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Practical Applications



Making Sense Out Of Suffering - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the concept of suffering and its practical applications. He suggests that suffering is an inevitable part of the human experience, but not all humans improve from it. Gregg argues that focusing on the unseen things, such as God's sovereignty and goodness, can help during times of suffering. He also explains that suffering can ultimately lead to growth and strengthening in one's faith.

Transcript

Just one more lecture in this series, and it's the practical application. We've been talking about how to make sense out of suffering, and we start out by trying to make sense philosophically. You know, how can there be suffering in a world that's governed by an all-good, all-loving, all-powerful God? That's a philosophical conundrum.

We talked about that a little bit. And of course, my point was that that's only a problem if suffering is seen as a bad thing. And from one point of view, it is a bad thing.

Lots of suffering, not all of it, lots of suffering is caused by evil deeds that people do to other people. But some suffering is just germs. Some is accidents.

Some is weather. Not all suffering has a negative moral component to it. The real question is, what is it there to accomplish? And if it's there to accomplish good, then it's hard to say that it is itself a bad thing.

Now, I also talked, when we talked about the glory of God, about putting the whole context of suffering, and our suffering in particular, into the context of God's overall purpose, that the glory of God fills the earth as the water covers the sea, and we are brought into that glory. We are made more like Christ. We're changed from glory to glory into His image.

And that happens through suffering. The sufferings of our present time, our light afflictions, it says, are working for us a far more eternal and exceeding weight of glory. So, last time, we talked about what kind of benefits, what kind of spiritual benefits suffering brings into our lives that cannot be brought without suffering.

No doubt there are benefits of sorts that we could receive without suffering, but the ones we're talking about are the ones that are specifically the results of suffering. And they're good, they're valuable benefits. They're Christ-like traits, which we need and cannot get without getting them the same way He did, actually.

Now we need to talk about how to benefit from suffering, how to gain from suffering. Because it's evident that every human being suffers, but not every human being improves. You can meet two people who've been through the exact same trial.

You won't meet them as much anymore because most of them are dead now, but the people who were in World War II, if you would meet people who spent time in Nazi prison camps, I think you'd find that a great number of them were very embittered people. It ruined their whole lives. They're cynical, they're angry, they've lost their faith in God.

But there's other people who went through that. It built their faith in God. They became more sanctified, they became more sweet by their experience.

What's the difference? Is it just like innate temperament? I think it is choices. And those choices are choices that the Bible instructs us about, how to make them. So that since you will suffer anyway, isn't it better to suffer and benefit from it? It is possible to suffer in vain.

That is, you pay the price for the benefit, but you don't get the benefit. You suffer, but you don't improve. In Jeremiah 2.30, God said, in vain I have chastened your children.

They have received no correction. God chastened them, but they didn't receive any correction. So it was all for nothing.

It was a wasted effort. Likewise, in Isaiah 9.13, God said, for the people do not turn to him who strikes them, nor do they seek the Lord of hosts. Notice he says, I'm striking them, I'm putting them through affliction so they'll turn to me, but they're not turning.

They're suffering the pain, but they're not getting the gain. It may well be that no pain, no gain, but it's not always the case that pain will bring gain. There is a responsibility on the sufferer to respond to God in a certain way in it, which will always bring benefit.

And if that way isn't, if that response is not followed, there's no guarantees that you'll have not wasted your sufferings. There was a book I never read back in the 70s. It was kind of a best-selling book at the time, and when Christians called *Don't Waste Your Sorrows* by Paul Bilheimer.

Again, I never read the book, but I always thought the title gave me a clue of what it's talking about. Don't waste your sorrows. Well, you're gonna have sorrows.

If you are improved by them, they're not wasted. If you're not improved by them, they

are wasted. Don't waste them.

So what do you do in suffering? How do you benefit from suffering? Well, I think you'll know and see very clearly by the end of this session. In 1 Peter 4.12, I mentioned earlier, Peter is a book that has a lot of teaching about suffering in it. In 1 Peter 4.12, Peter said, Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.

It does seem strange when you suffer and you didn't deserve it. You can't see any reason why it's come on you. But Peter says, don't think of it as a strange thing.

That's the first thing. Don't say, what in the world? Where is God? If God was on the throne, this wouldn't be happening. No, it's not a strange thing.

It's quite fitting. Trials are quite fitting with the purposes of God. We don't always know what they're going to produce.

Remember, Job's friends were very confused by his trials, and so was he, because they had a theological position that trials like that would only come on someone who's very deserving of punishment, someone who's very bad. Now, they knew Job had always been a good man, and they couldn't put it together. How could such a good man experience such bad trials which should only come on a bad man? And they made the wrong decision in trying to solve that problem.

They said, I guess Job's a bad man after all. We always thought he was good, but our theology tells us this doesn't happen to a good man. And so they had their debates with Job, but Job came out ahead at the end, not just of the debate, because God came and vindicated him, but also his life came out better.

All the things in which he had lost were replaced. He was twice as rich as before, and so forth, you know. The Bible says in James chapter 5, you have heard of the patience of Job and have seen the goodness of the Lord, that he's very... the end that the Lord intended, that he's very merciful and tender mercy.

Job suffered. He didn't understand why, but he benefited from it. Why? Well, for one thing, he said, though he slayed me, yet will I trust him.

He did not lose his faith. Instead, he hung firm to his faith through the trial. Well, you know, the book of Job... I think we need to just pause a moment on this to make this point.

The book of Job, we see it often as a book that's puzzling over why do good men suffer, because it's about a good man who suffered terribly. And no doubt that is what he and his friends were discussing. Why is he suffering? And it's a big question people have.

Why do good men suffer? Why do bad things happen to good people? Famous book written a few decades ago by a rabbi, or a Jewish writer, anyway. I don't know if he was a rabbi. I think he was Rabbi Kushner, I think.

Why do bad things happen to good people? Now, I've heard people say, well, I've heard Chris say, there are no good people, so that explains it. But that's not quite true. Job was a good person.

If you don't believe it, ask God. God said to Satan, if you consider a certain Job, he's a righteous man. He's a blameless man.

He avoids evil. He fears God. Sounds like he had a pretty good recommendation there from God as a good man.

And yet he suffered. And he and his friends were philosophizing about why a good man would suffer. And of course, their position was, he doesn't.

He's not a good man. And Job's position was, well, I actually am a good man. And therefore, this suffering doesn't make a lot of sense to me.

But there was another question that was being debated, not by Job and his friends, but by the devil and Satan. And that was, why does a good man serve God? You see, Job said, I mean, Satan said, Job is serving God because God's good to Job. Because God's making it worth his while.

He's making him happy, healthy, wealthy, and powerful. No wonder the guy serves you. But if you take away these things, he won't serve you.

So the question on the table is, why does a man like Job serve God? Is it because he's been exempt from trouble? Let's find out. So there's a bigger question being asked. In the heavenly realm, in the book of Job, not why does a good man suffer, but why does a good man serve God? But you never get the answer really spelled out in the book of Job.

And the reader comes away, even after God has given his speeches for four chapters, the reader still comes away not knowing, why did this happen? Well, the reason it happens is because Job was being tested, obviously, but it doesn't answer the question, why do good men suffer at all? And I've heard it said, and I believe this is true, that the answer to that question, I think that we can take from Job and from the Bible in general is, suffering is sometimes the price that a good man pays for God to be glorified. Certainly is true in the case of Jesus. Jesus suffered and died so that God would be glorified.

God was glorified in Job, he won the bet. Suffering is a price that good men sometimes pay to glorify God. And that's worth it, if the glory of God is what matters the most.

And if that's what matters most to us, then we will not think it's strange that we have to pay that price sometimes for the glory of God. Don't think it's strange that concerning fiery trials that come, as if that's some strange thing happened to you, it's quite in keeping with the whole purpose of glorifying God and becoming glorified through suffering. But how do we respond when we are in suffering? We read earlier a couple of verses from 2 Corinthians chapter 4. There's a third verse in the sequence we didn't dwell on.

2 Corinthians 4, 16 through 18 says, Therefore we do not lose heart, even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, the things that are not seen are eternal.

Now, here's what Paul says. We are going through afflictions, but these afflictions are working for us a desirable end, which is the weight of glory that we enjoy and receive as a result of suffering. But he says, while, you know, the sufferings are working these benefits while we are doing something.

If we're not doing that something, then there's no suggestion here that this would be the result. These sufferings work for our glory while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. Now, Paul has some things very specifically in mind here.

It's obvious that whether we're suffering or not, the most natural thing is to look at the things that are seen. We are surrounded by things that assault our senses. We have five physical senses.

They're always bringing in data about the physical world around us. They're not bringing in data about God, angels, unseen things, because we can't see or hear or feel those things like we can see things in the physical environment. We're continually bombarded with awareness of the things that are seen.

And we less naturally and have to more deliberately focus on things that are not seen. Now, when suffering comes, we almost always feel like we're suffering an injustice of some kind. Like, I'm not sure that I deserve this.

Why is this happening? Either I don't deserve this or is it maybe this is disproportionate to what I really do deserve. Maybe it's worse than I can justify. And you're always analyzing, looking at it.

You're aware of the pain because it's imposing itself on your senses. You're aware of deprivation of something you want, your health or your money or your family and

whatever you've lost in this suffering. And your focus is on these circumstances, on these things and on what we may imagine to be the causes of these things and how we might be able to do something to fix it and so forth.

And I'm not saying there's never anything we can do to fix things. But I'm saying that our focus in suffering is always drawn to the suffering itself, to the circumstances themselves, to the causes that we imagine to be there, to the possible remedies, all the things in the natural world that are related to this suffering. Suffering has a way of being a magnet for our attention.

You're aware when you're uncomfortable. You notice I'm wearing a sweatshirt. There's air conditioning on here.

I'm fine. I'm warm. I have a sweatshirt on.

I'm good. I'm good. What I'm saying is I put on a sweatshirt because I noticed I was uncomfortable.

Now I'm okay. But if the air conditioning had been just right, I wouldn't have even noticed. If it was comfortable, you don't think, boy, it sure is comfortable in here.

You don't think about when things are comfortable and okay. It's when you're uncomfortable, when things are not the way that are optimal for you, you know, you're feeling pleasant. It's when you're suffering in some way.

Cold air is not a very great kind of suffering. It's a very minor thing. But it's in principle the same thing.

You notice you're uncomfortable. You do something about it. If you're comfortable, you don't have to do anything about it, but you don't even notice whether you're comfortable or not.

Suffering or discomfort draws attention to itself. And that's the temptation. To look at the circumstances, the events, the people involved that are making me suffer, looking at the things that are seen.

But I'll never understand what's going on if I'm only looking at things that are seen, because God sovereignly is behind the situation doing something. He is unseen. And there are certain things about God that are not easily seen when we're suffering that we would more readily be aware of when we're not suffering.

For example, God's sovereignty. Is God in control or is He not? Well, when things are going great for us and things seem to be going as it should, it's easy to believe God's doing His job. He's on the throne.

Everything's going as it should. I can believe there's a good God in charge of things. But

when we suffer, we think, well, where's God now? Why did God do this? Is God really making this happen? Is God maybe not paying attention? Is God too weak? How come God's allowing this to happen? And it's very easy to lose sight of the unseen reality that God is always in control.

Now, I'm not saying He's manipulating everything, but He's in control in the sense that He could prevent anything He wants to prevent. To say that I have my children under control doesn't mean that I'm micromanaging everything they do every minute. It just means that they're not out of my control.

You know, I may be giving them some liberty. I'm not manipulating everything they do, but I can bring things around if they get out of control. I'm still in control of the situation.

God is in control of the situation. He doesn't ordain everything that happens like the Calvinists say. The Bible disagrees with that.

It says He doesn't. But nothing happens but that He could change it if He wants to intervene, that He could prevent it from happening. There's no one more powerful than Him.

So if someone wants to do something He doesn't want to do, He can stop it. He can and will if He needs to. He is sovereign.

He's in control. Now, when things are going badly, we really need to affirm, first of all, God is in control. That's why I gave the contrast between the pastor who lost a baby, and his first response was, God's not in this.

And my response from my wife, I was first impression was, God's in this. That's important for me to know. Because this thing happening doesn't make sense.

It's the kind of thing that might happen if God wasn't in control, if God wasn't paying attention, if there wasn't a God at all. This thing is the kind of thing I might think would happen. But God is in control.

It's not obvious. It's invisibly true. And it seems less to be true when this suffering comes.

It seems like God isn't as much in control. But He is. And to say, I'm going to look at the things that are not seen, one of which is God is sovereign.

He's in control. I'm not giving up that point. That's what faith is, by the way.

Faith is the evidence of things not seen. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, and it's the evidence of things that are not seen. There's an unseen realm that we know about because God said so, and we believe them.

And sometimes it doesn't look like it. If you're looking at what is seen, you'll get the wrong impression. You have to refocus on what is not seen.

There's a crisis happening in my world. But what I know to be true that I can't see is that God is totally the master of the situation. And this would not happen without His permission.

And therefore, I can trust that whatever malice may be behind the persons who brought this about, even the devil himself, God meant it for good. And I pointed this out that Joseph said this in Genesis 50, in verse 20, when his brothers had sold him into slavery, and there's all things that turned around. Joseph said, but as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, in order to bring about, as it is this day, to save many people alive.

So he says, bad things happened, the kinds of things I wouldn't think God would approve of, but I can see now. He was not out of control. He meant this to happen.

He meant it for good. God was sovereign in the situation. It didn't seem like it when my brothers arrested me and threw me in the pit.

I was crying out to God, and He didn't seem to hear me. He didn't answer. I got sold into slavery.

I was crying out to God. No answer. I was thrown in jail when Potiphar's wife accused me.

No answer. The butler forgot about me. I was stuck in jail two more years, and God still didn't answer.

It didn't seem like God was in any of this, but God was in it. God meant it for good. It was purposeful.

You have to believe this if you're going to believe what is true, and this requires looking at not what is seen, but what is not seen, namely God's invisible hand, God's invisible sovereign control. You have to affirm this and believe this, even at the times when it looks like it's not true. You don't look at what is seen.

You look at what's not seen. A second thing in the same category that's not seen that you have to affirm and look at when trouble is coming is that God is good. Now, these are the two things we brought up at the very beginning.

How could God be in control and be good and there be suffering? This is the question. This is the challenge, but these are the things that we have to affirm. You can't see God's goodness when you're suffering.

Not the same as when He's doing good things to you. When you got the promotion, when you're living the dream, when, you know, you get, you know, a perfect vacation,

everything's going great. You know, God is good.

Good all the time, right? Especially when things are going good for me. That's when God's really good. But when things are not going good, and when I do know that sufferings have come and I'm affirming that God is in control, then what I have to also affirm is, and He's good.

Because if I know He's in control and He's not doing what I wish He would do, then what's unseen to me is how God could still be good and let this happen. How could God be good and let my marriage break up? That just doesn't make sense. How could God be good and let this woman die of cancer when she's got three kids at home? How could God be good and do that? I don't know, but He did, and He is.

The point is, I have to affirm that He's good if I'm going to be in touch with reality, because He never ceases to be good. If I think He's not good, I'm out of touch with reality. I'm looking at what's seen, not at the unseen truth, the unseen realities.

And, you know, the psalmist in Psalm 119 made this wonderful statement in verse 75. Psalm 119, 75. He says, Oh Lord, I know that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Now, you afflicted me, God. I'm going to give you that. It was you.

You're in charge, and I didn't like it, but you did it in faithfulness. I know you're a faithful and good God. You may be not pleasing me, but I know you're faithful.

I affirm you are good. I know your judgments are right. You thought this should happen.

I agree. You're right. You're always right, and I see you as a good God.

In faithfulness, you afflicted me. In 1 Peter 4, 19, Peter said, Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good as to a faithful creator. If you're suffering according to the will of God, you need to say, I believe God is a faithful creator.

I'm going to commit my case to Him happily. I'm going to trust Him with it because He's good. He's a faithful creator.

You know, when Naomi went away into Moab from Bethlehem, and she lost her husband. Then she lost her two sons. Things were pretty bad.

Eventually, she came back to Bethlehem, and the people said, Oh, is this Naomi? Now, you have to know Naomi is a name that means pleasantness. She said, Don't call me pleasantness. Don't call me Naomi.

Call me Mara. Mara means bitter. Don't call me pleasant.

Call me bitter because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me. Now, she's talking about losing her husband or two sons. Yeah, she saw the Lord in it.

The Lord did this, but I don't think she's so sure that He's a good God. I mean, she came around. She's struggling.

God did it. I can affirm that, but I also have to assume that God is a good God who did it. That what God did it is good.

Now, again, if my son who broke his arm had been three years old, and he knew that I was giving the doctor permission to break his arm again, how would he know whether I'm a good father or not? It doesn't seem like a good father would do that. I'd hope he would trust me because I am a good father. I did have my son's best interest at heart.

It may not have seemed so at the time. It might have been beyond his capacity to register how that could be. It doesn't change the fact that it was good, that doing it was something I did because of my commitment to Him, because I'm faithful to Him.

God is like that to us. We're like little children most of the time. We don't understand what He knows, and it seems like He ought to do it differently if He loves us, but He loves us, and trusting that, looking to that, it's unseen in times of suffering that God is in control and that He is good, but we have to affirm those things.

We have to look to those things and not allow those to slip from our consciousness. Another thing we have to look at that's essentially unseen to us at most times is the example of Christ. We don't see Jesus.

He's gone, but we do know about His example. We can look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. It says in Hebrews chapter 12, verses 1 through 4, Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

That's what we look at when we're going through the hardships of running this race and need endurance. We look at the example of Jesus. He did the same thing.

He's our example. He's our model. In Hebrews 13, 12 through 13, the writer said, Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

Therefore let us go forth to Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach. If we're being reproached, if we're being rejected, if we're being ostracized, well, remember so was He. We're just going with Him.

He suffered outside the gate. Let's go to that place where He was rejected, be rejected with Him. His example is ours to follow.

You know, in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 20 and following, for what credit is it if when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But if you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God, for to this you were called. To what? What were we called? I thought we're called to glory. That's right.

We're called to glory, but that we're called to suffer, though we're innocent. That's part of the call to glory, is to go through undeserved suffering. To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps.

His example of suffering is an example for us to follow in suffering. You know, a lot of people might say, you know, Jesus suffered for us so we wouldn't have to suffer. He, you know, He was whipped so we wouldn't have to be sick.

He was, He went through trials so we wouldn't have to go through trials. No, He went through trials so that we would have His example of going through trials to follow. The example of Christ, look to that.

Of course we can't see Him with our eyes. We have to remember Him. We have to call Him to mind.

He's not seen, but He is known. Whom having not seen, you love, Peter said in 1 Peter chapter 1 and verse, I think, 6. We haven't seen Him, but we love Him. We haven't seen Him, but we know Him.

We look unto Jesus, though we don't, He's not visible to us. His example becomes a strength to us, and it puts things in perspective. If you're going through suffering and you're starting to feel sorry for yourself, becoming bitter, remember Jesus.

You haven't suffered like He has yet, and His Father loved Him and made Him go through what He went through, but we also know His Father glorified Him, which is also the promise of what He'll do to us. The example of Jesus becomes something to focus upon. These are unseen things.

We must be looking at not what is seen, but is unseen. The sovereignty of God, the goodness of God, not visible things, not obvious things in times of suffering, but real things. You have to see them.

You have to look at them and the example of Christ. Another thing we don't see yet, of course, is the benefits that we will have from suffering. We can't see those yet.

We don't see the future. Again, faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the

evidence of things not seen. My faith tells me that I will benefit from these sufferings.

How do I know that? The Word of God says so. All things work together for good to those who love God were they called according to His purpose. After you've suffered a while, it says God will strengthen you and establish you in 1 Peter 5.10. There are promises that after our suffering comes glory, after our suffering comes benefit, that God is doing this for our benefit, that we might be partakers of His holiness.

Those promises, I'm not seeing it when I'm suffering. They're future. You don't see the benefit while you're suffering.

If you did, that would alleviate the suffering a little too much and make the test different, but you know they're there. They're unseen, but you look to them. In Hebrews 12, verses 10 and 11, speaking of our earthly fathers, it says, For they indeed for a few days chastened us, as seemed best to them.

But He does it for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful. Nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

That hasn't been seen yet. That's coming up. I have to look to those, have to look to the finish line.

You have to look to the crown. I look to say, why am I in this race anyway? Why am I going through this? Oh yeah, there's something at the end. It's the glory of God.

That's, I need to remind myself of that. Job 23.10, Job the sufferer said, But he, meaning God, knows the way I take. When he has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

The idea that testing of our faith through suffering is like the perfecting of gold is also in 1 Peter 1.7. He says, If need be, you are in trials. But the trying of your faith, being much more precious than gold, perishes. You shall be found in a glory and honor at the coming of Christ.

So there's a glory that comes, just like we're being tested, the impurities are being removed. In Psalm 119 and verse 67, the psalmist said, Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now I keep your word.

That's good. I always wanted to be more obedient. I didn't really want to get there that way.

But that's how it got me there. I went astray before I was afflicted. Now I have been afflicted.

I don't go astray anymore. That's good. I need to realize there's rewards lying ahead.

I'll be a better person if I respond to God faithfully in this situation. Now, Peter gives very specific instructions about how to respond to trials. He says in 1 Peter 4, verse 19, Therefore, let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to him in doing good as to a faithful creator.

Now, this is what you do. Am I suffering? Okay. What am I supposed to do? I'm supposed to commit the keeping of my soul to God by doing good.

Now, in many cases, in Peter's day, the reason people were suffering because they were doing good, they were actually following Jesus and suffering persecution for it. The temptation at that point is to kind of back off on doing good, because that's what's making me so unpopular. That's what's bringing these sufferings.

I'm suffering because I'm doing the right thing. Maybe I can just back off and not do so much good. No, commit the keeping of your soul to God by doing good.

You keep doing good. Well then, but I'm walking strip smack into this danger of persecution. Well, leave that to God.

You commit that to him. You can try to rescue yourself by compromising. Maybe you'll get less persecution that way, but you'll be worse off for it.

Keep doing the good thing. Keep on course. Finish strong.

Keep doing the right thing, and in doing so, you're committing your situation into God's hands, and Peter said that's what you do. If you suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of your soul to him by doing good as unto a faithful creator. That's what Jesus did, isn't it? Jesus, when he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, he said, Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass for me, but not my will, but yours be done, and so he just committed the case into his Father's hands.

Peter took a sword, and Jesus said, put away your sword. The cup the Father has given me, I'm going to drink it. I'm not going to rescue myself.

I'm going to put myself in his hands. I'm going to be totally obedient, drink the cup he gives me, and leave the outcome with him, and sure enough, one of the last things Jesus said before he expired on the cross was, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. The very thing that we're told to do, commit the keeping of your soul to him if you're suffering.

Jesus said, into your hands I commit my spirit. Actually, he was quoting Psalm 31.5, and from what I've read, this line, 31.5 of Psalms, was actually a bedtime prayer that Jewish children learned from their parents. Sort of like, now I lay me down to sleep, I pray to your Lord my soul to keep.

Into your hands I commit my spirit. It's like a childhood prayer taken from Psalm 31.5. Probably the first prayer Jesus ever learned from his mother or father as a child, and also his last prayer as he died. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

I've often thought how Mary's there at the cross, hearing him say that, might have felt as she really she taught him that prayer when he was a little boy, and now it serves him at his time of extreme suffering. And he did it. He committed the keeping of his soul to God, and hey, it turned out good.

He died, but he rose again. It was glorified. So it was safe.

It is safe to commit the keeping of your soul to God. If you are suffering, just keep doing the right thing. Keep doing the obedient thing.

Keep moving forward in the will of God. Is that what's causing your suffering? Is it because you're not compromising that people are doing bad things to you? Well, keep it up. Walk right into the wood chipper.

Commit your case to God by doing the right thing. Now, this is how Paul says we benefit from sufferings. When we are going through these sufferings, we are looking at the things that are not seen, and that's primarily God and his attributes.

Attributes that we take for granted when we're not suffering, but are a little harder to affirm when we are suffering. He's still on the throne. He's still good.

What he does is faithful and good. And Jesus, he went through stuff like this, worse than this. And he's my example.

And there are changes and rewards and improvements that are promised to be made through my suffering if I go through it properly. I'm going to trust God in this. And again, it was Job's cry, if he slaves me, I'll still trust him.

This is the, it's when you trust God in your trials and continue to do good and commit your case to him by doing good. That's when you're safe. Not safe from suffering, but safe from disaster, spiritually and ultimately.

Because people who don't look to God in their suffering, and instead they look at who they're going to blame for it and what all the things were that caused it, and they become embittered by people who failed them or people who did injustices to them. These people don't improve in their suffering, through their suffering. They go through the same suffering, they pay the same price, but they don't move any closer to being like Jesus, but less so.

And Christians waste their suffering sometimes this way. Now, there's one aspect of sufferings I didn't address, and I just might take a moment to do so. I talk about this

often enough under other headings when people ask me about them, but this is certainly related.

I mentioned that God is bringing many sons to glory, but why? It's because he intends for us to reign with him. He made Adam and Eve so that there'd be someone in his image to whom he could give dominion over the things he made. The original creation of mankind, after the animals had all been made, was to give mankind a shared rule with God over what had been created.

God has never changed his purpose. The problem is Adam and Eve had to be tested to see if they're the right stuff. You can't hand over the family business to a son who hasn't been shown to be reliable.

You can't give over your surgery practice to a son who flunked all his medical school exams. You want to give it to him, but you can't give it to an untested person. He could destroy everything you've made.

So what did he do? He made people so that they could reign with him over the creation, but he had to test them to see if they are going to be okay in that role. Well, what does that regard? What do they have to be? They have to be loyal. They have to be trustworthy.

They have to be unselfish. When you give unlimited power to people who are selfish, it's a disaster. You can have people who you give them authority and power because they won't abuse it because they're not selfish.

They'll use it to serve instead of to, you know, dominate. People have to be tested before they can be trusted. That's why there are tests at universities.

You don't let someone be a brain surgeon if he has not been tested to see if he's learned brain surgery. You don't let a person have responsible positions if you don't know if he's learned how to do it or if he can be trusted to do it. That's exams are for.

Temptation and trial and suffering are, in a sense, the exams. God intends for us to reign with him, but since the fall, all of us have been disqualified. He's trying to qualify some of us.

He's trying to bring more of us into his own image to change us to be more like Jesus so we can do what Jesus does in a sense so we can reign with him. We'll be joint heirs with Christ of all the Bible says. The Bible says if we endure, we'll reign with him, says in 2 Timothy 2. This is God's intention.

In Revelation 5 10, the saints in heaven are saying, we shall reign on the earth. That's true. Jesus said to his disciples, the meat shall inherit the earth.

We're going to reign on the earth with Christ if we qualify, but qualification means we go through the tests. Suffering not only builds character, which is what we've been focusing on, but it tests character. When Job was allowed to suffer, it was more of a test than character building.

He saw it as character building. You know, when he was testing me, I'll come forth as gold. He saw he was going to be approved and purified through this thing.

No doubt he was, but the test happened because the devil said he's not the right stuff, and God said he is. And the devil says, well, let me let me let me hurt him. And then you'll find out he's not.

God said, you can hurt him because God knew that Job would pass that test. He, Job was being tested. You are being tested.

When, when my wife was killed, I remember having this, this visual thing in my head when the paramedics said she's dead. And I, for the first moment, I knew she died. I pictured sort of a scene out of Job chapter one or two, where I could sort of picture it almost comically, God and the devil looking over a cloud at me.

That moment that I was told your wife is dead, I felt like God and the devil are watching. Which way is this going to go? Is he going to curse God or is he going to trust God? I don't think there's ever any doubt in God's mind which way it was going to go, nor in mine, but it was a test. Clearly a test.

When you lose things, you're being tested. Passing the test is qualifying, enduring, faithful to the end. Jesus said to the church of Samaritan in Revelation 2.10, be faithful unto death and I'll give you the crown of life.

A crown is given to you when you're going to reign, but you have to be faithful in hard times, in persecution, even in martyrdom. Be faithful unto death and you'll win. You'll qualify.

So, again, this is a reason there is suffering. This is the reason there's temptation. Now, suffering is simply another kind of temptation.

It's a test. As well as having redeeming value in changing us, as I said, it tests our loyalty. Lots of people will follow Jesus until it gets hard.

Jesus said some of the seed falls on rocky ground. It's shallow. It doesn't have any root in it.

It springs up, but it dies when the sun comes up real quick because it has no root. He said these are those who when they hear the word of the kingdom, immediately with joy they receive it, but when persecution and tribulation come because of the word, they

quickly fall away because they have no roots. That's what these trials test.

You're excited about Jesus. Well, he should just hand over a planet to you, right? He should just hand over the creation, give you the car, give you the keys to the business. Well, wait, not so fast.

Not so fast. You're all excited about Jesus, but you haven't had the sun come up yet to see if you're going to get scorched. Tribulations and persecutions, those have to come, and if you find you get withered and died and so forth, then you're not going to reign.

You're not the right stuff. Trials and pains and sufferings serve to see will you serve God when he's not easy on you. That's how Job was being tested.

The devil said he serves you just because you're so good to him. Be hard on him and you'll see he won't serve you. That's the test.

When you're going through trials, know that that is the test. If you lose your faith, if you become bitter against God, you failed, it may not be your last test. Final exam probably isn't until about the time you die, but there's lots of pop quizzes, and when you experience unexpected suffering, that's a pop quiz.

How you doing? You getting better at this? You getting better at trusting God, being faithful to God? Now, those are the things the Bible, those are some of the things the Bible says. You know, as I was teaching, I kept thinking things. I didn't have these in here.

I didn't have these in here. I mean, there's all these new, all these ideas that are from the Bible that aren't even in my notes that we didn't cover. It's amazing because suffering is a major part of reality, and the Bible is about reality, so it says a lot about suffering from a lot of different angles, but I hope, since we're essentially out of time, that, and we're not going to take any more, that bringing these particular thoughts up, bringing them to our attention, hoping to clarify them and explain them, will go a long way toward helping you to make sense of suffering in your life because you will suffer.

I'm sorry to say, as I look at you, I hope none of you suffer, but you will. I don't wish it on you or on me, but in a sense, I do, too, because if it's not good, God wouldn't have it for you or me, and so, you know, I don't look forward to my next big trial, honestly. I do not look forward to it, but I'll tell you what will happen when it comes.

I intend to pass. I intend to grow. I intend to embrace the will of God, and I hope that's where you stand, also, because you'll be glad if you do, and God will be glad, and that's even more important.

God will be glorified. So, this is a few minutes early. Are there any questions? Yes, pretty much.

Is the issue of the test whether you're denying God in small ways or big ways? You know, if you deny Christ, say, I don't want Christ. I'm done. You know, if this is what, if this is the way God treats me, I don't want anything to do with him.

I'm done with Jesus. That's denying him in a big way. That's, you know, that was like what the devil wanted Job to do, to curse God to his face, okay, but we can deny God in smaller ways that aren't quite so final or quite so terminal.

I mean, we can deny him by not speaking up when we should speak up, you know, and why don't we speak up? Because we kind of anticipate people disliking us or someone hurting us or rejection. We, it's suffering we're trying to avoid, and so we are often tested to know whether we will do what we should do or not what we should do. In a sense, if we do what we shouldn't do, in a sense, that's denying the Lord, but not in the final sense of, you know, like giving up your salvation and that.

Christians make, Christians lose and fail small tests a great deal, but we're still enrolled in the Course, you know. We're not flunking out, and I mean, we would flunk out if we finally gave up on God. Well, repentance is kind of, what would you call it? Yeah, it is definitely a test in and out of sins, because once you have sinned, you've in a sense failed a test, but there's another test now.

Will you repent or will you try to cover it up? You know, there's another temptation there, you know, okay, I've got a sin I committed, now there's a duty to repent, but there's a temptation not to, so there's another failure I could make, you know. I mean, in a sense, after I know myself to have sinned, am I going to say, I want to cover this up, I'm going to deny that I sinned, I'm going to ignore it, I'm going to go on as if nothing happened, or am I going to repent like I should? You know, obviously only one is the... that's a multiple choice question, but there's only one right answer, you know. So, in a sense, repentance is passing another test.

It's amazing how many tests there are, you know, you're facing a really strong temptation, you're finding you win it, and then the next thing you're tempted to be proud of yourself, you know. I mean, wait a minute, I just got through this, now there's another test. Now, that's what life is.

This is the school, this is the course, and this is where the tests are. No more tests after that. People sometimes say, you know, when we go to heaven or the new Jerusalem or whatever, will we still have free choice? I mean, will we be in danger of possibly falling again like Adam and Eve did? They didn't have a sinful nature, and they fell anyway, you know.

Would they, would we, you know, when we go to heaven, is that the last verdict, or could we fall again? Well, you see, heaven is not a place of testing. This world and this life is the place of testing. Heaven and the new earth are the place of rewarding those who

pass the tests, you see.

There's not going to be a devil who's a tester. There's not going to be a forbidden fruit. That was the test.

We are all tested in this life. Those who end up in the new earth reigning with Christ, they have passed the test. There's no more testing.

They graduate, and therefore we will have free will, but there won't be anyone trying to lure us to do the wrong thing. The truth is, the people who make it to heaven are the ones who all their lifetime wanted to be obedient, and the failures in their lives were because of missteps or weakness or, you know, you know, bad judgment. I mean, we all sin.

We all stumble, but if you really love the Lord, you don't want to stumble. You don't want to sin. You sin because you're thinking wrong, or you're weak, or you're fooled, or you go the wrong way before you know it's the wrong way, and all of a sudden you're falling off a cliff.

I mean, Christians sin, but they don't sin because they want to be sinners. They sin because they're weak. Only those who want to not sin are the ones who are really followers of Christ.

In this life, we fail, but that's because we're going to continue to be tested in those areas, but when we get to heaven or the new earth, there won't be any more testing, and those of us who are there are the ones who do not want to sin, and there won't be anyone there luring us to. In a sense, we'll have more free will there than we have now, because now I want to live a perfect life, but I've got conflicts that I don't like. Like Paul said, the flesh and the spirit wrestle against each other.

That crisis is not going to be going on, so I don't have completely free will because my will is to obey God and live a holy life. Like Paul said, it was my mind. I delight in the law of God.

That is good, but I find this other thing in my members that's bringing me into bondage. My will is not completely free. If it was, I'd obey God all the time.

There's this other thing fighting against my will, so when I'm glorified and with the Lord, there won't be this other thing fighting against me. I'll have perfect free will to be perfectly holy, and so there won't be any fall. There's not even going to be any temptation to fall.

Now, I think some Christians wonder because in their hearts, they're not so sure they want to be holy. They feel like they have to be holy or else they'll go to hell, but honestly, they'd kind of like to have some sin, and they're afraid maybe if I go to heaven,

I'll still be having a struggle. Well, if you really love the Lord, you won't be having that struggle there.

You won't have sin in your members, in your glorious body. You know, there won't be a devil there to deceive and to tempt. So the tests are all for this life, and there won't be more afterwards.

Any other questions before we wrap up? Yeah, bro. Uh-huh. The question is, the Bible says in 2 Corinthians 5 that God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us.

Do I believe that Jesus, in becoming sin for us, took all the consequences of all the sins of all humanity upon him, and that's what made it such a crushing, horrible experience for him? I would say yes, that's how I see it. You know, the Bible doesn't enunciate all those phrases just as we gave them, but as far as I'm concerned, I think it's implied. And remember in the cross, Jesus was having a real... I mean, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus was having a real struggle with the prospect of the cross, and yet many people were crucified.

His crucifixion was a little easier for the most, because he died after six hours. Most people hung there for three days alive, you know. So, I mean, he gave up the ghost after six hours.

His crucifixion, in terms of the actual physical suffering, was perhaps not as bad as a lot of other people were crucified. Some of them probably went to their death more stoically than he was. So what, was he a wimp or what? No, I think we understand usually that there was more than just a cross he was facing.

There was more than just the physical pain and agony of the cross that anyone crucified could go through. He also was bearing something on his... a burden on his spirit that was unique that no one has ever borne, you know, the weight of the sins of the world. And, of course, many people believe that he experienced at that time God himself turning his back on him because of the sinfulness.

Now, the Bible's not all clear on that, but that's a pretty common belief. Some people think that what Jesus dreaded about the cross most was that separation from God and, you know, the alienation that he'd never known previously. And that, you know, the physical pain was not a big issue, but it was more of an inward trial that he was going to go through.

He certainly suffered more than people normally do, although his physical suffering, his circumstances, bad as they were, were not the worst that any man ever went through. But if you add the spiritual dimension of what he was going through, I think it makes it uniquely horrendous.