

# Suffering Part 2

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Date: 31 March 2019

[ 0 : 00 ] As I mentioned last time, as I have occasion to speak in the next number of weeks, I want to speak on the subject of suffering, and this is the second of those sermons.

And what we saw last week is that suffering is the universal experience of every Christian. Unexpected losses can make you a pauper overnight. Wasting illness, crippling disease can invade our lives in a moment.

The powerful arm of the state can imprison and even torture God's people. Christians are subjected to persecution that ranges from everything from mockery and derision to physical torture.

In fact, there are 215 million Christians worldwide that are in political situations where they face immediate or extreme persecution.

We're slandered by our enemies. Sometimes our words are twisted. Even friends with whom we shared our secrets betray us. Family can become the context of extreme suffering, abuse, anger, bitter words, unfaithfulness.

[ 1 : 16 ] The anguish of spirit can destroy family relationships. We can suffer loss of someone close to us and the attendant grief that tracks with that.

Sometimes, sometimes, sometimes, sometimes, sometimes, like the psalmist, we are in the pit and we feel that the waves are crashing over us, terror, and overwhelms our souls. We feel that darkness is our dearest friend. Physical suffering can invade our lives and beyond our ability to bear.

And we can even face chastisement from the hand of God. And what we need is perspective.

Perspective from the word of God that enables us to respond to suffering in faith.

And the list of suffering that I've just gone through, we have all experienced. We haven't all experienced all of them, but we all have experienced some of them. And perhaps we're even in the throes of some of them right now.

And we need the word of God to give us perspective. So let me pray with you and pray that God would be with us and open his truth to us tonight. Father, we come to you acknowledging our need of you and praying that you would be our teacher, that you would instruct us in your ways, that you would show us truth concerning ourselves and concerning you that we need to understand and need to embrace as your people.

[ 2 : 42 ] And so we come, Lord, as supplicants. We come to you pleading for that which we cannot provide for ourselves. But we come with confidence because you have already demonstrated your love for us and given us your son.

And the promise of Romans 8 is that having given us Christ, you will not withhold any good thing from us. And so we come asking that you would illuminate our hearts and minds, that you would develop within us Christian patterns of thinking that would sustain us and enable us in times.

We pray this for Christ's glory. Amen. I have two broad areas I want to mention to you tonight. And I want to, the first is two basic truths about suffering.

And then the second half is that God uses suffering for our good. And there are six headings under that. So actually only two points. But the first one is just this truth that, you know, basic truth about suffering.

The first truth that I want to assert is the fact that God is sovereign over our suffering. The suffering that comes to us is not random. It's not just crazy things that are happening, things that are careening out of control.

[ 3 : 55 ] It's not random events. It's not crazy coincidence. It's not haphazard. It's not undirected. And it's very easy for us to look at suffering that way, to almost look at suffering like, this is crazy.

Why would this happen? Why would this happen to me? Why would I have to face this? And it's not karma. It's not bad things are coming to us because we've been bad to others.

God's word makes it clear that suffering comes according to the plan and purposes of God. And God is at work in our suffering. Remember these words in Isaiah chapter 43, the first three verses. It says, God begins here with a reminder that he's our creator.

He has made us. Our existence is owed to God. God is in control. He is the one who's called us. We are his Israel. He has formed us. He has redeemed us.

[ 5 : 16 ] Now, does that mean we will never face trials? No, not at all. It doesn't mean we will never suffer. It doesn't mean that we will never face times of perplexity or confusion when we don't understand what is going wrong.

But the assurance of this passage is that all things come from his sovereign hand and he is with us in them. We will never be abandoned alone in the midst of our suffering.

Our troubles are like the deep waters that Israel passed through. And that's the illusion here. That Israel passed through in the Red Sea and the crossing of the Jordan.

And God assures us that through the fires, through the waters, he is in control and they will not overwhelm us. Remember the story of Joseph. Joseph was betrayed by his brothers.

They sold him into slavery. Even though he conducted himself honorably in Potiphar's house, he was falsely accused of making sexual advances toward Potiphar's wife.

[ 6 : 20 ] He was wrongfully imprisoned. He suffered on so many levels. And the sovereignty of God was what sustained him in the midst of his suffering. And when he finally discloses himself to his brothers who are bowed to the ground and trembling and afraid because of the ways they have sinned against him and their sin has been exposed, his statements about God's sovereignty are remarkable statements.

And I'm quoting Joseph from Genesis chapter 45. He says, Now who sold Joseph into slavery? His brothers. Those wicked, cruel men. They were heartless. They were motivated by jealousy and anger. They ignored his pleas when he pled to them for his life.

They did it. But Joseph says, It was God's work. God sent me ahead of you. And Joseph's statements are not statements that are meant to excuse the brothers for their sin, but to remind them that God is sovereign.

But to remind them that God is sovereign even over the wicked acts of wicked people. And that is such an important truth for us to maintain and hang on to in the face of suffering.

[ 8 : 28 ] And Joseph's God-centered perspective is a very profound insight because Joseph experienced real evil in his life. His brothers hated him.

His brothers hated him. They treacherously enslaved him. They sold him into slavery.

Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. He was wrongfully imprisoned. But Joseph understood that behind and underneath that was even under those, the most wicked and treacherous acts of these evil men.

There was a God who is sovereign and who is working out good purposes, who is orchestrating all things for good. Now, we have a hard time understanding this.

We have a hard time getting our mind around it because we think to ourselves, aren't they responsible for their choices? Are the brothers and Potiphar's wife mere puppets?

[ 9 : 31 ] And weren't they sentient people who are making volitional choices and decisions? How can God be in control of all these things and not be the author of evil?

And to make sense of the Bible, you have to always remind yourself that there are two wills of God in the Bible. There's God's will in precept and God's will in decree.

God's will in precept is the revealed will of God. The Ten Commandments, for example, are the precepts of God. They are the things that God says we ought to do for our good and for his glory.

They're the precepts of God. In that sense, we can say they are the will of God. It's the will of God for human beings to live according to the Ten Commandments. That's God's precept.

The decree of God is what God has determined before all time will actually come to pass.

Remember, Ephesians 1.11 says that God works all things according to the counsel of his will.

[ 10 : 37 ] And the confession has such an excellent statement. The confession says God has in himself decreed from all eternity by most wise and holy counsel of his will, freely and unchangeably, all things whatsoever come to pass.

And yet so is thereby God is neither the author of sin, nor has fellowship with any therein, nor is violence offered to the will of the creature, nor is the liberty or contingency of secondary causes taken away, but rather established, in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and his

power and faithfulness in accomplishing his decree.

The statement of the confession is really summarizing the Bible's teaching that God decrees all things, God is never the author of sin, and people make real and valid choices.

Now, I can't fully get my mind around that, because that's larger than my mind. And what I have to remind myself of is the fact that I'm a finite creature trapped in my finitude, and I'm trying to understand the workings of an infinitely glorious God, and naturally, I'm going to find times when I bump up against my finitude, I can't fully understand what God is doing.

But I can assert what God says to be true from his word, that God decrees all things, that God is never the author of sin, he never tempts anyone with sin, and people make choices that are real choices, and valid choices, and they're not puppets.

[12:20] Now, here's where it gets tricky. Sometimes, God's will and decree violates his will and precept. For example, if you go out after the service is over, and you go into the parking lot and discover that someone has stolen your car, and you come back in, and you say, you won't believe it, my car is gone, someone stole my car while I was in church, we'll gather about, and we'll comfort you with the decretive will of God.

We'll say, you can trust God with this. This is something God has brought into your life. He's brought into your life for your good, for his glory. We can trust God. Let's pray that God will help you to face the trial of having your car stolen.

But we also will say, now let's call the police and see if they can arrest this miscreant who picked up your car and bring him to justice because he's broken the law of God, the will of God.

Now, on one hand, he's established the will of God in stealing your car because that was God's purpose that you experienced having your car stolen, but he has violated the will of God in terms of God's precept.

God's precept says, thou shalt not steal. So, what Joseph is acknowledging is God's eternal decree is the deliverance of the people of God.

[13:42] And he's brought that about through the sinful actions of wicked men who are responsible for the choices that they've made. And God is not the author of evil.

God is sovereign over all things, even over the wicked acts of wicked men, so that his purposes are established in our lives and not the purposes of the wicked men are established.

It has to be that way. It's what the Bible teaches. And the alternative is unthinkable. And in fact, the scripture says in Acts 4, you might remember, indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel to conspire against your holy servant, Jesus, whom you anointed.

And they did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. In 1981, there was a Boston rabbi named Kushner.

Maybe you remember this book being published. There was a book entitled When Bad Things, Excuse Me, Happened to Good People. It was an instant bestseller. It went to the top of the New York Times bestseller list and stayed there for 52 weeks.

[14:57] The thesis of the book is that God is all-loving but not all-powerful. He's good, but he's not sovereign. And so when bad things happen to good people, Kushner's answer was it's because events have happened that are outside of God's control.

And what are we to do with that? Well, Kushner's answer is, he asked the question, are you capable of forgiving and loving God even when you found out that he's not perfect, even when he's let you down and disappointed you by permitting bad luck, sickness, and cruelty into his world and by permitting some of those things to happen to you?

Can you learn to love and forgive him despite his limitations, as Job does and as you once learned to love and forgive your parents even though they were not as wise, as strong, or as perfect as you needed them to be?

Kushner's God is not the God of the Bible. He's not the God of Joseph, the God who is in control of suffering and uses even suffering for our good and for his glory.

See, God uses suffering in Joseph's story to both chasten and refine Joseph and his brothers. And in this passage, Joseph identifies even several of the good things that God brought as a result of the evil that came to him.

[16:30] God prospered him and made him Lord over Egypt. God saved the lives of Joseph's family through Joseph's imprisonment and eventual rise to power. It was a way of getting the people of Israel to Egypt where they would go from being a clan and emerge from Egypt 400 years

later as a mighty nation.

And God saved many lives through Joseph. Think of the multitudes of people all around who came to Egypt, bought food during the famine, and whose lives were saved because Joseph was there. In fact, it was one of the first illustrations of the nations of the world being blessed through the seed of Abraham. So far from us forgiving God for his limitations, the absolute sovereignty of God enables us to forgive others.

And Joseph says to his brothers, don't be distressed, don't be angry with yourself for selling me here. God sent me here to save lives.

To see that God is at work in all things for our good and for his glory can help us find comfort even when those trials involve being sinned against.

[ 17 : 51 ] And it can enable us to pity and to forgive those who have been carried away by their passions and see how God is using even their sin for his glory to make us like Christ.

And if you think that way and pray that way, it begins to enable you to forgive people who have sinned against you. Now the story of Joseph is a story of interpersonal relationships.

But the principle of God's sovereignty applies in all circumstances, in all of our trials, not just relationship trials. Whether you face physical trials, wasting disease, financial reversals, you can be assured whatever comes to you comes from the sovereign hand of a God who is good.

Nothing comes apart from his will. And God uses trials for our good and for his glory. The second big principle that I want to mention is that our suffering is redemptive.

Because suffering makes archaeologists of us. We sift through the chards and fragments of our lives and try to make sense out of them. and we instinctively focus on particulars.

[ 19 : 10 ] Perhaps the child that has gone bad and we try to understand what is it that we did or failed to do in an effort to try to make sense of it. Or we try to understand the physical illness that has come to us.

We wonder, how can I do all the things that God has called me to do with this illness? And we focus on the disease and we research it and read about the course of it in the lives of fellow sufferers. Or we see the unfairness of persecution for our faith and we wonder what we could have done to have avoided it. Or we reflect on relationships in which we've been betrayed and we replay conversations and the hurtful actions of others toward us and we ponder how close we once were and we relive that sense of loss over and over again.

And we reinterpret the history of the relationship trying to find the moment where the relationship took its disastrous turn. And it certainly is appropriate for us to assess our trials and to try to learn the lessons that may be learned from them.

It's healthy and appropriate for us to do that. But those efforts don't satisfy and they don't provide perspective for our suffering. We need a way of understanding our suffering that enables us to make sense of it and even embrace it.

[ 20 : 40 ] And secular culture faces suffering with fear and with dread. Affliction is seen as something to avoid. And suffering is regarded as an interruption of life.

It's not seen as a meaningful part of life. But in a biblical vision, the things that we suffer are a meaningful part of life. They come from the hand of a God who is good, who is working good in all circumstances and in all the things he brings to us.

And our suffering may seem overwhelming. Our afflictions may seem to be unfair and are often unfair and adversity may seem random and meaningless.

But in reality, our suffering is meaningful because God has a purpose in it. And if we face our suffering rightly, it can deepen and strengthen our love for God.

And our afflictions can produce greater stability, spiritual stability within us. It can produce a deeper spiritual growth and deeper graces and deeper walk with God.

[ 21 : 46 ] So we want to establish this general principle that God is at work. He uses suffering. Suffering is redemptive. He uses suffering for our good. Let me just take you to three passages that show that principle to us.

The first is from Romans chapter 8. And this may be the most familiar passage that we often look at and think about when we think of suffering.

And it's the very familiar passage in verses 28 and 29. For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose.

For those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his son that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. It's a familiar passage to us.

God says that in all things, in every affliction, in every trial, in every broken relationship, in every financial loss, in every persecution, in every illness, in every wasting disease, in every case of chastening from the hand of God, every time the heavens seem to be brass in all circumstances.

[ 23 : 08 ] God is at work for our good and for his glory. And we don't have to figure out what the good is. So many times you've heard and I've heard people say, I know God's working out for good, but I have no idea what the good is.

He tells us in the passage what the good is. He tells us in verse 29. The good end is that God is conforming us to the image of his Son. We know what God is doing.

God is making us like Christ through our trials. James chapter 1, in a very similar vein, makes the same point.

in verses 1 and 2, consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know the testing of your faith develops perseverance, and perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

The message here is clear. James says, embrace trials with joy because God is working through your trials to test your faith, to develop in you a spirit of maturity, to bring you to, to help you to persevere, to bring you to a place of maturity.

[ 24 : 36 ] Now James is no, is in no ways minimizing the dislocation and pain and anguish that suffering brings us. But the point James is making is one that we often fail to see in the midst of our suffering, that God has an agenda, that God is doing something through this suffering that is greater and of more enduring value than the suffering that we are experiencing, that God is working through that trial something of more enduring value than the suffering that we experience.

And we can face all things with peace knowing that God has designed this trial to be the means of growth and spiritual maturity. Back to the book of Romans in Romans chapter 5, very similar words, and I'm multiplying passages here so the weight of these passages comes to us.

Beginning with the last half of verse 2, he says, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, perseverance character and character hope.

And hope does not disappoint us because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit whom he has given us. Here you see the same themes that we see in Romans 8 and in James 1.

Suffering is not crazy, it's not random. Suffering is in the context, it's the context in which we grow in grace because suffering produces perseverance. Perseverance produces character.

[ 26 : 21 ] Character produces hope. Hope confirms us in the love of God. And so God's purpose is that we become strong Christians whose character is refined and who are full of hope in all circumstances.

And that's what God is doing in the midst of our trials. So there's this broad, overarching truth. God brings suffering to us because it's the means by which we grow in grace.

Now, what are some of the specific, the particulars of that growth in grace? And I want to give you six of them. The first is that God is deepening our message of hope.

Remember the passage in 2 Corinthians 1. Paul talks about the sufferings he had in Asia. And he says, our suffering was beyond our capacity to bear.

In fact, we despaired of life. In our hearts, we felt the sentence of death. And in this extreme trial, God comforted them. And God showed them that they could not trust themselves, but they could trust God.

[ 27 : 26 ] He comforted them with himself. And the suffering is bearable for us when we know that in that suffering, God is with us in the suffering.

And that's what the Apostle Paul experienced. He said, the comforts of God overflowed into our lives through the suffering. And not only was the comfort of knowing God in the midst of the suffering a great value for Paul and for his companions, but it also deepened their message of hope in God.

And he says, because I've endured this trial, I have a message of hope. I've found God to be sufficient in my trial, and that gives me a message of hope for other sufferers.

God has delivered us, and he will deliver us. We have set our hope in God, and God put us through this trial so that we would have a message of hope for others who suffer.

It's one of the things God is doing in suffering. Often in our suffering, God is chastening us.

Remember those words in Hebrews chapter 12.

[ 28 : 38 ] The writer describes the chastening hand of God, beginning with verse 5. He says, have you forgotten the word of encouragement that addresses you as sons?

My son, don't despise the Lord's discipline or make light or lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? And if you are disciplined, and everyone undergoes discipline, then you are not, excuse me, if you're not disciplined, then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.

Moreover, we all had human fathers who disciplined us, and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the father of our spirits and live? Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best, but God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time but painful. Later on, however, it produces the harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

[ 29 : 48 ] Sometimes, not always, but sometimes the suffering we face is the chastening hand of God. God sends trials and difficulties into our lives to correct us, to correct wrong patterns in our lives.

Think of Jonah. Jonah was imperiled by the storm and eventually thrown into the raging sea. Or think of the prodigal who was brought to near poverty.

We read that story this morning and near starvation and he returned to the father's house. as the passage is reminding us in verse 11 that the suffering under the chastening hand of God is not pleasant but is painful.

It's hard to be the prodigal in the pig pen, to have been humiliated, abandoned by friends, to be lusting after the food thrown to pigs during a famine.

It's hard to be Jonah cast into the open sea during the raging storm, gasping for breath, swirling around in the waters, realizing he's been ingested by a great fish.

[ 30 : 55 ] But the passage reminds us that chastisement is God treating us like a father who loves his son. And it's introduced to us as a word of encouragement that addresses us as sons, as dear children.

It's proof of love and commitment. It's a demonstration that we are his because a father doesn't discipline children who belong to someone else. He disciplines his children. And God wants us to share in his holiness.

And one of the means is bringing suffering to us or discipline. The promise of the passage is that discipline will yield the fruit of peace and righteousness.

The third thing that God is doing in our trials is he uses trials to demonstrate our weakness so that we might experience his strength. Remember how Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians 12.

He speaks of this thorn of the flesh, a messenger from Satan. He said that it tormented him. He prayed three times that God would deliver him.

[ 32 : 02 ] And God's statement was that God would give him grace that he would know God in the midst of the trial. And so Paul, at the end of that section, he says, I will rejoice in hardships and insults and persecutions and difficulties.

You know, think, because it's in the midst of these things that I know the strength of God. So he says, I will rejoice in insults. I mean, think about times when people are making fun of your faith or your lifestyle or making your words look stupid or hardships, circumstances that force you against your will.

It could be any situation in which you feel trapped. You didn't plan it. You didn't think it was going to be this way, but this is where you are and it's hard. Or persecutions, wounds, abuses, painful circumstances, acts of prejudice and exploitation from people because of your faith and your moral commitments as a Christian.

You're not being treated fairly. Or difficulties. difficulties. The idea there is the pressure, crushing weight being brought down upon you and you can't overcome it.

And Paul repeatedly prayed to God to deliver him and God answered his prayer. But the answer was not, I will take it away.

[ 33 : 22 ] The answer was, my grace is sufficient for you. The answer that God gave Paul is, Paul, I have a purpose in this suffering that you will never experience without the suffering.

You're going to, you're going to experience me. You're going to experience all my power as you bear this suffering. See, weakness humbles us.

Weakness reminds us that we're not self-sufficient. Insults, persecutions, hardships, difficulties force us to determine what's really important, what really matters.

What do I want more than anything else? What must I have in order to be okay? God's answer for Paul's prayer to relief was, my power is not going to be found in deliverance.

My power is going to be found in your weakness. The way to ever deepening joy is suffering.

[ 34 : 26 ] There are joys unspeakable and glorious in knowing God. Do you want to experience the fullness of Christ? Do you want to be overwhelmed with a vision of this one who is the greatest of ten thousands?

Do you want to be emptied of yourself and swallowed up in God? Do you want to see his glory as the mediator between God and man?

Do you long for a sense of the wonderful, pure, sweet grace of his meek condescension and gentleness to people such as we?

Do you want to glory in his excellence so that the delights that you experience in God swallow up all other thought? Do you want to love him with a pure and holy love?

Do you want to trust in him and delight in him and serve him with joy and be lost in wonder in the fullness of Christ? See, Paul says in this passage, I want Christ and if suffering is what's going to bring it to me, if suffering is going to bring me this experience of God and all of his glory, then bring on the insults, bring on the hardship, bring on the persecution, bring on the difficulties.

[ 35 : 50 ] He's praying, I want to know Christ and so I will gladly embrace persecutions, insult, hardship, difficulties.

If what God is doing in this affliction is to make me experience Christ and to know Christ more deeply, then I want to know Christ. Let me embrace this so the power of Christ may rest upon me. So he says, I will rather glory in my weakness because it's in the midst of my weakness that I experience the fullness of Christ.

Suffering is a refiner's fire. We'll talk about this more in another message, but God's purpose is to bring us forth as gold. And 1 Peter 1 speaks of God refining us like gold.

And there's no cold refining process. Refining requires heat. The ore has to be refined. It's got to be melted. It's got to be boiled in order for the dross to be burned away.

[ 36 : 57 ] We'll talk about this more later, but I'm just surveying what is it that God is doing through our trials. One of the things he's doing is he's refining us through suffering, through the fires of suffering.

Affliction also demonstrates to us that God is enough, that God is all we need. Think about this in Psalm 62 during one trial that God brought Margie and I through.

This psalm was such a great comfort to us. But the psalmist begins, my soul finds rest in God alone. My salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation.

He is my fortress. I will never be shaken. How long will you assault a man? Would all of you throw him down this leaning wall, this tottering fence? They fully intend to topple him from his lofty place. They take delight in lies. With their mouths they blessed, but in their hearts they cursed. Find rest, O my soul, in God alone. My hope comes from him.

[ 38 : 02 ] You notice the subtle shift. In Psalm 1, he gives us, Margie drew this to my attention one day, he gives us his theology. my soul finds rest in God alone, my salvation comes from him.

That's a theological statement. It's an indicative statement. But in verse 5, he's exhorting his soul, find rest, O my soul, in God alone.

God is enough. The psalmist exhorts himself to find rest in God. He goes on in that psalm, he says, pour out your heart to him at all times, for God is our refuge.

God is enough. It's scary to rest in God and God alone in the midst of suffering. One of the purposes of God in our affliction is to tear away at all the things in which we trust so that we are left with God alone.

And we can't truly be at rest in God until we've come to know that he is really all we need. As long as our expectation of blessedness is from any other source, disappointment awaits us.

[ 39 : 27 ] And sometimes God strips us of all the other things in which we trust. Because the truth that God is all we need only becomes real to us when God is all we have.

Otherwise it's just theory. But when God is all we have, then the truth that God is all we need becomes real to us. And what God does in suffering is he strips away all the other things in which we trust.

And we're left in this situation of vulnerability where all we have is God. And that's the very best place for us to be. Because that's the place where we experience God and know the nearness of God.

That's where we experience what the psalmist talks about in Psalm 73 when he says, whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you I desire nothing on earth. My heart and my flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

And of course, affliction brings glory to God. I mean, think of what God is doing through suffering. Suffering and affliction are tools in the hand of God to loosen our grip on this world and to deepen our investment in what is truly glorious and enduring.

[ 40 : 44 ] Paul, Carl, was reminding us of God's glory this evening as he led the service. And what God does in suffering and in chastisement is to move us toward a greater fidelity in him and to refine us, to bring us forth his goal because God knows the hardness of our hearts.

God knows how easily we're distracted from finding him to be our all in all. And so he sends affliction to us to deepen our love for him. And God's purpose in affliction is to remind us that God is infinitely and supremely worthy of praise.

And bringing glory to God fits reality and fits us as creatures. And when we cry out like Job, even if he slay me, yet will I trust him, God is glorified.

When we can say with Asaph, the nearness of God is my comfort, my refuge, God is glorified.

When we can say with the apostle, I delight in weaknesses because when I am weak, then I am strong, God is glorified.

And God is glorified not only by us seeing his glory, but he's glorified when we rejoice in his glory. Glorifying God means that we're so overwhelmed with his glory, that we can embrace even our suffering because we're attracted to him, we delight in him.

[ 42 : 18 ] Whatever brings us closer to him, whatever turns our attention away from lesser things and turns our attention to him, is what we delight in and what we long for. And it's far different from just the stoicism saying, well, he's God, I guess I've got to accept whatever he brings, but it's seeing his beauty, it's seeing his infinite worthiness that enables us to embrace the trial and glorify God in it.

I mentioned last week a book that I read during the summer by Dave Furman, it's a title, Kiss the Wave, and Furman is a missionary church planter, contemporary in the Middle East, but he speaks of Charles Spurgeon in the book, and Charles Spurgeon faced such great suffering in his ministry, he faced public criticism that was beyond what you could imagine, his family in fact actually would hide the newspapers from him so he wouldn't read the paper to see what was being said about him in the London press, his wife was so sickly she could rarely attend his services in which he preached, he himself faced chronic gout and they didn't understand gout at the time and so he faced gout and not with not very much relief and chronic bouts of gout and he also struggled with lifelong times of depression, sometimes he would cry for hours and hours and not even be sure what he was crying about and he endured this suffering throughout his lifetime until the Lord took him home at age 57, but Spurgeon tells how he persevered in the face of trials and a statement is often attributed to him, he says,

I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the rock of ages. Let me repeat that, I've learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the rock of ages.

None of us likes adversity, we always want our suffering to end. And yet God's purpose is to use our suffering for our benefit.

And Spurgeon's advice in this little article is stop thrashing about in fear and embrace the God who has designed your circumstances in order to bring you near him.

[ 44 : 49 ] Kiss the wave that throws you against the rock of ages. Remember, God has his glory in your good in view. Obviously, hardship and suffering, persecution, the loss of family, the loss of friends, family trials, attacks by enemies, betrayal by friends, are not good things in themselves.

But God uses these afflictions for our good and for his glory. And afflictions awaken in us a consciousness of our need for God.

God's God's grace. We need him. And we need to draw near to him and near to his grace. Maybe some of us are facing trials right now.

Maybe you're depressed and you're in the midst of despair. You're lost in your despair. Or maybe you're disabled and permanently in pain and you don't know how you can endure it any longer. Or maybe you suffered physical or sexual abuse as a child and you can't shake the memories that haunt you and fill you with fear or anger. Or maybe you've had a miscarriage or lost a child who was too young or an older child maybe who was going bad and your sorrow and sense of loss is overwhelming.

[ 46 : 11 ] Or maybe you've lost a spouse or a family member that has died. You feel alone. You don't feel like you know how to go on. Or maybe you have a life that is organized around illness.

It strikes me so often that chronic illness, people organize their lives around dialysis or around chemotherapy or whatever is required to enable them to survive.

And they spend many days wishing that it was dead, that they were dead. Or maybe you hate your life and you just can't stand your job. You think you're married to the wrong person.

You don't even like your children. Whatever our circumstance, and those are just some generic ways to get us thinking about suffering, kiss the wave that throws you against the rock of ages. Stop trusting your ever-changing circumstances to bring you joy. Instead, rest in the one great permanent circumstance that is given to us in Christ in the gospel.

[ 47 : 16 ] Christ Jesus came into this world in flesh like ours. He lived the life that we should have lived. He died as a sacrifice for our sins on the cross. He took the ultimate wave of judgment and death so that we could be lifted to eternal life.

And the ways of our trials cannot drown us when we have a Savior who is there with us in the midst of our trials. Tim Keller in his book on suffering makes this statement.

He says, Jesus lost all glory so that we could be clothed in it. He was shut out so that we could get access. He was bound, nailed so that we could be free.

He was cast out so that we could approach. Jesus took away the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you, being cast away from God. And he took it so that in all the suffering that comes into your life will only make you great.

A lump of coal under pressure becomes a diamond. A suffering person in Christ only turns you into someone gorgeous.

[ 48 : 30 ] God's work through suffering is to refine us, to make us like Christ. Embrace the trials, embrace the suffering that God brings. His purpose is to bring you forth as gold.

Let's pray together. Let's pray together.