

God's Agenda Through Suffering

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 May 2026

Preacher: Tedd Tripp

[0 : 0 0] And recently, as I've had occasion to speak to you, I've begun a series on suffering. The eighth chapter of Romans anticipates that suffering will be the universal experience! So Paul says in verse 18, I consider that the sufferings of this present age are not worth comparing with the glory that shall be revealed in us. Let's pray together and ask that God will give us biblical perspective on the sufferings that we all experience. Let's pray. Father, we come to you asking that you would cleanse our hearts and minds of all the false hopes in which we cling, all the misunderstandings that we have and misinterpretations that we bring to our times of suffering, the compulsive self-love, the self-pity, those things that we so easily fall into.

And we pray that we would have the grace to understand that everything that comes to us comes to us from the hand of a heavenly Father who loves us and who is good and who designs good through even our suffering so that we might be conformed to Christ. And so we pray that you would refresh our perspective and enable us to face all that we face in this life, understanding the goodness of God and the glories that are to come. We pray this for his sake. Amen.

In my first message on this topic, I listed from the scriptures, and I won't mention all the passages this morning, but the examples of the kind of suffering that we see on the pages of the Word of God. Unexpected loss. Think of Job, who in a moment lost an entire fortune and became a pauper overnight, or wasting illness, a crippling disease that can capture us in a moment, or the powerful arm of the state that can imprison and torture God's people, or just the general persecution that Christians are often subjected to. Think of in 2026, 388 million Christian people are subjected to regular persecution.

We're slandered by our enemies. We're slandered by our enemies. Our words are misunderstood and twisted. Even friends with whom we've shared secrets betray us. Families can become a context of extreme suffering, abuse, anger, bitter words, unfaithfulness, anguish of spirit can destroy family relationships. We suffer the loss of those whom we love, who are close to us, and all the attendant grief that comes with that. Sometimes, like the psalmist, we're in the pit with the waves crashing over us, and terror and despair overwhelms our souls. Remember, in 88, the psalmist says, the darkness is our dearest friend. Or physical suffering beyond our ability to bear can invade our lives. Sometimes, like Jonah, we face chastisement from the hand of God.

[3 : 1 2] And there's a whole range of suffering that the scripture describes that are the experience of Christian people. I want to give us two perspectives on suffering this morning. So I have two things for you that are very easy for us, I trust, to carry away. One is the sovereignty of God. God is sovereign over even the suffering that comes into our life. And the second is that all of our suffering is redemptive. It's for our good. And God is working good things through it. But first, looking at the sovereignty of God. The suffering that comes to us is not random. It's not happenstance. It's not haphazard. It's not undirected. Sometimes we can see suffering that way. We see it as blind chance, just dumb luck. Or we see it as what others are doing to us. But God makes it clear to us that all suffering is to fulfill God's purposes in our lives. That God's at work, even when we cannot see him at work. I think of passages like Isaiah chapter 43. Now, thus saith the Lord, he who created you,

O Jacob, who formed you, O Israel, fear not, for I have redeemed you. I've called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. Through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. God begins here with the reminder that he's our creator. We are his. We're creatures. We belong to him. We are his Israel. He formed us.

He redeemed us. But does that mean we'll never face suffering? Will we not ever be perplexed by afflictions that come to us, by sorrow that's brought into our lives, struggles that are thrust upon us? But the assurance of this passage is not that we will never suffer. The assurance of the passage is that God is with us in the midst of the suffering, because he's sovereign even over those difficulties that come. And though our troubles might be like the deep waters that Israel went through, or like the raging fire that this passage describes, the assurance is that God is with us in those deep waters. He's with us in those raging fires, and they will not overwhelm us.

[5 : 40] You might remember the story of Joseph. Remember Joseph, he was betrayed by his brothers. They sold him into slavery. And even though he conducted himself honorably in Potiphar's house, he was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, and he was wrongfully imprisoned. He suffered on many levels. But God was sovereignly watching over Joseph through those sufferings. In fact, he had brought those sufferings to Joseph, even the 20 years of multiple trials that Joseph went through. And you might remember that he rose to the second most powerful place in all of Egypt. He had authority. His brothers were forced by the famine to come to Egypt looking for food, and they had to confront Joseph. And they didn't know who they were dealing with. They didn't know it was their brother until he finally revealed himself to them. And when he revealed himself to them, they were bowed to the ground. They were trembling. And his statements about the suffering that came to him are remarkable statements. Because he says, I'm quoting from Genesis 45, 5 and following,

And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.

For two years now, there's been famine in the land, and for the next five years, there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on the earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then it was not you who sent me here, but God. Isn't that a remarkable statement? Who sold him into slavery in Egypt? His brothers, these wicked, heartless, cruel men, motivated by motivated by jealousy and anger, sold him into slavery. They did it. But Joseph says, It was God's work. God was the one who sent me ahead of you in order to save your lives.

Jacob's, or Joseph's statements to his brothers are not meant to excuse them for their sin. What they did was wrong. They were wicked, cruel men. But what Joseph is reminding them, and what we're reminded of in reading this passage, is that God was sovereign even over this suffering that Joseph experienced.

[8 : 25] And Joseph's God-centered insight is a profound insight, because Joseph experienced real evil at the hand of men who did wicked things. His brothers hated him. They were treacherous men.

They enslaved him. Potiphar's wife falsely accused him. He was wrongfully imprisoned. But he understood that underneath it was the hand of God.

That even in the most wicked acts of wicked men against him, God was sovereign, orchestrating all things for his good. We have a hard time understanding this.

We have a hard time embracing this truth. Because we think, aren't they responsible for their choices? Were Joseph's brothers and Potiphar's wives mere puppets?

Weren't they choosing people? How can God be sovereign over all things, even over the evil acts of evil men? Well, we need to do some theology here and think about this.

[9 : 31] Because to make sense of the Bible, you have to understand there are two wills of God revealed to us in the scriptures. There's God's precept, his preceptive will, and God's decree.

The precept of God is what God has revealed as his commandments. This is the will of God. The Ten Commandments, for example, we may say are the will of God. This is what we ought to do. It's God's precept. These are the things we should do both for our good and for God's glory. The decrees of God are what God has determined before all time should come to pass.

We can also say that's the will of God. And Ephesians 1 embraces this truth for us. It says, God works all things according to the counsel of his will.

Our confession of faith has this statement. God has decreed in himself from all eternity by the most wise and holy counsel of his will, freely and unchangeably, all things that come to pass.

[10 : 40] Yet God is neither the author of sin nor has fellowship with any sin, nor is violence offered to the will of mankind, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away but rather established.

It's Old English. Let me summarize it for us. God has decreed all things. Whatever comes to pass is from the hand of God. God is sovereign over all things.

But in his sovereignty, he is never the doer or actor of sin. And human beings are never puppets dangled on a string. We are always choosing responsible actors.

We're doing what we think we want to do, and we're fulfilling our own desires. So people still make real and valid choices. And here's where it gets tricky.

Sometimes God's decree, what God ordains will happen, violates his precept, what ought to happen. That's where we get stuck sometimes in this truth.

[11 : 50] Illustration. For example, if you go out after the service today, you go out to the parking lot to get in your car, you discover it's been stolen. And you come in, you say, somebody stole my car during the service.

We will comfort you with the decree of God. You can trust God with this. God brought this stolen car into your life for your good, for his glory.

He's going to be with you through this trial of recovering a car, getting a new car, whatever you have to do, God will be with you through it. God is in charge of all of this. So we will comfort you with the decrees of God.

We will also embrace the precepts of God, say, let's call the police so we can have this miscreant arrested because what he did was wrong. He should not have stolen your car. You see, both sides of it are true.

And we have to be able to embrace both things. And what Joseph is acknowledging is God's eternal decree. God's will is the deliverance of his people.

[12 : 51] He's brought that about through the sinful acts of sinful men who sold Joseph into slavery. But they are their actions.

God is never the doer or actor of evil. He's never the author of evil. But he's sovereign even over the wicked acts of wicked men. His purposes are established, not their purposes through their actions.

It has to be that. It's what God's word teaches. The alternative is unthinkable because the alternative is that God has no control over what happens on the earth.

Remember the words of Peter at Pentecost in that great sermon. He said, Indeed, Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Herod and Pilate violated the precept of God by putting our sinless Savior to death.

[14 : 06] And in doing so, they fulfilled the decree of God that Jesus should die as our Savior. You see, God uses suffering in our lives.

And all of us face sufferings of various kinds. And I read that catalog of suffering at the beginning of this sermon to help us to think broadly about this topic because there's a whole range of suffering. The illustration of Joseph is interpersonal kind of suffering, but there's a whole range of suffering that all of us are subject to and experience. And God used suffering to refine Joseph and his brothers and to chasten them.

And in this passage, Joseph identifies some of the blessings that came out of that suffering. God prospered him and made him the Lord of all of Egypt. God saved lives through Joseph's family and through Joseph's imprisonment and eventual rise to power.

In fact, it was the way of getting God's people to Egypt to become a mighty nation. So this family became a mighty nation and emerged after their captivity as a mighty nation.

[15 : 13] God formed them as this mighty, cohesive nation during that time of suffering in Egypt. Multitudes were saved from starvation because of Joseph being in Egypt.

In fact, it was one of the first instances of God blessing all the nations of the world through his promised people. And the absolute sovereignty of God, even over the evil of other people, it really is what enables us to forgive them.

Because Joseph, you see that in Joseph. He says, don't be distressed with yourself. Don't be angry with yourselves for selling me here. God sent me here to save lives. To see that God is at work for our good and for his glory in all circumstances, even in those circumstances in which people do wicked things toward us, enables us to forgive.

We can have pity on them in the ways they've been carried away by their passions. And we can see how God is using even their sin for good to make us like Christ.

And if you think that way and pray that way, you'll find that it'll be easier to forgive those people who sin against you. Now, Joseph's story is a story of interpersonal relationships.

[16:30] But the principle of God's sovereignty applies to all of our trials. You may face physical trials. You may face disease. You may face financial reversals.

But you may be assured whatever trial you face or whatever trial you may be experiencing today has come to you from the hand of God and nothing comes apart from his will.

And he is in it for your good. So that's my first point. All suffering, God is sovereign over the suffering that comes to us.

Secondly, is that our suffering is redemptive. And, you know, suffering has a way of making archaeologists out of us. We sift through the broken fragments and pieces of our trials and we try to make sense of them and try to put things together.

And we instinctively focus on the various particulars. Perhaps we think about the child that has gone bad and we wonder about what we did or what we could have done or how we could have made sense of it or how we could have helped.

[17:38] Or we try to understand physical illnesses come to us. Or we might wonder, why has God called me to endure this trial, this disease? And we focus on the disease. We read about the disease on the internet and we try to research it and its course 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 avoid it. Or we reflect on relationships where people betrayed us and we replay conversations and we rehearse the things that happened and we try to identify what was the point at which things went bad.

and we relive that sense of loss again and again. And it certainly is healthy and appropriate for us to try to learn the lessons that we might learn from the things that we suffer.

But those efforts don't ultimately satisfy and they don't really provide perspective on suffering. We need a way of understanding our suffering that enables us to embrace it, not just endure it, but to embrace it.

And of course, the culture around us looks at suffering with dread. We see it as something that needs to be avoided, afflictions to be avoided. Suffering is regarded as an interruption to life.

[18:56] It's not seen as something meaningful or part of life. But in a biblical vision, we have to see that the suffering comes from the hand of God and God's purpose in suffering is our good.

God is doing good things for us even in the most difficult trials that we endure because His purpose for us is always good. And our suffering may seem overwhelming to us.

The affliction might seem so unfair. We might see the adversity as random or meaningless. But in reality, our suffering is meaningful.

God has a purpose. His purpose is to make us like Christ. I want for us to see that and look at some general principles of how God uses suffering for our good. And of course, the best known passage perhaps on this topic is Romans 8, 28, and 29.

Paul writes there, and we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good. For those who are called according to His purpose, for those He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son so that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

[20:05] This is perhaps the most familiar passage talking about suffering being for our good. All things, Paul says, every affliction, every disease, every trial, every broken relationship, every financial loss, every persecution, every illness, every wasting disease, every case of chastening at the hand of God, everything is for good, for our good.

Even those times when the heavens seem like brass and we can't figure out what God is doing. But we don't have to really search for it because Scripture gives us the answer.

We don't have to sift through the trial and say, I know there's good in here somewhere, I just can't imagine what it is. He tells us. Because He says, God is conforming you to the image of His Son.

The good purpose that God is working out in all trials is to make us like Christ. James 1 is another well-known passage on suffering. Count it all joy, my brothers, James 1 verse 2, when you meet various trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

Let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. The message here is clear, isn't it? Embrace the trials.

[21 : 26] Embrace it with joy. God is working through this trial to test your faith. He's developing in you a spirit of perseverance. God is bringing you to maturity.

And maturity comes through the trials. God's agenda in our suffering is to grow us. That's what God is doing through the trials is of greater and more enduring value than even the suffering we experience.

And we can face things with joy because we know God has called us to this for our good and for his glory. So God, these passages establish this overarching truth.

God brings suffering to us as a means of our growth in grace. It's redemptive. Let's look at some particulars. What are some specific things that God does through suffering?

One of those things is God deepens our message of hope. Do you remember in 2 Corinthians chapter 1, the apostle Paul describes suffering that he experienced in Asia.

[22 : 35] And he says the suffering was so great it was life-threatening. We actually felt in ourselves the sentence of death. We thought we were going to die. We despaired of life. And in this extreme trial, God comforted them.

He showed them that they could not trust in themselves but they could trust in God. God comforted them with himself. And that's what enabled them to endure the trial.

Suffering is more bearable when you remember God is with me in the suffering. I'm not in it alone. It's not just happenstance. God has brought this to me for my good.

And he's with it. And it's that comfort of knowing God is in the midst of the trial that saved Paul and his companions. and Paul says it gave us a message of hope for others who suffer.

And that's one of the things God is doing through your suffering. As you find God in that suffering, he's giving you words of comfort and hope that you can give to other Christians who suffer.

[23 : 38] And you can remind them to fix your eyes on Christ. That that's where their hope will be found. In some cases, God is chasing us. The passage was read for us this morning by Eric from Hebrews chapter 5.

And we're told that when God is chastising us, he's treating us as sons. God sends trials and difficulties to correct our things that are wrong in our lives.

Remember Jonah, who was in peril because of the storm. He eventually was thrown into the raging water. or think of the prodigal son who was brought to near starvation and was off in the far country and God chastened him.

In fact, I'm always struck by that passage. He was jealous of the food that the pigs were eating during famine. Now, you know, during a famine, whatever is given to the pigs is not very appetizing, but he was longing for the food that the pigs were eating in the midst of the famine.

And this passage reminds us that suffering under the chastening hand of God is not pleasant, but painful. It's hard to be the prodigal in the pig pen.

[24 : 55] It's humiliating to be abandoned by your friends and to be lusting for the food that's cast to pigs during a famine. It's hard to be Jonah cast into the open sea and finding yourself with the waves crashing around you and feeling yourself swirling around the water and then being ingested by a great fish.

The passage also reminds us that in chastisement, God is treating us as a father because this topic is introduced as an encouragement that addresses us as sons and God's children.

It's proof of God's love and commitment. It's a demonstration of his commitment that we are his. As a father doesn't discipline the neighbor's children, he disciplines his children and he disciplines them because they're his sons.

God wants us to share in his holiness and one of the means of bringing us to that is the hand of sometimes painful discipline because that's what produces a harvest of peace and righteousness. Now, I'm not suggesting that every trial is chastening from the hand of God because often trials come to us that are not necessarily God chastening us because of our sin.

[26 : 13] But in all trials, God demonstrates our weakness so that we might experience his strength. Remember, Paul talks about that in 2 Corinthians 12. He talks about this thorn in the flesh and three times I sought the Lord to deliver me from it and he kept reminding me his grace is made sufficient in my weakness.

So, Paul gives four specific examples of ways that he suffered weakness. He says, we rejoice in insults when people have clever ways of mocking your faith and your lifestyle and making your words and choices look stupid or hardships, circumstances that are forced upon you against your

will.

It could be any situation in which you feel trapped. You didn't plan it. It wasn't supposed to turn out this way. Or persecution, wounds, painful abuse, painful circumstances, acts of exploitation or prejudice against you because of your faith and moral commitments, times when you're not treated fairly, or difficulties.

The idea of being, the word here means to be crushed or pressed, weighed down by circumstances that overcome you with stress and tension. and Paul repeatedly pled with God to deliver him from these trials and God answered his prayer.

But the answer wasn't the answer he sought. The answer was, my grace is sufficient for you. The answer was, I have a purpose for you in this trial and my grace is sufficient.

[27 : 52] If you're going to experience my power, you'll have to bear suffering. You see, weakness humbles us. Weakness shows us that we're not self-sufficient. Insults, hardships, persecutions, difficulties force us to determine what's really important and what really matters.

What must I really have more than anything else? And Paul's answer, God's answer to Paul's plea for help was, my power is made perfect in weakness.

It was not deliverance. It was to find the power of God. We don't like to hear this, but the path to ever-deepening joy in God is through suffering.

There are joys unspeakable and glorious that are found 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's greater than tens of thousands?

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

[29 : 15] Do you long to have a sense of his wonderful, pure, sweet grace? a sense of his meek, deep condescension toward fallen, needy people?

Do you want to glory in his excellence so that everything else seems swallowed up and insignificant by comparison? Do you want to delight in him and his fullness above all things?

Paul says, that's what I want. In fact, at the end of this passage, he says, if suffering and weakness is a means of bringing me to experience God in all of his glory, then I will rejoice in suffering.

I will embrace the suffering so that God's power might rest on me. I will glory and weakness to bring the fullness of Christ to me. Of course, suffering we know is God's refining fire.

First Peter talks about that, that we're refined through our suffering because God's purpose to bring us forth is pure gold and pure gold is made pure as it's boiled.

[30 : 27] You boil the gold and skim off the dross in order to purify it. There's no cold refining process. Refining requires heat and the gold that is refined can be purified as the dross is burned away.

And of course, affliction demonstrates that God is enough, that God is all we need. In Psalm 62, the psalmist, David, faces trials, being under assault from others.

He says, they take delight in lies, they bless me with their mouth, but in their hearts they curse me. And the psalmist exhorts himself in that psalm.

In verse 5, he exhorts himself, find rest, O my soul, in God alone. God is his rock. God is his fortress. God is his salvation. God is the one that can be trusted.

And it's to God, David says, that we can pour on our hearts at all times for God is our refuge. And one of the purposes of God in suffering is to tear away, tear us away from all the things that are distractions and focus our attention on the one who is worthy of our attention and our worship and adoration.

[31 : 43] And as long as we're expecting blessedness to come to us from some other source, we won't be clinging to God alone. And sometimes God strips us of all the things that we trust in because the truth that God is all we need only becomes real when God is all we have.

Can I repeat that? The truth that God is all that we need only becomes real to us when God is all we have. And of course, all of our affliction brings glory to God.

Think of what God is doing through suffering. Suffering and affliction are tools in the hands of God to loosen our grip on this world, to deepen our investment to what is glorious and enduring.

God uses our suffering for all these purposes we've looked at to deepen our message of hope, to chastise us, to call us to greater fidelity to him, to show us our weakness that we may experience more of his strength, to refine us, to bring us forth as gold, to help us to see that God is enough.

You see, God knows the hardness of your heart and the hardness of my heart. And he knows how easily we're distracted from finding him and having him be our all in all.

[33 : 09] And so God brings suffering into our lives to focus us on him, to draw us to him. And if that is what God is doing through affliction and through suffering, then we may say, then Lord, bring it on.

if you will draw me closer to you through suffering, then I want to love you with love that is pure and undefiled.

And through whatever means, Lord, bring me to that. God's purpose is to remind us in affliction that God is infinitely and supremely worthy of praise.

And bringing glory to God fits reality and it fits us as creatures. And when we cry out like God, even though you slay me, yet I will trust in you.

Or when we're like Asaph, the passage is on the bulletin today, whom have I in heaven but you and being with you I desire nothing on earth. The Lord is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

[34 : 09] When we cry out again in Psalm 73 like Asaph, God, the nearness of God is my refuge. When that's our heart, God is glorified through that.

When we can say, I delight in my weakness because when I'm weak then I'm strong. God is glorified. And he's glorified when we are overwhelmed with his glory and we can embrace the suffering that he brings to us.

I read a book a little while back by a man named Dave Furman. He's a missionary in the Middle East called Kiss the Wave. And Furman speaks of Charles Haddon Spurgeon.

Spurgeon was that famous preacher in London in the 19th century who endured such suffering during his ministry. He faced incredible persecution.

The press in London hated Spurgeon and sometimes his family would hide the newspapers from him so he wouldn't see the things that were written about him in the paper. And his wife was sickly.

[35 : 14] She could rarely even attend his services where he preached. He himself faced problems with gout and pain of gout all of his life and lifelong struggles with depression.

And sometimes he would cry for hours and hours not even sure what he was crying about. And at age 57 God took him home. And Spurgeon tells us how he persevered in the face of trials in a statement that is often attributed to him.

He says, I've learned to kiss the wave that casts me on the rock of ages. None of us desires adversity. We want our sufferings to end and yet God's purpose is to use suffering for our good, for our benefit, for his glory.

Obviously hardship, persecution, suffering, the loss of family, fortune, attacks by friends and enemies and the struggles of our family and those we love and ways that their lives get upended. All these afflictions are for our good and God uses them for his glory because they throw us on him. So Spurgeon says, I've learned to kiss the wave, that wave of adversity that cast me up on the rock of ages.

[36 : 36] stop trusting in changing circumstances to make your life good. As we prepare to receive the Lord's table in just a moment, it's a time for us to rest in the one great permanent circumstance that can bring us joy.

Jesus Christ came into the world in flesh like ours and he lived a life without sin so that we might have holiness and he died as a sacrifice for our sins so that the penalty of our sins might be born and we might have eternal life.

And the waves of our trials cannot draw us down when we have a Savior who has endured the greatest trial on our behalf. I want to quote to you in closing from Tim Keller, his book on suffering.

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

He was cast out so that we could approach. Jesus took the only kind of suffering that can really destroy you, that is being cast away from the presence of God.

[38 : 02] He took it all so that now 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.

embrace the trials and sufferings that God brings. He is in it. They come from his sovereign hand. His purpose is to bring you forth as gold.

Let's pray together. Father, how we thank you for your word, which is enduring and true, and gives us perspectives by which we can face those things that come to us. we pray that you would lift our vision to see Christ and to know Christ in the midst of our suffering. That we would not try to assuage it in other ways, but we would embrace it and come to pure joy, as James says.

[39 : 07] We ask this for his glory. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.