

"Surprised By Suffering"

Christian Liberty

Don Maurer

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Don: The Lord be with you.

Men: And also with you.

Don: Am I allowed to say that as a Presbyterian?

Men: Yes.

Don: All right, good. All right.

Participant: A Reformed Presbyterian.

Don: Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do come before You this day with praise and thanksgiving. Father, as we approach this very massive subject of suffering, we know Your word has a great deal to say about it. Father, I pray that the words that I would speak would be Your words, and anything that is not, Lord, that You would nullify it and only Your truth would shine forth. And as Bruce has said so many times, Lord, we pray that You would open our eyes, that we would see You more clearly for Christ's sake. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Don: Okay. Well, my topic is suffering. I was talking to a brother a few days ago, and he said that there are three kinds of rings in a marriage. There's the engagement ring, the wedding ring, and suffer-ring. *(Laughter.)* Not being married, I have no further comment on that. *(Laughter.)*

I feel very inadequate and disqualified being up here talking about this subject, because I have had relatively very, very few incidents of suffering in my life. I taught it last week at my church in Sunday school and people were encouraged. So let's begin.

A lot of what I have to say comes from R. C. Sproul in his book *Now That's a Good Question*. And so there are six questions on your handout. And so let's dig in.

Suffering has been defined as having what you don't want, or wanting what you don't have. I mean, it's a simplistic definition, but nevertheless it really summarizes a lot of things, doesn't it? It's having what you don't want, or wanting what you don't have.

Now the first question here on your handout is this. *If God is all powerful, why would He allow suffering?* And related to this, *why would a holy and loving God allow a child, or anyone, for that matter, to suffer through a serious illness such as cancer?*

Now there was a book that was written about thirty-five years ago. I read it. It was a best seller. It's called *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. It was written by a Jewish rabbi named Harold Kushner. And the premise of that book was that God would like to stop all the suffering in the world, but He just doesn't have the power to do it.

Now these questions really aren't questions so much as thinly veiled accusations, right? They come particularly from skeptics or atheists who would say this. God is either impotent or wicked. Forgive the blasphemy there, but that's what they would say. He either wants to stop suffering but can't, or He can stop suffering but He doesn't, which, of course, they would say, is the majority experience of mankind.

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Now maybe some of you have gotten into discussions with people about that subject when they've raised it. How would you respond to a question like that? I know I'm putting you on the spot. Any ideas? *(Long pause.)*

Okay. Well, it's a tough question. Well, what's the Biblical response? The Biblical answer is in Genesis 3, verses 1-6. And let's see. Doug Mangus, would you read that for us, please, on the handout?

Doug: I don't have a handout.

Participant: He has one now.

Doug: *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'*

"And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden. But God said, 'You shall not eat the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'

"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. And she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate."

Don: Okay. That's what the Bible says. We believe it because it's God's word. This is how suffering entered the world.

Now on November 28, 2014, when I taught on a subject related to this, I quoted this extensive quote from John MacArthur. Most of you were not here for that, and those of you who were, please bear with me, because I'm going to quote it again. I think it says it all. Here we go.

"Now this" (referring to the sin of Adam and Eve) "is by far the saddest event in history, obviously. All problems personal and environmental, all that is wrong, evil, immoral, incomplete, all that is decaying, all that is inferior, all failure, all disappointment, all weaknesses, all sadness, all sorrow, all pain, all disillusionment, all trouble, all discomfort, all remorse, all regret, all conflict, all hate, all jealousy, all envy, all bitterness, all vengeance, all fear, all crime, all selfishness, all confusion, all lies, all deception, all error, all intimidation, all manipulation, all deviation, all distortion, everything that fails to be as perfect as God is came from this one event.

"This then is a monumental event. It truly defines life in our universe. It is the reason for all imperfection and death. The Fall and the impact of that fall have touched every part of the universe. It is accurate to say that absolutely everything wrong in our world is because of sin. If there were no sin, there would be nothing wrong. If there were no sin, everything would be very good, as it was on day six. But because of sin, everything is very bad—from world wars, terrorism, murders, serial killings, plane crashes, auto accidents, fires, crippling and maiming of people through accidents, nuclear reactor disasters like Chernobyl" (in the Soviet Union), "radiation, poisoning, pollution, cancer, heart diseases, all illnesses—to all broken relationships, all divorces, all orphaned children, all drugs, all crime, dereliction in all forms, all confusion, all conflict, all

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struggle, all disappointment, all anxiety, all fear, all depression, all sorrow, all failure, all remorse, as well as all lust and selfishness and lies and hatred and covetousness and rebellion and murder and stealing, and sexual acts outside of marriage, and irresponsibility, and disobedience to parents—in summary, all evil, all sadness, all failure, all death, is because of sin."

Now that says it all, doesn't it? That is a comprehensive statement. And see, the thing that R. C. Sproul says that I think is very accurate is this: that if we have the belief that why would God allow suffering, and why would an all powerful God allow that, what we're saying in effect is that criminals should go unpunished. And that is who we are in God's sight apart from being in Christ.

Participant: Amen.

Don: We're criminals. We have all sinned and come short of the glory of God. And so its very, very important that we realize that.

And, you know, there is no better answer. There is no other answer that exists. The burden of proof is on the skeptic to give a better answer as to why we have suffering. And why should it matter whether we have suffering if we're just blobs of protoplasm from evolution? So it's very important that we know this.

#2. *People speak of the problem of pain. Is it not more accurate in a fallen world to speak of the problem of pleasure?* Let's think about this. If we are as bad as the Bible says that we are, outside of our being in Christ, if we, as R. C. Sproul says, commit cosmic treason against our Creator every day, if it's true that we are "*only evil continually*", (Genesis 6:4), that according to god we are "*evil from our youth*", (Genesis 8:21), that we are "*wicked from our mother's womb*" according to Psalm 58:3, that there is "*none righteous, no, not one*", (Romans 3:10), including infants and children, and if we are "*dead in trespasses and sins*" and "*by nature children of wrath*" before we're saved, (Ephesians 2:1, 3), and if God is "*holy, holy, holy*", as Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4 tell us, then it's a wonder that we don't experience more suffering than we do. You know, Sproul points out that if God is good, then He must punish sin.

So why do we experience pleasure? You know, I've had a lot of pleasure this week. I got to go out Tuesday night for ice cream. Wednesday I got to go to a church picnic. Thursday I was able to get together and practice music for Sunday. Tomorrow I'm going to visit my mom. Now her circumstances aren't pleasurable, but it's always a pleasure to see her, even though I have to do it with Sig. (*Laughter.*)

Participant: That's not sin; that's suffering. (*Laughter.*)

Don: But God is patient and long-suffering with us. Why? Rich Clark, would you read Romans 2:4 on the handout, please?

Rich: Romans 2:4.

Don: Yes.

Rich: "*Or do you presume upon the riches of His kindness, forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?*"

Don: Okay. God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance. Now Paul is talking to unbelievers there. But it could equally apply to us, because we tend to get very hard hearted, which I'm going to talk about in a few minutes. But see, we tend to take pleasure

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for granted, don't we? And there's a very fine line between taking pleasure for granted and expecting it, even demanding it.

I mean, how many times have I, how many times have we said, "Lord, thank You that I slept well last night, that I didn't wake up with a heart attack or with some horrible experience," or whatever? You know, we take it for granted that a new day is here, and that because of His mercy, right? And when pleasure is taken away from us, we say, "Why?"

I'm not going to get into this in depth. But Jimmy Fallon, the talk show host, was talking about the massacre that happened in Orlando, and he said this. "There was one bad guy and forty-nine good guys." No, there were fifty bad guys, right? There was one murderer and forty-nine victims, but fifty bad guys, fifty sinners in that situation. And we deserve infinitely worse than our suffering. And I'm not trying to minimize it at all. My goodness, I'm not trying to minimize it at all. We pray every week for heart wrenching things in our lives or people's lives that we know. But we deserve hell itself, don't we?

I think of the song by Chris Christoferson that Johnny Cash wrote. "Why me, Lord? What have I ever done . . . To deserve even one . . . Of the pleasures I've known?"

And Sproul points out that pleasure can be a narcotic. And the more we have, the more we can forget God, and the less aware we can become of our dependence upon God's mercy, help and forgiveness. You know, God warned Israel in the Old Testament, lest they forget the Lord their God. Don't revel in your pleasure, lest you forget the Lord your God. Jesus said that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Rock stars say this over and over again, like Katie Perry. "I want it now." I don't want pie in the sky when I die. I want to be a rock star and have it all now.

And pain, as uncomfortable as it is, is used by God to purify us and grow us into a deeper dependence upon Him. C. S. Lewis said this. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our circumstances, and shouts to us in our pain." And Hebrews 12 says that no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. But afterwards, it produces the peaceful fruit of righteousness for those who have been trained by it.

Jay picked me up this morning and we were talking about this. So many times suffering draws us closer to the Lord.

Okay. The next question is this. *When we experience trials, how can we determine if they are the consequences of violating a Scriptural principle, a test from the Lord, or an attack from Satan?* All three of these things are possible, and it's not always easy to determine which is which.

Suffering may be punishment for unbelievers and chastisement for believers. It's like that old country song from Danny O'Keefe from 1972 that says, "You play around, you lose your wife; You play too long, you lose your life."

You know, there are consequences to sin. If I engage in sexual immorality, there is a very good possibility that I may suffer a sexually transmitted disease. If I get drunk, then I may suffer cirrhosis of the liver and other things. If I commit other sins, they have consequences, even though the sin may be forgiven.

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Moses could not enter the Promised Land because of his disobedience to God. David suffered great consequences because of his polygamy, his adultery with Bathsheba and the census that he conducted because of pride.

Could it be a test from the Lord? Yes. Abraham was told to sacrifice Isaac. And even though he did not do it, I'm sure that he must have experienced great mental anguish for a while there, contemplating the enormity of what God told him to do. Job's afflictions were a test from the Lord and an attack from Satan.

And we must not make the mistake, as Job's friends did—how would you like to have friends like his, huh? (*Laughter.*) You know, with friends like his, who needs enemies? "Oh, Job, you must have done something terrible to suffer what you're suffering." Or Christ's disciples, when they saw the man born blind said, "*Lord, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*" We can't always attribute a one-to-one correspondence between sin and suffering. We can't always do that.

Paul received a buffeting from Satan, his thorn in the flesh, as did our Savior for forty days. Luther talks about that too in his writings.

I think the safest thing that we can say is that our suffering results from living in a fallen, sin cursed world. And Jesus said, along with His other glorious promises, that in the world we will have tribulation, contrary to the name it and claim it and blab it and grab it people of our day.

Now instead of "why?", Sproul points out that we should be asking, "Lord, what do You want me to learn from this situation?"

Participant: Amen.

Don: "What are You teaching me, Lord?" And whatever type of suffering you have, whatever the reason for the suffering, it's true that God disciplines those He loves. And we have to keep that in mind.

You know, when I was little, and I was not cooperating with my parents, they could get very strict with me. Whenever I would get a whipping, Dad would say, "This hurts me more than it hurts you." And I would think, "Right, Dad! Uh-huh!" (*Laughter.*) But it's done in love. We may not always know the reason in this life. We may not know it in the next life, either. But we want to suffer in an honorable way for the glory of God and for our ultimate good.

Okay. Next, *in 1 Thessalonians 5:18, we are called to "give thanks in all circumstances." What does this mean? Should we be doing this?*

Well obviously, we should be doing it; it's a command, right? Bruce points out what God's will is. And of course, that passage says, "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.*" Let's see. Sig, would you read Romans 5:3-4 on the handout,. Please?

Sig: Romans 5:3-4. Where do I find that on the handout?

Don: Isn't that on the handout?

Participant: No.

Don: I'm sorry.

Sig: I can look it up.

Don: No.

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Participant: It's 5:3-5.

Don: Okay.

Participant: It's midway through.

Sig: Oh, I have Romans 5:3-5. Is that what you'd like?

Don: Yeah, that's it.

Sig: *"More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given to us."*

Don: Okay. Now first of all, let me say what it does not mean. We're saying here that we're to give thanks in all circumstances, that we're to rejoice in our sufferings. You know, it's not like those old Carol Burnett episodes with Tim Conway I believe it was. And he would be doing his comedy routine. "Beat me! Beat me, please! Oh, I enjoy it!" You know, we're not masochists. Of course we're not masochists. Sickness, loss, bereavement, whatever you're going through right now, even death—they're not good in themselves. They are a result of sin and the Fall and the curse.

And you know our Savior grieved, didn't He? Read the Psalms. *"My couch is drenched with tears."* We don't grieve as those who have no hope, but we grieve, all right? Our Savior was *"a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."* John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible, says what? *"Jesus wept."* He wept with the people at Lazarus' tomb, knowing that He would raise him from the dead. He didn't have a stiff upper lip. He didn't tell Mary and Martha, "Now Mary and Martha, I am the resurrection and the life, so stop crying. This is all going to work out really well." No, no, no! He wept and we can, too.

And sometimes the best thing to do for a person when he or she is suffering is to be there with that person and to weep with him or her.

Participant: Amen.

Don: But what does it mean? It means that we can give thanks in the circumstance. "Lord Jesus, I thank You. You have promised to work even this out for my good. And though I don't understand what I'm going through now, and though it hurts like crazy, it's horrible; Lord, please get me out of this! But I thank You, even in the midst of this, that You are working through this." And, of course, sometimes He does, in some ways, let us know when we look back upon an incident that occurred. Lord, I can thank You that You were working in that incident, and I thank You, Lord. So we're to thank Him in all circumstances, knowing that it is all for His ultimate glory and for our good.

Participant: Don?

Don: Yes, Sig?

Sig: In the example you gave in the earlier question about suffering, and you had those three points on why we suffer, wasn't one of them to your point in this question for the glory of God, the man born blind in John's gospel?

Don: Yes.

Sig: It wasn't the fault of the parents.

Don: Right.

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Sig: It wasn't anything the child had done. But what was Christ's answer? That it would show the power and glory of God.

Don: Exactly. Not only in the man's healing, but presumably in the man's salvation. He worshiped Christ and was saved. So yes, I think that God uses that, and that is a way in which God works even today in our suffering, for sure.

Okay, next—we're moving right along here. *How does God use suffering for His glory and our good?* I have a number of ways here.

a. on your handout. *Renewed repentance and dependence upon God.* Let's see. Bill McCoy, Psalm 32 verses 3-5, and Tom Smith, would you read Psalm 119:67 and 71 on the handout? Psalm 32:3-5.

Bill: *"When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon Me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah I acknowledged my sin to You, and I did not cover my iniquity. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin."*

Don: Okay. So David was burdened even physically because of his sin. I don't know if this was the result of his adulterous affair with Bathsheba. But he had even physical manifestations because of his sin. But he confessed his sin and his fellowship with God was restored.

It was the same with Peter after his denial of Christ. I'm sure Peter probably thought, "Oh, Christ will never use me again." He was probably in great mental suffering. But Christ restored him after He had the conversation with him. Okay. Psalm 119:67 and 71, Tom.

Tom: *"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." "It is good that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes."*

Don: Okay, it was good! You know, we don't feel good when we're afflicted. But sometimes the Lord helps us to see that it was good. There is no such thing as senseless suffering for a Christian.

b. *Prevention of sin and further sanctification.* Jay, would you read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, please?

Jay: Sure. *"So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."*

Don: Wow! How about that? This is Paul, obviously, and the Lord is preventing him from pride because of the revelations that he had experienced, that we would give anything to see, right? We don't know what this thorn in the flesh was. It could have been a physical ailment. Some people even think it might have been a sin that Paul was struggling with. But whatever it was, God used him in this, and said, "My grace is

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sufficient." And Paul was even able to rejoice in these things. And that's something that's tough for us to imagine. But it is possible for us to do that in Christ. *"When I am weak, then I am strong."*

Incidentally, Paul begged the Lord three times to take it away from him. He did not. Sometimes Christ does take away suffering; sometimes He doesn't. But it's all for His glory and for our good.

c. *He uses suffering to comfort others with the comfort of Christ.* Would someone read 2 Corinthians 1, verses 3-5 on the handout?

Participant: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God."*

Don: Okay. Thank you, Bob. When we go through disease, when we go through bereavement, losing a loved one, a wayward child we think has left the faith, financial difficulty—whatever—it's always true, isn't it, that we're better able to sympathize and to empathize and to comfort others who have gone through similar situations, right? God often uses us in that way to do it.

I think of Elizabeth Elliott, who Ted mentioned in his teaching about a month ago. Her first husband was killed by the Auca Indians along with five others who went to minister to them in Peru or Ecuador, or wherever it was. But she went back to them and many were saved. Her second husband had prolonged cancer and died. And then she married a third time. But her books and recordings have helped many people in their suffering.

There is Joni Eareckson Tada. I love her writings. She is a quadriplegic, with just about everything that you could imagine wrong with her body, and constantly dependent upon people. But does she just stay home feeling sorry for herself? No. She has been around the world with Joni and Friends and Wheelchairs for the World and other organizations, and she has been a help to thousands and thousands of people.

I don't want to embarrass him, but Bruce Bickel—for him to stand up here week after week in pain 24/7, and to be able to teach with the zeal and fervor that he has is just an inspiration to me, and I know he's an inspiration to us all.

Lisa Beamer, the widow of Todd Beamer who was part of the 9/11 tragedy in Shanksville, part of the plane that went down. I read her book. And sure, there's a lot of sadness in there. But the hope of Christ is all through that book. And so God uses suffering so that we may comfort others.

Participant: Hey, Don?

Don: Yes?

Participant: Before you go on, isn't there a default setting, maybe more so in our culture, that happiness is what we're entitled to?

Don: It's our right—life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, yes.

Participant: I looked at the cover of a magazine I saw at a newsstand. And it said, "Find your happiness." And there are a lot of those themes throughout our popular culture. Either you're entitled to it, or the default setting is that it should be okay.

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Everything should be okay. And we really don't want to hear about other people's suffering—

Don: Right.

Participant: Or misfortune. Yet, I think in contrast to what you've been teaching, there is that sense that we don't know how to deal with pain, so we look for these other things. And sometimes I wonder if it might be appropriate to say, in light of what you've been teaching, that we don't know. We don't know why you're going through this suffering.

Don: I think it's entirely appropriate, sure. Because we don't oftentimes. Like I said, we don't know whether it's God testing us, or if Satan is using his fiery darts, or whether it may have been a sin. David said, "See if there is any wicked way in me." We just don't know. All we can say is this: that we live in a fallen, sin-cursed world.

Now people may not want to hear that, especially unbelievers. They think it's a fairy tale. But as I said before, what other explanation is there? That's the safest thing to say, Sig. I think you're right. Like I said, we do demand it. It's our right according to the Declaration of Independence—"life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." We think it's our right.

And I've said many times—maybe not many times, but a few times—that there is a difference between happiness as the world defines it, which really also means *happenings* or circumstances, and joy, the joy of Christ, which even people around the world who are suffering persecution which we know nothing about, are experiencing—the joy of Christ.

Participant: Don?

Don: Yes?

Participant: The Declaration of Independence does not say that we have the right to happiness. It says that we have the right to the pursuit of happiness.

Don: Yes.

Participant: Where are you going to pursue that? I'll pursue mine here with Christ.

Don: Amen. Right.

Participant: Everybody else is misguided or whatever we can call them, they can pursue theirs, but they're never going to attain it.

Don: Yes, exactly.

Participant: Don?

Don: Yes?

Participant: One other thing. It strikes me if we ask ourselves, do we learn anything from happiness, or do we learn anything from suffering? Do we come to saving faith because of some happy event, or do we come to saving faith because of some suffering that we've heard of or witnessed?

Don: Well, many of you are much more qualified to comment on that than I am. I've had a good life as far as being spared a lot of suffering. In fact, this morning I had to beat my breast because I was getting ready to leave. And all of a sudden, for some reason, the power didn't work in my office, where my computer and my reading machine are. My brother is away for the weekend. "What am I going to do?" He was able to get it fixed. But little things like that, relatively little, compared to the suffering that you guys are

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going through, and I have a hissy fit. *(Laughter.)* A lot of you are much more qualified to speak on that than I am.

Participant: Don?

Don: Yes?

Participant: I have a short poem.

Don: All right! Our poet laureate!

Participant:

"I walked a mile with happiness,
She chattered all the way.
But nary a thing I learned from her
In spite of all she had to say.
I walked a mile with sorrow
And nary a word said she.
But oh the things I learned from her
When sorrow walked with me!"

Participant: There you go.

Don: May I remember those words. *(Applause.)* May I remember those words when something catastrophic comes into my life.

But see, this is the great promise of Scripture. Let me just move along here.

d. *Suffering helps us to develop endurance.* We've already read Romans 5:3-5—that we can rejoice in our suffering. It produces endurance and endurance produces character.

e. *It helps us to participate in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.* The apostles and the disciples, when they were beaten by the leaders and the Sanhedrin, they didn't say, "O Lord, why is this happening to me?", which is probably what I would have a tendency to say. But they counted it an honor to suffer the sufferings of Christ. Yes, Christ's atonement is complete. But we are called to suffer individually and corporately as His body, and let's never forget that. And we think of the martyrs of yesterday and today, who are examples of witnesses to us in that regard.

And then finally, #6. *How would you counsel Christians who are suffering with illness or old age who would rather be in heaven with their Lord than here?* Well, Sproul points out that they are in good company because Job and Jeremiah cursed the day of their birth. It's not necessarily right, but they did it. Paul said the same thing. He said that it was good for him to be here. But even he said that he despaired of life itself. He said that it was good for him to be here, that it was needful because he had to teach the Philippians. But he said that he would prefer far more to be with Christ, which is far better. He said, "*to live is Christ and to die is gain,*" because suffering makes us long for heaven, doesn't it? We are homesick for heaven.

And remember two things. A. *We are never alone in our suffering.*

Participant: Amen.

Don: Rich, would you read Hebrews 4:14-16, please?

Rich: "*Since then we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been*

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tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

Don: Oh, that is so precious! That's one of my favorite Scriptures. All right, Jesus is our High Priest. And see, this is what the skeptic and the unbeliever who raises the question that if God is all powerful, why doesn't He stop suffering fails to grasp. You know, God became man. The second Person of the Trinity became man and suffered. Christ knows what it is to suffer. He knows what it is to hurt physically. What do you think He went through on the cross? I believe that growing up, being human like we were, that He had colds and every infirmity that we have. He is able to sympathize with all of our weaknesses and sufferings because He suffered Himself. He knows what it's like to hurt. He knows what it's like to be scorned and rejected, to be abandoned. The ultimate abandonment occurred where? On the cross. *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* And so we can come to Him and we can know that He will always be there to listen and to sympathize with us.

Bruce has talked about it a lot. Ted has talked about it a lot—our union with Christ. And because of our union with Christ, in a sense He suffers with us. No, he doesn't suffer pain physically. But what did He say when Saul who became the apostle Paul was persecuting believers? *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute Me?"* And so there is a sense in which He identifies with our suffering, whatever it may be.

I think of the hymn:

"I must tell Jesus all of my trials; I cannot dare to bear them alone."

Or the more contemporary song by Chris Rice:

"Sometimes the way is lonely, Steep and filled with pain; So if your sky is dark and filled with rain, Then cry to Jesus ... and live."

Jesus longs to hear your cries. He may take away the suffering. He may heal the disease. He may not. But He has promised to be with us always. Sig, would you read Romans 8:38-39 for us, please?

Sig: Certainly. *"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

Don: Brothers, what could you want more than that?

Participant: Amen.

Don: Absolutely. And then finally, b. *For the Christian, suffering will end at death with eternal life and resurrection.* Romans 8:18 says that *"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

Now it may not seem like these sufferings are "light and momentary afflictions," as Paul has said. It doesn't seem like that, whether it be persecution, which is the context of that passage, or any kind of suffering. It may not feel that way while we're going through it. But we have God's precious promises and the hope, the certainty, of eternal life in Christ that is life and blessedness that will never, ever, ever end. Any questions or comments before we conclude?

Participant: Hey, Don?

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Don: Go ahead.

Participant: I already said this, and I was just thinking that I wanted to say that I think it was Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones who said that this is one of the most comforting verses in the Bible. In Romans 8:28 it says that *"all things work together for good to those who love God and those who are called according to His purpose."* And then thinking about what you were teaching this morning just in regard to our trusting God's purposes in the midst of suffering, even when we don't know what those purposes are.

Don: Right, exactly. That's when real trust in God takes place, when we can't see how He's going to get us out of it. Lord, what is going on here? But we trust Him anyway. And that's what He wants us to do. Does someone else have something to say?

Participant: Don, I was just thinking that Matthew 5:10 says, *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."* And I look at my life and also the people in the United States. We have inconveniences.

Don: Yes.

Participant: We really don't have a lot of suffering.

Don: Right.

Participant: Other than that which is from sin—sickness, cancer—but we're really not persecuted.

Don: No.

Participant: And I often wonder, are we doing enough?

Don: Probably not. I think it's going to come upon us, maybe not to the extent that is happening in the Middle East, but with the government redefining marriage and so forth, it's going to come upon us in ways that we don't know now. Anyway, that's what I think, but I don't know. But you're right. It's Brain, right?

Brian: Yes.

Don: Yes. I think you're right about that. What has Bruce said many times? The church is growing by leaps and bounds in China, where there is so much persecution, in Africa and other places. May God give us the grace if and when that happens, to face it, to endure it and even to rejoice in Christ because of it.

Participant: Don?

Don: Yes, Sig?

Sig: Just one thought along that line. I worship in the Anglican/Episcopalian tradition. And our priest said a couple weeks ago that Episcopalians historically do not like to talk about salvation. And that puts so many things together in my mind as to why the Episcopalians got a little liberal. And I asked afterwards how that came up.

And they said, "Well, if you have to talk about salvation, you have to talk about sin and you have to talk about death. And we'd rather talk about love and mercy and power."

And I thought, "That explains so much to me."

Don: Yes.

Sig: As to why not only Episcopalians, but why some groups avoid these specifically.

Don: Right.

Sig: I mean, there are some times of the year when it's hard not to talk about sin and death, like on Good Friday.

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Don: Right. You're forced to do it then.

Sig: And then they sort of tap dance around it.

Don: And how can you appreciate God's mercy if you don't talk about sin, right?

Participant: Exactly.

Don: For sure.

Participant: Don, Paul encapsulated what you just said in Philippians 3:13 and 14, if I may read it.

Don: Okay. Go ahead.

Participant: *"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it"—the prize. "But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* Don't wallow in your sin or your suffering. Look to Christ. He'll pull you right through.

Don: Amen. Let us pray. Father, I just feel so inadequate here. For Your reasons, Lord, You have graced me with a lot of blessings. And I stand here, Father, with many, many of our brothers here today who are either going through suffering or have gone through great suffering. We all know people who are going through great suffering. And I just pray, Father, that somehow, Lord, these words from Your word will be instructive and comforting to us all, and Father, that You would bless our time together this morning, thanking You. We just pray, Father, that You would use this teaching for Your glory and the instruction that we've learned for our good. We pray in Jesus' name. And all the Brave Men said,

Men: Amen.

Participant: Thank you, Don.

Don: You're welcome. *(Applause.)*