By all outward accounts, Maria's story is tragic. Yet, in the midst of this tragedy, Maria's faithfulness and trust in God laid the foundation for Alessandro's conversion. The suffering she endured became a powerful force that helped transform a rapist and murderer into a God-fearing Catholic man. Maria and her mother's love for and trust in God enabled new life to arise in the midst of a dreadful situation.
- These amazing witnesses show us that our response to suffering can have a profound and lasting impact on ourselves and those around us. They testify to what our love for God and his love for us can accomplish.
- Chances are you won't find yourself in such dire situations. However, at some time or another, we all will face a kind of suffering that makes us question the goodness of God.
- We might experience something that hurts us deeply, that frightens us, or that changes the course of our life. In the midst of it, God may not show up in the way we expect or save us in the way we would hope. These saints encourage us to persevere in faithfulness nonetheless.
- When our friends hurt or betray us, when life at home is difficult, when school feels overwhelming, when we don't make the team, when that addiction draws us further and further in, when we feel empty, anxious, and alone, how do we respond? What do we do in the face of these sufferings?
- God asks us to love and trust him in the midst of every hard situation. This entails an active choice to accept that we can't stop what's happening or change what's happened, but trust that God is with us in it.
- Suffering has the capacity to mold us into stronger, more empathetic, and more selfless individuals. Every injury is an invitation to a new strength.
- Saints Maximilian Kolbe and Maria Goretti teach us that, when faced with suffering, we can still choose to love.
- Despite our pain and our lack of understanding, we can choose to love God by remaining faithful to Mass, receiving the sacraments, and persevering in prayer. We don't have to have it all together, but we can be an example of trusting God, who sees the whole picture and gives purpose to everything.
- We can also choose to love others. Despite our frustrations, hurts, and disappointments, we can relinquish our hatred and revenge to God, who is the most just and who will bring about the right judgment at the right time. We can strive for reconciliation, whether that's offering or seeking forgiveness.
- God wastes nothing, not even our suffering. In the face of hardships and difficulties, our task is to entrust ourselves to him with love, knowing that he is in control and he knows best how to transform the pain of crucifixion into the glory and joy of resurrection.

SCRIPTURE

Project and read **Romans 8:28**.

BREAK

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION 20 min

Gather teens into their small groups. Core members begin in prayer and then facilitate a small group discussion, using the following questions as a guide. Be aware of where the Holy Spirit leads the discussion. Take your time, and do not feel rushed to cover all the questions.

SMALL GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Were you surprised by any of the stories you heard? What was a takeaway?
2. Can you think of someone whose suffering produced some sort of positive outcome?

Sample answers: Michael Jordan didn't make his high school basketball team, and that instilled in him a work ethic that made him one of the best basketball players ever.

Pope St. John Paul II lost his parents and brother, lived in a Nazi-occupied country, and saw the suffering of his countless friends and countrymen. Those experiences increased his faith in God, gave him a heart of empathy toward others, and made him an inspirational example for millions.

3. What are some good things that might come from suffering?
4. Why is it hard to accept suffering?
5. We often forget to consider that everyone around us is suffering in some way. How can we help someone who is suffering, especially when we don't necessarily know that they are going through a difficult time?
6. How does Jesus' Death and Resurrection change the way we experience suffering?

SEND

VENERATION OF THE CROSS 15 min

Transition to a time of prayer. Invite the teens to take a comfortable position on the floor and away from distractions. Dim the lights and turn a spotlight on the crucifix. Allow a moment of silence. Encourage teens to pray about their own sufferings and consider where God is in the midst of their circumstances, feelings, and experiences. Introduce the activity with the following or similar words.

Suffering is hard. Jesus never promised that life would be easy. Our tendency is to try to escape suffering; God asks us to trust him and bear it in patience.

In this time of prayer, reflect on the suffering in your life. You'll have a chance to venerate the cross with a kiss or bow, whichever you choose. In doing so, you are thanking Jesus for the suffering he accepted for your sake and asking him for the grace to accept the suffering in your life.

While you venerate the cross, I encourage you to offer your suffering to God with the simple prayer, "God, I want to offer this situation to you; be with me in it and help me to trust you." As you return to your seat, you may take a nail from the bowl as a reminder of your desire to accept this suffering with Christ.

Begin the prayer with the Sign of the Cross.

Good and gracious Father, we sit before you in wonder at the reality of suffering.

We believe in your goodness and hope in your promise that our pain, fear, doubt, discouragement, stress, anxiety, illness, or any other heavy cross that weighs on our hearts will be redeemed by your love. We choose to trust you.

When trusting you is too hard, we ask you to recognize our weaknesses and increase our faith. We want to be able to trust you. Show us how.

As we bring our sufferings to you, give us the strength to endure them with grace.

Convict us of your presence in our trials.

We love you. We hope in you.

After the opening prayer, invite the teens to come up to the crucifix when and if they feel moved to do so. They can venerate the cross and take a nail from the bowl as a sign of their acceptance of suffering and their willingness to endure suffering with Christ.

Play some soft worship or instrumental music during this time of prayer.

Close out this time of prayer with an Our Father.

ANNOUNCEMENTS 5 min

Make announcements for your program, then dismiss the teens.

AFTER THE LIFE NIGHT

Most core members are tired at the end of the session, but be sure to do two things upon the completion of a Life Night.

FIRST, CLEANUP

Try to foster a spirit of teamwork and generosity among your core team. One of the fastest ways to a divided core team is for one or two members to neglect cleanup. No one is done for the night until everyone is done cleaning up. If a core member is not helping clean up, presume goodwill on their part. If it becomes a consistent problem, address it with them rather than letting issues fester.

Be mindful of any relational ministry that may be happening or teens that need to talk. Sometimes, teens can be deeply moved by a Life Night and may need to continue to process with a trusted adult. During cleanup, your team should continue to be available and interruptible for any teens. You never want to shove teens out the door for the sake of cleaning up.

SECOND, EVALUATE

After all the teens have left, appreciate what God has accomplished through the Life Night. Share any praise reports. Identify who or what needs follow-up. Set a timer and invite the group to share in these five categories of the Life Night: Pros, Cons, Questions, Comments, and Concerns. Remind the core team that evaluations are intended to improve the teens' experiences at Life Teen and are not critical judgments of a youth minister's or core member's performance. As you discuss, encourage the core team to consider each of the Life Night movements of Gather, Proclaim, Break, and Send, or pass out/email the evaluation forms. Conclude your time together in prayer and praise to God.

LIFE NIGHT EVALUATION

On a scale of 1-10, how well did this Life Night accomplish the goal we set?

GOAL

The goal of this Life Night is to explore the reality of suffering and encourage teens to trust God in the midst of it.

Did not accomplish

Nailed it

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

What was the strongest aspect of this Life Night?

Gather

Proclaim

Break

Send

Environment

Optional: Please explain further.

What kind of follow-up do we need to do after this Life Night?

What can we improve for future Life Nights? How can we accomplish this?
