

Assurances in suffering

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Preacher: Tedd Tripp

[0 : 00] Let's pray again that God would be with us. Father, we have come to hear from you. We've come to learn of you. We've come to have our thinking reoriented around the grace and power of the gospel and around your eternal purposes for us.

We've come, Lord, to learn to interpret our lives according to what you have revealed about yourself from your word. And so we ask, Lord, that you would be with us.

We ask that you would give us illumination and understanding, that you would give us insight, that you would give us the ability to connect the great broad truths that we will be looking at tonight to the particular details of our own lives.

And we know that each of us come with different sets of trials and afflictions and struggles and temptations and disappointments and hurts.

And we pray that you would speak your word to us in the ways that we need to hear it in order to live in this world for your glory. So we ask this for Christ's sake, because we want to live for your glory.

[1 : 15] You've loved us with an everlasting love. We pray that you would do your work in sanctifying our hearts through your word tonight. We pray this for his sake. Amen. Well, we've been talking to you as I've had occasion to speak for the last few months about the topic of suffering.

And I want to continue with that tonight. But I want to ask you a couple of questions as we begin. And I want to ask you to think for a moment about who is the most influential person in your life. Who do you converse with the most? Who do you talk to? Who do you listen to?

I can tell you. It's you. You are the most influential person in your life. You're talking to yourself all the time. You're telling yourself what things mean.

You're telling yourself how you ought to respond, how you ought to think about things, how you ought to feel about things. There's no one who you talk to who is more influential than you.

[2 : 31] There's no one you listen to who is more influential than you. You see, because we don't just simply live out of the facts and circumstances of our existence.

We interpret everything that comes to us. And the way we interpret things tells us how to respond. And that was the point I made in my last time with you two weeks ago, that as we face suffering and affliction and trials and difficulties and pain and the whole range of things that the Scripture describes as sufferings to which human beings are heir to, as we face those things, none of us faces them in neutral ways.

There are no neutral sufferers. We bring perspective to our suffering. We bring a point of view to our suffering. We interpret all the things that happen to us.

And last time I talked to you about three of the traps of suffering, the trap of doubt, the trap of worry, the trap of envy. And tonight I want to give you three assurances in the midst of suffering, three assurances that can give you comfort in whatever suffering, whatever affliction you face.

Three assurances. The assurance that God is good. Secondly, that God is present in the midst of the suffering. And thirdly, that God is wise.

[3 : 55] And these are the three things I need to be telling me. You need to be telling you during times of suffering. These are the things I have to listen to during times of trial.

But beginning with the truth that God is good. Psalm 145, such a wonderful psalm, puts it this way in verse 7.

It says, They will celebrate your abundant goodness. They will joyfully sing of your righteousness. The Lord is good. He has compassion on all that he has made.

That is categorically true of God. God is good. Everything that he brings to our lives is good. We receive things from the hand of a God who is good.

And so I have an assurance in the midst of suffering that God is good. It might not feel like that to me. And I might endure painful suffering. But by faith, I have to believe and preach to myself that in this suffering, God is good.

[4 : 57] I'm receiving things that are good from the hand of God. Now, Nahum 1.7 says, The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble.

He cares for those who trust in him. So in the midst of suffering, I've got to remember and preach to myself this truth that God is good. It's not always easy to preach that to yourselves.

Margie and I have been married for 51 years. And, of course, in the course of 51 years, you experience all sorts of unexpected and disastrous and calamitous things that come upon you. Physical suffering, financial reversals, betrayal by friends, your own sin and wickedness and depravity, all the things that come to us.

Margie and I went through one particular season of great turmoil and difficulty in our family life. And we found ourselves tempted to question the goodness of God in the midst of those difficulties.

[6 : 04] How could this happen to us? Why would God be pleased to take us through this kind of turmoil? And I sought encouragement and comfort from wise and trusted brothers.

And they pointed me to God. And they pointed me to God's word. But ultimately, the consolation for our souls in those deep hours of trial that we could not see our way through and could not make any sense of was this truth that God is good.

What he's doing in this circumstance that we would not have chosen and would readily free ourselves from if we had the power, God is doing good for us.

He's at work in this circumstance for our good and for his glory. And he is doing good to us.

And we can trust him in it. We must trust him in it. And even when it doesn't make sense and it doesn't seem good to us, we hang on by faith to this truth from the word of God, this revealed truth, that God is good.

[7 : 19] That is categorically true of God. He is good. And all that he brings into our lives is good. Even this trial, his mercy is following us all the days of our lives.

He is with us. He is good. And we found ourselves exhorting one another and clinging to one another, both physically and spiritually in that whole period of trial.

And saying to one another, we can trust God in the dark. And that became our little mantra. We can trust God in the dark. And what we meant by that was just exactly what a child has to learn, that I can trust God, that even when it's dark and I can't see what's going on around me, and I fear the unseen and the unknown, and it seems like everything is closing in on me, I can trust God.

Because God is good. And even when I cannot see the good, and even when I can't understand how this could possibly be good, God is good.

What God brings to me is good, and I can entrust myself to him, even when I don't have answers to my questions. In 1 Chronicles 16, there's a very interesting passage. Verse 34 says, Give thanks to the Lord.

[8 : 41] You know the rest of this, don't you? Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. And I want to appeal to our hearts here that we are being called to trust God, to cling to the goodness of God in the midst of our times of greatest affliction and greatest trial and greatest difficulty.

Because if you allow your heart to trust, excuse me, to question whether or not God is good in this trial, you will sink under the weight of hopelessness and despair that the trial will bring upon you.

The only hope is to cling to God and cling to this truth that God is good. And it's interesting in this passage, Verse 34 says, Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

His love endures forever. Verse 35 says, Cry out, Save us, O God, our Savior. Gather us and deliver us. Do you see the connection between verse 34 and verse 35?

It's the assurance in verse 34 that God is good that enables the prayer of verse 35. Save us, O Lord. Be our salvation. Deliver us. Because if I question the goodness of God, I will never cry out to God for salvation in the midst of my suffering.

[10 : 09] Psalm 100, verse 5. The Lord is good. His love endures forever. What I'm experiencing in any trials, the steadfast, enduring goodness of God.

Psalm 119, 68. You are good. And what you do is good. Teach me your decrees. Obviously, I could multiply verses with you. If I were going to look at all the verses that speak to us of the fact that God is good, excuse me, that's all we would have time for tonight.

Because there are so many passages that remind us of this truth that God is good. Now, here's the problem we have.

It's one of the ways that we can become confused. Because much of the suffering that we experience is related to the problem of sin. And it is right to hate suffering because the suffering that sin brings and the effects of sin have brought upon the world.

Because it was not God's plan that suffering has come. It's not part of the created design of the universe. Suffering has come into the world as a result of the fall.

[11 : 24] And remember, we saw that theme in our first session together, the first message I preached. I started with Romans 8, verse 18.

That our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us.

Because the world has been subjected, as that passage reminds us, to frustration. We live in a creation that doesn't work the way it ought to work.

The creation is, in the words of Romans 8, it's in bondage to decay. Things wear out. They don't work well. The world is full of suffering and sickness and disease and decay.

Remember how Paul says in that passage, it's like the world, we suffer like a woman suffering in childbirth. There are times of extreme pain and suffering and loss.

And much of the suffering that we experience in this life can be traced back to the problem of sin. It can be traced back to the fall and the curse.

[12 : 28] And it's right for us to hate what sin has done to this world. It's right for us to hate what sin has done even within our own souls. Because our sins afflict us like madness and derangement.

You get defensive and angry with your spouse in the midst of a discussion. Or you might run and hide and just withdraw.

Or you might find yourself sometimes vegetating in front of the TV. Or we know that we're filled with motives and passions that are wrong and inappropriate. You can spend a fantasy world of romance or some carnal delight.

We grumble at the weather that we don't like. We obsess about our appearance or our performance before people who seem important to us. We worry. We nag.

We gossip. We gossip. And it's right for us to hate sin in ourselves and hate sin in the world around us. And you can hate sin and the suffering that sin brings in ways that are righteous and holy.

[13 : 35] And you can hate the ways that sin and suffering and brokenness dishonors God. You can hate the impact of sin on yourself and on others around you.

You can inwardly groan longing for redemption. You can long for the everlasting end of it all when one day we'll be confirmed in righteousness in the presence of God.

All of that kind of hatred of sin and the effects of sin in the world is holy and righteous hatred. But you know you can also just hate suffering because we're not getting what we selfishly want to get. And so that hatred is self-centered. That hatred moves us away from God. That hatred is a denial of the truth that God is good.

And if we embrace the truth that God is good, then we can move toward fully embracing all that he brings to us as being good. Because God's good purpose in all the suffering and affliction and difficulty and trial and tribulation and pain that you experience in your life, God's purpose in all of it is redemptive.

[14 : 52] Because in God's wisdom, he has chosen to leave us in this fallen world between the already of our salvation and the not yet of our ultimate glorification in the presence of God.

We're here in between the time when he saved us by his grace and when one day we'll be confirmed in righteousness. And his purpose in all that he brings in that period is redemptive. Everything God brings into our lives is redemptive. His purposes are redemptive. That's the testimony of Romans 8, 28, isn't it? God is at work in all things for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes.

And as I observed earlier, it's not some undefined good. I know there's good in this somewhere. I don't know what it is. He tells us what the good is. He tells us in verse 29, the good is to conform us to the image of Christ.

Christ. It's not some undefined, airy-fairy good that maybe I'll be able to figure out someday. He's told us what the good is. His purpose in all that he brings to us is to make us like Jesus.

[16 : 00] So the trials he brings to us, the suffering he brings to us, the awareness of our own sin and neediness, the sin and neediness of others, the way we both sin and are sinned against, all

these things that take place within our lives is from the hand of God with this redemptive purpose of making us like Jesus Christ.

And we have a God who is good. He's always at work for good. Not some narrow, time-bound good that we're so invested in, but the grand and glorious goodness of making us like Jesus.

It's like what 2 Corinthians 4 talks about when he says, These light and momentary troubles are achieving an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes down to what is seen, because what is seen is temporary.

But we fix our eyes on what is unseen, because what is unseen is eternal. And I think as God's people, we need to develop a theology of uncomfortable grace. Because there are things that God brings into our lives that make us uncomfortable, and they are the grace of God.

Painful trials are grace. Betrayal by friends is grace. Disappointed expectations is grace.

[17:22] Times of suffering and illness. It's grace. God is at work. Because he's reminding us in all of these things of that which is the most important.

He's reminding us that life is not found in having things go swimmingly in the ways that we would like. But life is found in knowing God. He's reminding us through these trials that we are receiving goodness from the hand of God.

He's making us grateful. He's getting our attention. He's bringing us to our knees. That's why Paul prays, as he does in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, I will glory all the more in my weaknesses.

I will glory in persecution and hardship. I will glory in these things that God brings to me, because in the midst of my weakness, his strength is seen. God is at work in the things that make us uncomfortable.

That's why James 1 says, count it pure joy when you fall into trials of every time. That's a theology of uncomfortable grace, and we need to develop that theology of uncomfortable grace, because God will put you through things that you would have never chosen for yourself in order to work within you things that would be accomplished through no other means.

[18:41] Can I say that again? God will put you through things you would have never chosen for yourself in order to work in you things that could never have been accomplished through any other means.

He's at work for our good, because God will use suffering to break down your selfishness. Because God is good, he will use affliction to humble your pride.

Because God is good, he will use trials to make you long for redemption and for the day of the Lord. Because God is good, he will use loss to remind you of the fact that life is not found in the abundance of possessions.

Because he's good, he will use the futility of worldly things to show you that it's only Christ who can satisfy our deepest longings.

And it may sound strange to us, but in suffering, God is being good to us. And one of the assurances the Christian has in all manner of suffering is that God is good.

[19:50] The second thing I want us to think about is the fact that God is present. He's with us in our suffering. God is present in our suffering. Isaiah 41 puts it like this in verse 10.

And so do not fear, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you.

I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. What is the assurance there? Don't be afraid, I'm with you. I'm here with you. Later in that same passage, in verse 13, he says, I am the Lord your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says, Do not fear.

I will help you. Remember the assurance of Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth give way. Though the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, the promise in that passage is that even when the earth under your feet gives way, God is there.

[20:59] When the ministry that you've labored over is destroyed by vicious and unfounded attacks on you, God is there.

God is your refuge. When your body fails you and you pass days in pain and discomfort and weakness, God is with you. When God takes a child and you must bury a child, who in the normal course of things you would have expected would be burying you, God is with you.

When you're overwhelmed with grief because of an unfaithful spouse, God is with you. When you've reached out to someone to be helped and they have rebuffed you and turned away and you felt alone, God is with you.

When you've lost your family and your home, God is with you. God is present. And Isaiah 43 says it so well, Fear not, for I have redeemed you.

I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. When you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned.

[22 : 12] The flames will not set you ablaze. It's that assurance, God is with me. I remember talking to Cheryl Hoppus about that passage as she was dying and wasting away with cancer.

And how that truth that in these deep waters, in the flames of the cancer that was eating her body, she was experiencing the presence of God.

God is with you. He's present with you. When I became an elder at Grace Fellowship Church in 1976, a lot of you don't remember 1976, I was 30 years old.

And the other elders were only months or a year or so older than me. We were a very, very young church. And most of the congregation was younger than we were.

And young people in their 20s and even some late teens. And for the first 20 years that I served as a pastor of this church, I never performed a funeral for anyone from the church because we're such a young congregation.

[23 : 30] No one died. And I remember the first funeral that I ever officiated over was a dear saint named Marie Gagnon.

Some of you will remember Marie. She lived down in St. Clair. She came up every Sunday with a sweet lady who had brought the gospel to her, Sophia Weishaupt. And Sophia and Marie would come up every Lord's Day and they would drive up 81, regardless nearly of the weather and everything else, and worship with us.

She was a single woman. She was from a Roman Catholic, staunchly Roman Catholic family. She had lost her family when she came to faith in Jesus Christ and she had been rejected by them.

And she was wasting away with cancer down in the hospital in Pottsville and she was just skin and bones and I would visit her. I remember coming into the room and seeing her lying there on this bed that was kind of cushioned with air flowing and so forth because the weight of her bones against her skin was so, she was so fragile.

And I remember thinking she looks like a skeleton with saran wrap wrapped around it. I mean, all the bones in her head and jaw protruded and she was just literally skin and bones.

[24 : 55] And the last time I visited her, she was too weak to even whisper. She couldn't force enough air from her lungs to make a sound. And she lay there glowing with a smile.

She looked like Moses must have looked when he came from the mountain. She was glowing, radiant, with a sense of God's presence with her. And I remember her mouthing the words.

I couldn't hear her sound, but I could see her lips. She said, praise Jesus. He is with me. I'm not alone. God is present in our trials.

I remember that day going to the car and sitting in the car and weeping and weeping and crying out to God that I would die with such a sense of his presence one day.

And with that serene joy that I saw in my sister. The Lord is with us. God is close to the brokenhearted. He saves those who are crushed in spirit.

[26 : 05] There's a nearness to God that is experienced in trials that is experienced in no other way. If we will cling to him, if we will go to him, if we will believe that he is good, if we will believe that he is present, if we will believe that he is wise, there is a nearness to God that we experience in trials.

That's what Psalm 34 is talking about when it says, God is near to the brokenhearted. He saves those who are crushed in spirit. And see, sometimes God strips us of all the things that we trust in and all the things we tend to hope in when things are going well.

And we have a certain amount of confidence about ourselves because of our jobs or our health or our friends or our cars or our homes or the accretions of life that we are able to enjoy.

And sometimes God will strip us of all the things we trust in because the truth that God is all that we need only becomes real to us when God is all that we have.

And being in a situation where God is all you have is not a bad place to be. That's a sanctifying place to be. And that's a place that God will bring us to because life is not found in all the things that we cling to.

[27 : 30] Life is not found in having a wonderful family as great as family is. Life isn't found in having a lovely home to live in as thankful as we are for the things that God entrusts to us.

Life is not found in ministry. It's not found in any success that God allows you to experience. Life is not found in a faithful husband or a faithful wife.

Life is not found in robust strength and health. Life is found in a person. And that person is Jesus Christ.

And the assurance of scripture is that God is with us in our deepest, most profound trials.

My brother Paul tells the story of a woman he counseled in the counseling center in Philadelphia. She lived an hour from the counseling center. The counseling session would be an hour. It would take her an hour each way to drive.

[28 : 31] So when she went to counseling, she would be gone for three hours. Her husband was not a kind man. She had a very broken marriage, and he refused to come for counseling and refused to receive any counsel from anyone.

One afternoon while she was in counseling with Paul, he came up to their house. They lived in a beautiful mansion on the main line in Philadelphia.

And he came up to the house with three 18-wheelers, and they, in the space of three hours, emptied that house of everything in it, leaving only one mattress behind for her to lie on.

And she came home from counseling and discovered the house was empty and her children were gone. And she called Paul.

She called Paul in a sense of shock and dismay and grief. And Paul prayed with her, and he said to her, you're not going to be able to make any sense of what I'm saying to you right now, but I want you to remember this.

[29 : 48] God is with you. God is with you right now. God is with you. God will be with you tonight when you sleep on your mattress in this house that has been emptied.

God will be with you in the days that come ahead. God will be with you. And he's going to enable you to stand. He prayed for her.

Paul said he remembered some days later he got a call on his phone in his office. He picked up the phone. She didn't even identify herself. She just said, I'm standing.

I'm standing. I'm standing. Praise God. I'm standing. And the assurance is that God will be with you. God is always present in your affliction.

He's an ever-present help in trouble. And see, the answer to our suffering is not circumstantial change. That's what we pray for. We pray for the circumstances to change.

[30 : 51] It's not circumstantial change. I think that's so profound in Psalm 27. All the difficulties that the psalmist is facing. Evil men advancing against him to devour his flesh. Enemies and foes attacking him.

Army besieging him. War breaking out against him. In the midst of that, he says, I have one request of God. And it's not for circumstantial change. It's, oh, that I might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord because in the day of trouble he will lift me up and he will set me on a rock.

That's the hope in the midst of trouble. God is with me. He will be with me. He will care for me. He's present. He's my portion.

I can take a hold of his hand. I remember one day I was flying an airplane with one of my granddaughters.

She was about maybe seven at the time. And we were taking off from the airport. And just as the plane rotated and started to leave the ground, I suddenly realized she had stabbed her hand out toward me and grabbed a hold of my right hand.

[32 : 02] She was just clinging to my hand. She was scared at that moment of leaving the ground. And she reached out to Grandpa. And that's what we have to do.

We've got to reach out to God. We've got to reach out and grab a hold of his hand. He's with us.

We've got to reach out to God's presence. In the midst of our trials. You see, if you leave, if you lose a sense of God's presence in the midst of your suffering, I want you to listen to me.

If you lose a sense of God's presence in the midst of your suffering because you allow yourself to think he's not there or that he's forgotten you, then you'll be lost in the suffering.

There's no hope then. The hope is that he is with us. And I've got to cling to that truth even though it may not feel like he's with me.

I have to cling to that truth. You know, there was one who suffered, who suffered the loss of God in the midst of his suffering. I think the greatest suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross was not, was not the circumstances around him.

[33 : 17] Was it just the betrayal by his friends who said they would stay with him? It wasn't just the rigged trial in the middle of the night. It wasn't the cruelty of the Roman cohort that mocked him and put a crown of thorns on his head.

It wasn't the derision of the spectators. You know, he saved others. He can't save himself. It wasn't. The greatest suffering of Christ on the cross was interpersonal.

The greatest suffering of Christ on the cross was emotional. The greatest suffering was that moment when he cried out, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And hear this, brothers and sisters. He willingly experienced being abandoned in his deepest hour of need so that God would always be present with you in your deepest hour of need.

And Christ is the assurance that we will know God in our deepest hour of need. He willingly suffered the loss of God so that we would never suffer the loss of God in our suffering.

[34 : 26] God will never turn his back on you. He'll never quit on you. He'll never abandon you. He'll never say, This is taking too long. I'm done.

I give up. I've had it. Put your worries to rest. If only I had, if only I had not, it doesn't matter.

God will take care of that. But what if this happens or that happens? It doesn't matter. God will take care of that. It doesn't matter. You can face your worst case scenario.

God will be with you through that too because you will be able to stand because God is with you. So we have the assurance God is good in our trials. God is present in our trials.

The third assurance I want us to think about is the fact that God is wise. The assurance of Scripture is that God is wise. Hear these words from Daniel chapter 2. Blessed be the name of God forever and ever to whom belong wisdom and might.

[35 : 27] He changes times and seasons. He removes kings and sets up kings. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. He reveals deep and hidden things.

He knows what's in the darkness and light dwells in him. Or Isaiah 55, 8 and 9. My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the Lord.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts are higher than your thoughts. Or Job chapter 12, verse 13.

To God belong wisdom and power, counsel and understanding are his. Isaiah 28, 29. All this comes from the Lord Almighty, wonderful in counsel, magnificent in wisdom.

Remember Colossians 2 says, in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Now what are we talking about when we say that God is wise? What we're talking about is that quality in God that enables God to devise perfect objectives and match those perfect objectives with the best possible means of accomplishing those objectives.

[36 : 44] So his wisdom is the power to know and the goodness to choose what is the best and highest goal for you and also understanding what is the best and surest means of accomplishing that.

God is wise. In all that he brings to us, God is wise. Now, man's wisdom, of course, can be frustrated by circumstances outside man's control, but God's wisdom is coupled with his power.

Job says it this way in Job chapter 9, verse 4, he says, his wisdom is profound and his power is vast. There's no circumstances outside his power or can thwart the wisdom of his purposes.

So God's wisdom is always active. It's always unailing. In all of God's works of creation and providence, he demonstrates his wisdom. And sometimes we have trouble understanding his wisdom because we don't understand what God is doing.

We don't understand why he is doing this. We don't understand why would this be the best way of doing it. And sometimes we read statements in the scripture like the fact that God is love and we think that that means that God is going to give us a carefree, trouble-free life.

[38 : 02] And something comes along like an injury or an accident or a loss of a job or the suffering of a loved one or the untimely death of someone dear to us and we conclude that God's wisdom or

his power is somehow broken down.

God's wisdom is not pledged to making us happy in a fallen world. It's not pledged to making us comfortable with our weakness and our petty idolatries. God is at work with exquisite wisdom to continue his work of grace in us by transforming us into people who look like Jesus Christ. and sometimes that glorious work will take us through times of suffering and affliction and trial. Because God is working unrelentingly like a gemologist who's chipping away at a diamond to make it more beautiful and more valuable.

And God is at work. He's delivering us from our sins. He's reshaping our appetites and desires to the praise of his glory. And think, I've been talking in Sunday school about the story of Joseph. It's such a wonderful illustration of the exquisite wisdom of God because we have this dysfunctional family, the poor job Joseph did in raising his children and the ways that the famine forced his brothers to return to Egypt again and again and the way that all that trial was used to soften their hearts, these hard-hearted, vicious, and cruel men.

[39 : 39] And in Genesis 44, Joseph is testing his brothers to demonstrate that they were different men than the men that had thrown Joseph into the pit and left him to die.

and Judah cares about his brother Benjamin, the son of Rachel's, of his father's union with Rachel. 20 years earlier, he had been willing to leave the other son of Rachel in the pit. Now he cares. In fact, he's willing to take Benjamin's place so that Benjamin could go back to his father so his father would not have sorrow brought upon sorrow.

And there's a scene where Joseph reveals himself to his brothers in such a dramatic scene. And there, it may be the most dramatic revealing of a person that ever took place in history.

You have these men who are trembling with fear, laden with guilt. They've been forced by near starvation to deal with this enigmatic leader who they don't yet know.

[40 : 51] And at this moment when Judah is laying his heart on the table and pleading with Joseph in behalf of his brother, half-brother Benjamin, let him go home to my father.

It'll kill my father if he doesn't go home. I will stay and I'll be your slave. Keep me. Let him go. At that moment, Joseph is weeping so loudly that the other Egyptians Egyptians in the house who have been put out of the room are wondering what on earth is going on in there.

And Joseph steps forward and he says, I am Joseph, your brother. The one you sold into Egypt. Like he had to be reminded, which Joseph? But God in rich mercy and profound wisdom had orchestrated circumstances that would humble, proud Joseph.

Joseph was thrown into the pit, sold into Potiphar's house, betrayed, imprisoned, even though he was innocent. Eventually, he interprets Pharaoh's dreams. He's brought into the echelons of power in Egypt.

And God is using the circumstances at the same time to soften the hard heart of these wicked brothers. and we could overlay over this entire story, Hebrews 12, 5.

[42 : 15] Have you forgotten the encouragement that addresses you as sons? My son, don't despise the Lord's discipline because the Lord disciplines those whom he loves just like a father disciplines a child he delights in.

God used 20 years of suffering and affliction to humble all the members of this family and to bring about unity, to bring about forgiveness, to bring about the preservation of the line of Christ even in the midst of the famine.

What an amazing wisdom of God. God brought this all about by his wisdom. I wonder how often we stagger about through trials without reminding ourselves that the trials of our lives are not random events.

It's not just that this is a crazy, out of control world. The things happen that we have to endure and make the most of them and, you know, it is what it is.

You can't change it. We should be seeing these things that are very hard and difficult and painful afflictions as things that have come from the hand of a God who is good, who is present with us, who is wise and who is working in all things.

[43 : 39] It's not a crazy world that's out of control. We have a wise God who by design brings things, hard lives, hard things, into the lives of his children in order to make them like Christ.

We need to develop a doctrine of uncomfortable grace. Don't question the wisdom of God in your trials. God in wisdom is bringing grace to you through those uncomfortable trials.

So we have these assurances in the midst of trials. God is good. It's categorically true of God. All that he does, he is good. All he brings is good. In suffering, I have the assurance that God is good. It might not feel good to me. I might endure pain, but by faith, I believe and preach to myself the truth that God is good. The second thing is that God is present.

There's a nearness of God that is experienced by the brokenhearted that never is experienced until everything has been stripped away from us. Sometimes God strips away the truth, or excuse me, the things we trust in because the truth that God is all we need only becomes real when God is all we have.

[44 : 50] And then God is wise. God's wisdom is not pledged to make us happy in a fallen world or to make us comfortable in our weakness and petty lusts and hard idolatries.

God is at work with exquisite wisdom in all things to transform us into people who will love him, who will honor him, who will praise him, who will pursue him, who will delight in him.

There's probably nothing that preaches the gospel to us as much as suffering because God uses suffering to remind us of where life is found. Life is not found in your career success. Life isn't found in having someone who will love you.

Life isn't found in a happy family. Life isn't found in a beautiful house. Life isn't found in physical health and strength. Life isn't found in living the dream and having a good career.

All these are good things. If you have them, you're blessed. But they're to remind us that the giver of every good and perfect gift is God. Life is found in Jesus Christ.

[45 : 53] And the reason for the loss of these things is so painful for us is we make the mistake of believing that they are giving us life.

An incredible mercy God keeps reminding us. As Psalm 73 says, Whom have I in heaven but you? And being with you, I desire nothing on earth. My heart, my flesh may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

You know, if we could see our lives from the big picture of things that are ultimate and glorious beyond our, the petty drivel of our moments, we would be able to see things as they truly are.

You know, there's this wonderful description of a worship service in heaven in Revelation chapter 19.

It says, Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude and the roar of rushing waters and loud peals of thunder shouting, Hallelujah!

[47 : 09] For the Lord, our God, Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad. Let us give him glory for the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen and bright and clean was given for her to wear. A voice came from the throne, Praise our God, you his servants, all who fear him, both small and great.

There's this wonderful, wonderful worship service and you get a picture of just incredible praise. It's like this sound of thunder and roaring of waters and rushing waves and peals of thunder and hallelujah is the Lamb and let's rejoice and be glad and give him glory.

Can you imagine being part of that worship service? There in the presence of God and all of this life and all of its trials and all of its suffering and everything we've experienced in this veil of tears is gone and there we are in the presence of God and hosts, heavenly hosts praising God and giving glory to God.

Can you imagine turning to the person beside you and saying, you should have seen the house I had in Pennsylvania and the car. I had this really neat car.

[48 : 25] I enjoyed that car so much and we took vacations every year. Every other year we went to Disneyland with the kids. Those are not the things that will fill our thoughts in that grand and glorious day.

All those things that we put such weight and importance on will be nothing and all we will see is God and His glory. And it's that perspective, that sense of the worthiness of God that enables us to face trials knowing that God is good.

He's present with me in the midst of the trial. He is wise. Everything He's brought He's brought from a hand of wisdom that knows how to conceive what is best and find the best means of achieving it. We can trust ourselves to Him. That eternal reality must shape the way we experience our trials and afflictions. Let's pray together. How grateful we are Father for Your Word which gives us such deep and satisfying truths.

We pray that these truths that we've reflected on tonight will fill our hearts with joy and our mouths with gratitude that we would rejoice in this great God and give Him praise and glory.

[49 : 50] We pray this for His sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.