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Transformation Through Suffering (Part 2)



Cultivating Christian Character - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg discusses the role of suffering in shaping one's character, arguing that humility is a trait that rarely develops without experiencing affliction. He suggests that suffering can provide testimony to God's power and reminds listeners that even Jesus himself suffered. According to Gregg, faith in God's unseen plan can transform one's sufferings into something altogether different and beneficial for growth and development, and that ultimately God's hand chooses our path, and we must accept it with an appointment rather than disappointment.

Transcript

Last time we began talking about the role that affliction or suffering plays in shaping our character. And at that time, among other things, I was going through a list that I had accumulated of character traits which can be obtained only through suffering. Now, I'm not saying that all character traits can be obtained only through suffering.

But there are some which simply cannot be obtained otherwise. Or if they can be obtained, they can't be obtained with the same profound depth without suffering. And that list included things like endurance and compassion and obedience.

Even Jesus learned obedience through the things he suffered, we're told in Hebrews 5.8. We receive comfort from God when we suffer, which we do not receive if we don't suffer, because we don't need it if we don't suffer. And yet that comfort from God is when he draws near to those who have a broken heart, as the scripture says. Certainly that is something that is a great and invaluable advantage.

Of course, trust in God. As we said, when we're not suffering and when things are going only well for us, we pretty much have everything under control. We have everything in hand.

We don't have to trust God. But when God removes the props and the comforts and the crutches and we are desperate, then we are forced to trust God. And God wants us to be in that condition sometimes.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians, that when he was in Asia, he was pressed above strength, beyond measure. Above his strength. God had him in a circumstance that was beyond his strength.

And he says, for we had the sentence of death in ourselves, so that we might learn not to trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. God had Paul in a condition where there was absolutely nothing Paul could do to save his own life. What could he do then but just trust in God who raises the dead, rather than trusting in himself.

So, suffering often puts us in that condition. Humility is another character trait that rarely comes without suffering. Again, for the same reason.

Because when we're not suffering, when we're prospering and healthy and comfortable and all things are going our way, we just kind of get a little bit uppity and cocky. It says in Deuteronomy, of God's dealings with the children of Israel in the wilderness, it says he humbled them and caused them to hunger. He had to make them uncomfortable.

He had to make them go without food. Or at least the kind of food they liked. They called that suffering.

They wimped out and complained about it. And yet, he did that to humble them. Prayerfulness also comes of suffering.

We pray much more when we're suffering. Or at least more passionately. More urgently.

Than when we're not suffering. Prayerfulness is a good trait to have. It's a good habit.

It's a good characteristic. And God works that in us through suffering. Also, I think when we closed last time, the last thing I got to in the list was homesickness for heaven.

We're not as homesick for heaven. Again, when we're happy and prosperous and all things are well for us here. But when we're miserable, that's when we begin to look forward to seeing Jesus.

When John wrote that last prayer in the Bible, Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. It was in a context of suffering. He was in exile in Patmos.

He was a companion with his readers in the tribulation of Jesus Christ. That tribulation caused him to long for Jesus to come. Paul, when he was in prison, said that he was not comfortable there.

And he said he had this desire to depart and be with the Lord. That desire to depart and be with the Lord is much more pronounced when our comforts here are removed and when we're suffering here. There are a couple of other things we didn't get to last time.

I just want to go over them very quickly. And then I want to talk about a whole new

category that's related to this and a very important application. Another benefit that is derived from suffering is a testimony to God's power.

If you think about it, almost all of you know who Johnny Erickson Tata is. Anyone here does not know who Johnny is? Don't feel embarrassed if you don't. Everybody knows who Johnny is.

Anyone here doesn't know who Corrie Ten Boom was? Everybody knows who Corrie Ten Boom was. Who are these people? Very ordinary people. What are they known for? How did they become household words? How is it that their very name inspires us now? One of these was simply a selfish teenage girl like any other until she got paralyzed from the neck down.

But because of the grace of God that she has exhibited in the time of her suffering and the way that God has clearly used her in spite of her handicap, she's got a testimony that's been found in movies and books and radio programs. I mean, she's got a tremendous witness because of her suffering. Same thing with Corrie Ten Boom.

I think she was in her 40s before she had anything extraordinary happen to her. She was an old maid. If 40s is old, I'm old.

I'm 40-something. She was an old maid and just worked with her father in a clock shop until the Nazis came in and she began to be involved in hiding Jews from the Nazis. And then she was arrested and taken to a prison camp.

And there she suffered horrible things, as did everybody in those camps. And really, her sister, more than she, exhibited tremendous grace in that situation. It was only after that was over that Corrie herself really came through to have a right attitude toward her.

But when she did, God just used her in her testimony of that suffering. Without that suffering, Corrie Ten Boom would have lived and died in obscurity. She would have never traveled the whole world as she eventually did.

And everyone in the body of Christ, I suppose, knows her name and knows what she's known for. And what is it but suffering? Many Christians throughout the world know the name of Richard Wurmbrandt. His name may not be as much a household word as that of Corrie Ten Boom, but he was a Romanian pastor who suffered for many years.

I think it was 14 years in communist prisons and has since been released. But his sufferings, of course, have made a tremendous ministry for him, a ministry that is blessing thousands. Those who suffer, often God intends through that suffering to give them a testimony.

It may not be that your name will become a household word or that you'll travel all over the world and everyone will hear about your sufferings and marvel. But it may be that

your suffering will be a testimony to those in your family or those who see you, those who work with you. When my wife was killed, I didn't make an effort to be courageous in that situation, but God gave me tremendous grace in that.

And it was a tremendous inspiration to many who were around. And many people were saved as a result of that. I know of several personally who were saved because of it.

And it was simply because of the grace of God in the situation. The Apostle Paul, when he was suffering in prison, indicated that his suffering had turned out for a testimony too, a testimony that would not have existed in that sphere where he was suffering and bearing witness. And that was in, of course, Caesar's household.

He was in prison in Rome. And in Philippians chapter 1, verses 12 through 14, Paul said, But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which have happened to me, meaning his wrongful arrest and imprisonment, and he was, by the way, rotting in prison. At the time he wrote this, he had been in prison for at least four years awaiting trial.

There were no speedy trials that they got in those days. And he was taken out of commission, out of circulation for four years before a man as active and who so urgently wanted to reach the world as Paul did. That must have seemed terribly long time to simply be cooling his heels there.

And yet he saw that it provided him a ministry that he would not have had without being in prison. He says, I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard and to all the rest that my chains are in Christ and that most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. So the palace guard all were evangelized by Paul because he was an inmate.

If he had not been a prisoner there, he would have never had access to these people. By the way, at the end of the epistle, he sends greetings to the Philippians from the saints who were in Caesar's household, which no doubt became saints because Paul was there and would never have been otherwise. He also says there in Philippians 1 and verse 28, he says, and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation and that of God.

That is, when you are suffering, it is a testimony to the unbelievers of the rightness of your message. Jesus said when asked by his disciples in John chapter 9 whether this man born blind was born in this condition because of his sins or the sins of his parents, Jesus said, neither this man nor his parents sin, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. That's why he suffered, so that the works of God should be revealed in him, that he would have a testimony.

And boy did he. Jesus healed him and the whole of Jerusalem was in a tumult over it. And it became a great testimony of Jesus, not only to Jerusalem in general, but to the chief priests before whom this man was hailed and questioned.

And so our sufferings, one way or another, either by God giving us grace in the midst of them or by his relieving of them miraculously, in the case of that man, becomes a testimony. I remember in the early days of the Jesus movement, one of the young men who came all the time to the church where we went every night to sing and to hear the Bible taught, was a man in a wheelchair who had four limbs that were the wrong shape. I never did know what his malady was, but he was crippled and not only was he unable to use any of his limbs, but his face was disfigured and something about his vocal apparatus was not working.

He could make sounds, but he could not make intelligible speech, though he must have been in his twenties. But on the back of his wheelchair was written, I praise the Lord, do you? And he did. I couldn't understand what he was saying, but I assumed he meant to be saying what everyone else was singing at the same time.

But God understood, and what's more, I think many understood the testimony that he had because he was so greatly misshapen and so greatly disabled, and yet he praised God in it. Certainly, if nothing else, your sufferings give you an opportunity to have a different kind of testimony, a more powerful testimony in many cases than you would otherwise have had, depending on, of course, your response to suffering, which we're going to talk about tonight. One other thing I would mention, though, and this is really related to some of the things that were on the list earlier, and that is that by suffering, we are able to fellowship with Jesus in a way that we could not if we did not suffer.

The Apostle Paul expressed it this way in Philippians 3.10, he said, that I might know him in the power of his resurrection and in the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death. Now, the fellowship of his sufferings, the word fellowship means a sharing together, a partnership in something. Fellowship in Jesus' sufferings.

Paul wanted to know Christ through a partnership or sharing together with Christ in Christ's sufferings. Elsewhere in Colossians chapter 1, Paul said, I rejoice now in my suffering for you that I may in my flesh fill up what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ for the sake of his body, the church. Paul rejoiced in his sufferings because he considered that he and Christ were suffering together.

Now, going through things together with somebody else can be a very bonding experience. You know, if you live in the same house with somebody, but you never really face any crises together, you never really have any trials together, there is not the tendency to become bonded in the same way as if both parties are together experiencing a crisis and working through that crisis together. Going through a trial together.

There are people with whom I became best friends in my early life by going through certain persecutions together and certain other hardships. And I'm sure that you know very well that if you have never suffered, it would be hard to relate on an equal footing with somebody whose whole life has been characterized by suffering. Like Jesus, who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

How can you know him well if you know no sorrows, if you're never acquainted with grief? Thomas Watson, an old Puritan writer, said Christ was crowned with thorns and we want to be crowned with roses. But we cannot be in fellowship with him who is crowned with thorns if we're only crowned with roses. If we're crowned with thorns, too, then there is a point of sharing together, participating with him in his sufferings.

And Paul said that that was a means by which he hoped to know Christ more. That I might know him in the fellowship of his sufferings, he said. So, fellowship with Jesus is yet another benefit that we gain or can gain through suffering.

Now, I need to keep saying this. These are potential benefits. They are not guaranteed benefits.

They are not automatic. Corrie ten Boom was not the only person who was in Auschwitz. She may be the only person who was ever there who has a tremendous and well-known testimony.

She certainly was purified like gold is tried and purified through the fire through her experience. But there were many other people in Auschwitz with her who were not made more pure, who were not made more holy, who were not made sweet. Her spirit was made more sweet through the experience.

There were many who went through the same experience in the same bunk room with her who probably became more bitter. They suffered the same, but they did not have the same result. This is always the case.

There are people who go through identical sufferings but do not have the identical or even a similar benefit. Because one person going through sufferings will become better. Another going through the same sufferings will only become bitter.

One person becomes softer toward God through sufferings. Another becomes hardened toward God through sufferings. Now this is not merely sovereign.

I say merely sovereign because certainly the sovereignty of God has a lot to do with the way things turn out for the believer. But there are responses that the believer is called upon and commanded to make to sufferings. And which, if obeyed, become the means by which trials are turned to gold, as Keith Green put it in one of his songs.

I think it was Origen who was trying to explain how the same grace of God would soften

some people to God and harden others, like Pharaoh. I think it was Origen who said that some people's hearts are like wax and some are like clay or mud. The same warmth of the sun can shine on both and the wax will melt and the clay will harden.

And if our hearts are hard toward God and we do not respond to our sufferings in the way that God commands and instructs us to do, then we will simply become harder, like clay exposed to the heat. But if we are soft toward God, if we are responsive to Him, then the same sufferings can soften our hearts and make us more malleable in His hand and cause Him to be more able to conform us without resistance to the image of Christ. There are several things that I have put in the notes that I want to call your attention to that have to do with the right response to suffering.

The Bible itself tells us very plainly how it is that we can benefit from sufferings. But before we talk about that, I want to talk about the fact that the Bible also tells us that we may suffer in vain. It is possible to suffer and gain nothing by it, says the Scripture.

In Jeremiah chapter 2 and verse 30, God says, In vain I have chastened your children. They received no correction. They received chastening.

They suffered, but they did not change. They did not receive correction. Unlike the psalmist that said, It is good for me that I was afflicted, because before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your statutes.

There are some who are afflicted and they still go astray. In vain I have chastened your children. They do not receive correction.

God said in Jeremiah chapter 2 and verse 30. Isaiah chapter 9 and verse 13 has the same complaint of the people of Israel. It says, For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, nor do they seek the Lord of hosts.

Now, obviously this is what he hopes for, is that they will turn to Him. He is striking them. He is subjecting them to chastisement.

He is subjecting them to suffering. But they are not turning to Him. They are suffering in vain.

They are just taking blows and they are not getting any better from it. What a tragedy. To have to take the same blows as you would have to take to improve, but to take them and not improve.

Even the New Testament speaks of suffering in vain. Paul talks to the Galatians who seemed, at the time that he wrote to them, to be drifting into heresy. After they had been faithful for some time and had suffered loss for their faithfulness previously.

And he said to them in Galatians 3, 4, Have you suffered so many things in vain? If

indeed it was in vain. Well, have you suffered in vain? Many years ago in the 70's there was a very popular Christian book by a man named Paul Bilheimer. Some of you might remember him or his book.

He had more than one book, but the one that he became well known for was called Don't Waste Your Sorrows. I never read the book. I knew the concept.

But I knew what he was talking about. He was talking about the fact that you're going to have sorrows. It's a given.

You will have sorrows. But you can waste them. Or you can, as it were, spend them as capital upon character improvement.

You can grow through your sorrows. Or you can simply have sorrows and not grow. In which case you're paying the same price, but you're not getting anything.

You're wasting your sorrows. I'll tell you now what the scripture says about how not to waste your sorrows. How not to suffer in vain.

How to guarantee that your suffering will bring you forward and upward in your transformation into the image of Christ. Without these considerations, without submitting to these principles, there is no great likelihood that you will improve by your sufferings. But if you follow these biblical principles, I will guarantee you, because God does, that you will benefit through your sufferings.

So, be aware of them, please. It says in 1 Peter 4, verse 12, Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you as though some strange thing happened to you. Now this is the first principle.

Don't think it strange. You see, many Christians have been taught that if you behave well, you will avoid trouble. You'll avoid trials.

If you have faith, you will not get sick. If you have faith, you will not have to face poverty. If you simply make positive confessions, all things will go in the way that you confess that they will go.

When Christians suffer unexpected reversals in their fortunes and in their well-being, one of the first things that many ask themselves is, What did I do wrong? Is God upset with me? Am I paid up on my tithes? Have I done everything right yet? What am I doing wrong? And the assumption is, if they can run through a mental checklist and say, Well, I can't think of any sin I've done. I've done everything right. I paid my tithes.

And yet, this happened. And they think it's strange. The problem is that if you have been taught or if you have been led to believe that if you behave well and if you live a life pleasing to God, He will reward you by keeping suffering out of your life, then you've not

heard a biblical teaching.

And you will begin to question God Himself. Your faith will be shaken by sufferings if you have indeed done nothing to deserve it and it happens to you and you've been taught that these things aren't supposed to happen to you when you're doing what's right. And so, the first thing to realize is it isn't strange.

Don't think it is. Don't get confused. Don't let your faith be shaken.

Don't say, What's going on? This isn't the way it's supposed to be. Realize it is the way it's supposed to be. Man is born to sorrow as surely as sparks fly upward, Job said in Job 5, 7. It's normal to suffer.

Man is born to trouble as sparks fly upward. As universally as sparks fly upward from a fire, so universally man is born to experience trouble. In 1 Corinthians 10, 13, Paul said, No temptation is overtaken you except such as is common to man.

But God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond that which you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape that you may be able to bear it. Now, the experiences of temptation and testing that you go through, the trials you go through, these are just the same kind that all people go through. There's nothing happens to you but what is common to man.

Don't think it's strange when it happens to you. As I said earlier, it amazes me when people go just fine in their faith until somebody in their family dies. And suddenly they think, I can't believe in a God who would let my three-year-old daughter be killed by a train.

Well, you had no problem believing in God before your daughter was killed by a train. But when you were in the middle of something, were you unaware that daughters and sons and parents and brothers and sisters and wives and husbands are killed every day by the thousands? In some way or another, that didn't bother you. It didn't shake your faith until it touched you.

Which only, of course, shows how self-centered we are. God doesn't have to explain Himself until He hurts us. But people are hurting around the world every day.

It doesn't seem to bother us because we don't care as much about them as we do about ourselves. Listen, nothing happens to you but such as is common to people. When it happens to you, don't think it's strange.

It happens to people everywhere. You're going to lose your loved ones. They're going to die.

You might die before some of them do, but they're all going to die. Unless, of course,

they happen to be living at the time that Jesus returns, which we all hope and every generation of Christians so far has hoped. And I don't know that we have any more reason, we certainly don't have any more assurance than they do that we will live to be that generation.

Maybe we will, maybe we won't. But apart from that very unusual, that very unique exception, we're all going to die. And we might as well just face it.

If someone dies, don't think that's strange. That's normal. Peter said in 1 Peter 5, 9, Resist Satan, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

The sufferings you're going through, it's common. The brothers throughout the whole world are going through sufferings. Don't think it's so unique.

Don't think yourself so special. Don't think it's strange that it touches you. Accept it as normal.

That's the starting point. Now, the real key to changing sufferings into benefits is you need to learn to see what is invisible. Now, that sounds rather difficult, doesn't it? Can you see what's invisible? Well, the Bible says you can.

And when you learn to see what is invisible, not everything that's invisible, just certain things that you have to keep sight of, you need to not lose sight of certain invisible truths and times of suffering. And it is by holding on to these invisible realities that you will benefit from it. In Hebrews 11, 27, speaking of Moses when he fled from Pharaoh and went into the wilderness, it says, By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.

Now, this latter part of the verse, Hebrews 11, 27, says, For he endured as seeing him who is invisible. Moses had to leave the comforts of the palace where he'd always lived for the 40 years of his life and go live out in the wilderness for a while, out in the desert. And though he was a tough character and handled himself well, it was certainly a sudden change from the palatial accommodations to which he was accustomed to that nomadic desert tent dwelling life which he endured for another 40 years.

He endured it, though, it says, as one who can see him who is invisible. Well, who is him that's invisible? God. Moses at that time had never yet seen God.

And yet he endured as if he could, as if he did. Now, if you're going through great trials and you feel like you're all alone, it's much harder. But if you could see Jesus, I'm not suggesting that you visualize him or anything like that, but if Jesus were visibly present with you in any trial, wouldn't that sort of change the way you experience the trial? At the moment when you're going through the greatest trial, maybe even torture.

None of us have been through that yet, but Christians do go through that. Maybe we will. Who knows? If you're being tortured, even to the point of death, would it make a difference to you if you could see Jesus there? If Jesus was visibly standing there, giving his approval to you and encouraging you? Of course that would change everything.

Well, you can't see Jesus. He's invisible. But by faith, faith is the evidence of things that are not seen.

Jesus said, I'll never leave you nor forsake you. When you go through your sufferings, he is there whether you see him or not. Moses could not see God when he went through his sufferings, but he endured as if he could.

Why? Because he had faith. By faith he did this. Faith does for you the same thing as seeing does for you.

It is the evidence of the unseen realm, just as vision is the evidence of the seen realm. Your faith in God and that which is unseen will make it possible for you to endure in a unique way that others who cannot see by faith cannot do. Now, this is not just some kind of metaphysical, mystical mumbo-jumbo.

We're going to talk about some very plain, ordinary things that the Bible teaches that are unseen realities, but once you lay hold of them and believe them, it transforms your sufferings into something altogether different than it would otherwise be. In 2 Corinthians, we have one of the most important scriptures on this subject. In 2 Corinthians 4, if we would ask, where in the Bible does it tell me how to make sure that my sufferings turn out for my good rather than being wasted? The passage that speaks most clearly to this of all passages in Scripture, in my judgment, is 2 Corinthians 4, 16-18, where Paul said, Therefore we do not lose heart, even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being 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, but the things that are not seen are eternal. Now notice what Paul said.

Paul said, our outer man is perishing, but the inner man is going the other direction. It's being renewed day by day. Getting better and better all the time.

Every day, my inner man is being renewed in the image of Christ. Even though my outward man is getting worse every day, because Paul was suffering. Now, he says, our light affliction works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory while we do something.

Now, when we don't do this, it doesn't. Your affliction will work for you glory, the image of Christ in you, while you do something. If you don't do that something, it won't.

Paul is not saying it's automatic that when we have affliction, we get glory in exchange for it. No, he says that affliction works glory for us while we look, not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. Is that not the same thing we said earlier? Seeing the invisible, looking at that which is not seen? Now again, this isn't something mystical.

It's simply the case that Christianity calls upon us, as all faith systems do, of their adherence, to believe certain things to be true, whether we have seen them to be true or not. Whether there's any visible, tangible evidence that they are true or not. If the word of God declares that they are true, then they are true and the Christian is called upon to believe it.

And if the person believes it, then that serves the believer the same as if he could see it. Because faith is the evidence of the things that are not seen. What things are not seen? Angels are not seen.

God is not seen. Jesus is not seen. If we had no faith, we'd have no way of knowing whether they exist or not.

Now, I know that you are here in this room because I can see you. You belong to the seen realm. You're one of those things that are seen.

And because you are seen, I can see you and I know you're here. My vision is the evidence of things that are seen. But I am equally sure, not only that you are in this room, but that angels are in this room.

But I don't see them and I never have seen them. Well, how do I know that they're here? They don't belong to the seen realm. They belong to the unseen realm.

But how can I be sure that they are here as I'm sure you're here? Well, God said it. I believe it. Faith is the evidence of the things that are not seen.

Vision is the evidence of things that are seen. That's why in a court of law, there's no better evidence that can be given that a thing happened but eyewitness. When it comes to the realm of the seen, vision is the best evidence available.

But when it comes to the realm of the unseen, how do we have any evidence about that? It's by faith in what God has told us. If God said it, it is true, and therefore we believe it. And therefore, that belief serves us as well as if we could see it.

Moses couldn't see God, but by faith he endured as if he could see Him who is invisible. Paul, when he said, we don't look at the things that are seen, we look at the things that are not seen, he doesn't mean that he could literally in his mind envision or visualize these things. It means that he was as sure of these realities that were unseen.

By faith he was as sure of them because God had promised that they are true, as he was sure of the seen realm. And it is those unseen things, his awareness of those things that carried him through his sufferings and made it possible for those sufferings to be transformed into glory in his life. What unseen things then did Paul look at while suffering? There are a number of things that the Bible declares to be true, none of which are visible.

Some of them are occasionally visible, but when you're in sufferings you can't see them. There are times when they seem reasonable to believe. Other times it seems less reasonable to believe them, but they're still true, because they are objectively true, and God has told us about them.

We don't make them come true by believing them. They are true, and that is the reason to believe in them. You don't create reality by your faith.

That's metaphysics. You put your faith in that which is reality, or else you've got a fool's faith. But there is a reality that is unseen, and God has told us what it is, and it is a reality whether we feel like it or not, whether it seems like it or not, whether it makes sense at the moment or not.

It is a reality, and your faith lays hold of that which is true and real, and you are as sure of it as if you could see it, even though it is unseen. And laying hold of that with your faith and saying, I believe it, I believe God, I choose to believe God, and not being shaken in that is the thing that will change everything about your afflictions and make them work for you glory. Let me talk about some of the unseen realities that Paul knew were there, and that he looked at, and that we must look at in times of suffering if it's going to make a positive difference.

The first of those things is God's sovereignty. Now, different folks have different opinions about God's sovereignty in so far as how far it extends, or exactly how He exercises it. Let me just say that the Bible makes it very clear that God is absolutely sovereign.

Sovereign means that He has all authority, He has all power, and He answers to none. He does His will in heaven and earth, and none can say, Why have you done thus? And no man can stay His hand. What God determines to do, He will do.

What God determines will not be done, will not be done. Now, that may sound very Calvinistic, but it isn't necessarily Calvinistic. The difference between a Calvinistic view of sovereignty and the view that I hold is that the Calvinist believes that God determines every decision people make, for good or for ill.

I don't believe God determines those things. Everything He determines materializes inevitably. But as I understand it, He never did determine people's choices.

That's what He gave them the ability to determine. But even if He gives us the ability to

choose things, even to choose to do what He would prefer, we didn't do. And certainly the Bible indicates a lot of people choose to do what God would prefer they didn't choose to do.

Yet, the ability of human beings to carry out the things they decide is not total. God doesn't say you can not only choose anything you want, but you can also succeed in everything you determine. No, it says in Proverbs, the plans of the heart are man's.

But the outcome, of course, is God. God determines what materializes in terms of, well, let's say I decide I'm going to rob a bank. Well, God didn't make me make that decision.

That was made by my own evil heart. But God determines whether I'll ever carry that out successfully. I may try to do it and get hit by a truck.

Never get to the bank. I mean, God determines the outcome, but I determine whether I will choose good or evil. That is what I understand the Bible to teach about the sovereignty.

But the important thing is that God does determine the outcome. That nothing can happen to me except what God decides to allow to happen to me. In terms of my circumstances, the Bible makes it very clear that God has me in the palm of His hand.

Underneath are the everlasting arms. Surrounding me are the angels of the Lord. The angels of the Lord encamp round about them that fear Him and deliver Him.

He has given His angels charge over thee to keep thee in all thy ways. And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. These promises of Scripture are there.

Nothing can happen to me. Not one bit of suffering can enter my experience unless God wants it to. Because the angels of the Lord would otherwise deliver me.

God Himself is a shield about me, Scripture says. How can anything penetrate that shield to bring suffering into my life? Well, it can under one condition. That God chooses that it does.

We see this illustrated so clearly in the book of Job. Because Satan, who ultimately brought some tremendous suffering into Job's life, for an extended period of time prior to that, was unable to do a thing to him. And complained to God.

He said, God, you have not given me a chance with this guy. You've put a hedge around this man. I can't get at him at all.

And so God said, okay, I'll tell you what. I'll open that hedge just this much. I'll let you do just that much and no more.

And so suffering came to Job. By whose decree? Not Satan's. By God's.

Satan didn't have any authority in the situation. He had no sovereignty. He couldn't get near him unless God let him.

God has a hedge about His people. And no suffering, no human being or devil or demon can come to you and bring you harm unless God determines that He will allow it. Now, what that means, of course, is that if you are suffering, God has allowed you to suffer.

That bothers some people because they think suffering is bad. But the point is, it's not always bad. And the first step in making it something good is to recognize that God is in it.

You need to see God in everything that happens to you. If you do, it changes the whole perspective of it. Now, of course, all this depends on what you think about God.

We'll talk about that next. But you need to know that nothing happens to you by chance merely. All things that happen to you happen because of God.

Not one sparrow falls to the ground without the will of your Father, Jesus said. If not one sparrow falls to the ground, how can something as significant as you going through a crisis happen without Him, without His will? He is in charge of those things. He will determine what happens to you.

And if He will not determine that it will happen, I guarantee you it won't. We see that in the oft-quoted wonderful statement of Joseph to his brothers. And the reason that it's so oft-quoted is such a wonderful statement of God's sovereignty.

At the end, after they had sold him into slavery, he'd spent years as a slave and then more years as a prisoner in a prison. And finally, things turned better for him. And then the brothers were at his mercy.

And they were afraid that he would be angry and hurt them. And he spoke to them in Genesis 50 and verse 20. He said, you intended evil against me, but God meant it for good.

Now, Joseph was not bitter. If you had been as innocent as he, as falsely accused as he, as hated without a cause as he, as deprived as he from being the heir of one of the wealthiest chieftains in Palestine to becoming a slave in a foreign land without any hope of freedom, and then being falsely accused and being put into a prison and rotting there and helping two royal officials there who owe you a favor and when they get out, they forget you. And so you end up there another two years in jail.

Two years goes pretty fast by in one verse of Scripture. It goes by real slow when you're living it in a stinking jail. All that he went through.

And then he said, he came out of it smelling like a rose as far as his spirit is concerned. He said, God meant it for good. Now, what's wonderful about that statement is that Joseph's sufferings were not simply misfortunes, such as, you know, a flood came and washed away the whole neighborhood and your house was damaged too.

Misfortunes like that, Christians could maybe more readily say, well, I can see God's in charge of that. God's in charge of the wind and the waves and the floods and so forth. He calls on those things.

But my suffering isn't that kind of suffering. I'm suffering because of that person's sin. That person didn't pay me what they owe me.

That person was driving recklessly and damaged my car and I'm paralyzed. That person, you know, attacked me, robbed me, injured me. And they were sinning and therefore that can't be the will of God.

Because God doesn't want them to sin. So how can it be that I can rejoice and receive this suffering as from the hand of God when it didn't come from the hand of God? It came from someone who's doing something adverse to the will of God. Drunk driver.

That's not the will of God. Well, there's truth in that. It isn't the will of God for anyone to drive drunk.

But if God didn't want you to suffer, God knows how to keep that drunk driver from connecting with your car. God does not determine which evil purposes men will make in their hearts. But He certainly determines which ones they will succeed in carrying out.

And if God doesn't want somebody else's malice to touch you, it will never get near you. Joseph knew that his brothers were not doing the will of God. Did God anywhere express His will in Scripture to be, hate your brother, sell him into slavery, plot his death? Contrary to the expressed will of God.

They were doing what was not the will of God, but they could never have succeeded against Joseph if God had not wished it to happen to him. Therefore, Joseph could say, you intended evil, that was not good. You were not obeying God, but God was still able to override your evil plans and He meant it for good.

If you can't see your sufferings as from the hand of God, you will never grow through them. You cannot benefit from them. The sovereignty of God in your situation is the first thing.

It's invisible, but it's real. You need to assure yourself of it. You need to know that it is true.

In John 18, 11, when Jesus was arrested in the garden, and Peter took his sword and tried

to defend Jesus, Jesus said, Peter, put away your sword. The cup that my father has given me, shall I not drink it? What is this about his father giving it to him? It was brought to him by Judas Iscariot, the devil incarnate. What is this business about my father giving it to me? It was brought to him by the Sanhedrin.

It was brought by the most corrupt, wicked people in the land of Israel. It was not brought by God, or was it? Jesus said, Father, before this, when he was praying the same night, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Was it possible? Well, it's possible, but it would not be possible for Jesus to save the world and have this cup pass from him, therefore it was not possible.

It was not that God was unable to shield Jesus from the malice of these people. How many times earlier in the Gospels do we read that they took up stones to stone him, but his hour had not yet come, and he passed through an escape. Or they took him and tried to throw him off a cliff, but he just walked through the midst and got away.

His hour was not yet. The Father knew how to deliver Jesus out of situations like this. On this occasion, he didn't.

The cup was brought by Judas. It was given by the Father. No matter who brings your suffering, it's always God who sends it.

And if you don't believe that, you'll never gain by it. Now, the sovereignty of God. Second invisible reality you need to hold on to is the goodness of God.

Now, there are people who have no problem believing that God is sovereign and that their troubles come from him. But it's that very belief that makes them wonder whether he's all that good. Naomi lost her husband first, and then both of her sons.

She was bereft of all the men who would otherwise have provided support. She was a poor widow. She had only one of her daughters-in-law.

And she came back to Bethlehem after a famine had driven her out of there. And when she came back, everyone said, Oh, is that Naomi coming back now? And she said, Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara.

Naomi means pleasant. Mara means bitter. She said, Don't call me pleasant.

I don't want to be pleasant. I want to be bitter. And she said, Call me Mara, because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me.

Now, see, she believed in the sovereignty of God. She believed that the loss of her husband and her two sons was of God. But she wasn't all that happy about it.

From the tone, it sounds as if she wanted to hold it against God. God has been bitter toward me. Yeah, well, God was, in fact, in charge of all that.

Her husband and sons would be alive today if God wanted them to be. But she had no trouble believing God was in it. She had trouble believing God was good in it.

Now, that's the harder thing. Many people have a view of the sovereignty of God that convinces them that God certainly must be in everything that happens, including their sufferings. And that very fact is an argument against God being good.

If God's a good God and can do everything, why would there be suffering in the world? Well, He can do everything. And He is good, but there's suffering. How is this so? Well, you've got to not let either of those truths slip.

In Psalm 119, in verse 75, the psalmist said, I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me. In other words, because you are good, because you are faithful, you have afflicted me. Your judgments are right judgments, and I have been afflicted by you, and it was right and good that you do it.

Now, we don't know what the psalmist's particular afflictions were or what brought them on. It doesn't matter. The statement is true regardless.

If God afflicts you, He does it in faithfulness. If God afflicts you, He does it justly. Our family went two years in a row to Australia back in the early 80's, where I taught, among other things, in a Christian community that had several, well quite a few hundred actually, Jesus people from Australia living in community over there.

And I taught in a week there each of those two years, as well as teaching for youth with a mission in Australia those years. And the first year I went there, I stayed in a home where there was a young single man staying named John, who was the, I guess he was the secretary or the accountant or something of the community. The next year when I went, he was dead.

He had been, I think, hitchhiking at the side of a road and a car had hit him and killed him instantly. What made this more poignant was that he was engaged to be married that year and the first car to drive by after he'd been hit and killed was that which was driven by his fiancée. And so she's driving down this highway and she drives by and she sees her fiancée dead at the side of the road, still warm, that recently killed.

And so when I came to Australia the second time and heard this story, which had happened only a short time before, I was very eager to talk to this young woman because, well, it was not too dissimilar to something I had been through a few years earlier. And I wondered how she was handling it. I knew that some people go through that kind of thing rather poorly.

But I had been told that she was doing well and her faith was strong and I wanted to talk to her about it, so I did. I had a time to converse with her about it and I said, you know, I said, what was your first reaction when you saw that John was dead there, your fiancée

whom you were planning to be married to in a couple of months? And she says, well, she said, I just said, God, I don't know what you're doing, but I know that you're right. I know that you're a just God.

And you know what? She gained through it. You know what could have happened that would not have caused her to gain through it? She could have become angry at God or bitter against God. She could have lost her faith that God is good.

In suffering, the goodness of God is invisible. When everything is going great, it's easy to believe God's good. You can see it everywhere, through his providences, through his protection, through everything that's going right.

But in suffering, the goodness of God is something that is not seen. And Paul said, we benefit from our sufferings while we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen. The trial is what is seen.

The circumstances are what are seen. The goodness and the sovereignty of God are not seen, but they are still true. And we need to look not at the things that are seen, but at the things that are not seen.

Now, what does it say in 1 Peter 4.19? It says in 1 Peter 4.19, 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, you're suffering according to the will of God, Peter says. What do you do when you're suffering? And God, it's His will that you suffer.

What kind of a God is that? Well, you need to commit yourself to Him in doing good as unto a faithful Creator. That is, you still need to judge Him faithful. And commit yourself to Him as if He is faithful, because He is, whether it looks like it or not.

So, it's necessary to recognize these unseen things in your suffering. The sovereignty of God, He is making it happen, or at least He has not chosen to prevent it from happening, which He could have done. He wants you to go through this.

Secondly, it's part of His goodness. It's not a challenge to His goodness that this happens. It is part of His goodness.

In faithfulness, He afflicts. It doesn't seem right to our self-centered selves that always want to have things comfortable for ourselves, but that's... Remember, there are some things more important than your temporal comfort. The things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.

What's more important? It's sensible for God to allow you to suffer a little longer in the temporal so that you have more of an eternal benefit from it. That is the goodness of God. When God comes at you with a big sharp knife to cut you open, it's not because He's a mugger, it's because He's a surgeon.

It's not because He's a surgeon. It's because He's a surgeon. Because you're filled with the cancer of sin.

And this is the only way to get it out. This is the only way to change you. And the suffering is for your good.

What's another unseen thing that you need to look at during times of suffering? Well, we find in Hebrews 12, verses 1 through 4, an answer to that question. Hebrews 12, 1 through 4 says, 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. For consider him who endured such hostility from sinners against himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your minds or your souls.

You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. What's this talking about? Well, you're suffering. What are you supposed to be keeping your eyes on? On Jesus.

Now, is keeping your eyes on Jesus some kind of a theoretical, feel-good kind of an idea? Just keep your eyes on Jesus? No, he says, here's what you're supposed to keep your eyes on. On Jesus who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, and who resisted even to the shedding of blood in striving against sin. You haven't done that yet.

Let his example encourage you. You can't see him, but you can remember him. You can consider him.

You can keep your thoughts and your mind, as it were, your eyes upon him, in your suffering. You can ask yourself, am I responding to my suffering the way Jesus responded to his? Am I valuing my suffering as much as Jesus valued his? Am I as committed to bringing glory to God out of my suffering as Jesus was committed to bringing glory to God out of his? The example of Jesus, invisible really, but not incapable of being held before the mind as an incentive to going through our trials in a different way than we otherwise would. Also in Hebrews chapter 13, verses 12 through 13, it says, 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. He did it. Let's do what he did.

He was ostracized. He was kicked out. He was treated as an unclean thing and taken outside the gate to suffer.

Well, let's go with him. Let's follow that example. Let's go with him outside the camp.

Let's share in that ostracism if necessary and bear that reproach with him. Let's suffer like he suffered. Not only suffer what he suffered, but suffer like he suffered.

Suffer in the same way, with the same spirit that he suffered. Christ's example in suffering is an unseen thing. Invisible thing, but real and something for us to look at when we're suffering.

Another unseen thing that we should look at when we're suffering is the future character benefits that we will derive from it. Now because they are future, they're not visible. You can't see what hasn't happened yet.

But it's promised. And if God has promised it, it's true. And if it's true, you can believe it.

You can lay hold of it. Not only is faith the evidence of things not seen, it is the substance of things hoped for. Hebrews 11, verse 1. Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen.

What does it mean, the substance of things hoped for? Well, things hoped for in the future. They haven't happened yet. But faith, if it is real, if it is upon the truth of God, it is something that makes those things that have not yet happened substantial.

Things that God has promised, but have not yet been realized in our experience. We know they're real because God has promised them. And we can benefit from them now.

We can receive strength from them now. We can embrace them now. It says in Hebrews chapter 11 and 13 of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it said, these all died not having received the promise, but having seen it afar off, they embraced it.

How can you embrace something that hasn't happened yet? By faith. God had said it. They believed it.

That settled it. If you lose a loved one, you will not see that person again until the resurrection. If that person is a Christian, though, you will see them in the resurrection.

Do you believe that? If so, then you can receive the same comfort knowing that as seeing it. Faith makes it substantial. Faith is the substance of things that have not yet become substance yet.

That's why Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians, I don't want you to be ignorant concerning those who have fallen asleep, that you should not sorrow as others who have no hope. Sure, you can sorrow. Everybody sorrows when they lose loved ones, but you do not sorrow as one who has no hope.

Why? Because you know that the dead in Christ shall rise again. You will see them again. You don't see that now, but you know you shall.

And because of that, that changes everything. Your belief in that tells you, I will see that person again. That is as comforting as if I saw them again, depending on the strength of my faith in that truth.

Why shouldn't I believe it? It's true. It's natural to believe things that are true. In Hebrews 12, 10 through 11, it says, Now, no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful.

Nevertheless, afterward, it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it. Now, suffering, chastening, it doesn't seem joyful at the time, ever. But afterward, it yields desirable fruits, the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.

It's the future benefits that make it worthwhile. Therefore, the future is unseen, but our faith in what God has promised is substantial. It makes the thing a reality to us now, or as if it were a reality to us now.

Job, when he was suffering, made this observation in Job 23, 10. He said, But he knows the way that I take. When he has tested me, meaning when he has finished putting me through the meat grinder, I shall come forth as gold.

It hadn't happened yet. Job was still in the middle of it. But he had faith that this refining fire would do just that, would refine him like gold, and he'd be better off at the end.

You need to have your sights on the future benefits. It's hard to appreciate sufferings in themselves. But if you know that you're losing sleep and restricting your diet and working out until your muscles hurt because you're going to win a gold medal, all that suffering is a lot easier to be motivated to go through and to not complain about.

Athletes in training suffer in ways that people who don't care about athletic events don't. They bring it upon themselves and they don't complain about it. Why? Because there's a prize at the end they're looking forward to and it makes it worth it to them to do it.

People who go to medical school for ten years or whatever it is, they lose a big chunk of their life that they could be out having fun or even out making money or whatever it is they want to do with their life. But it means something to them to become a medical doctor. They've got a goal that they want and they will suffer until they get there.

And they will suffer without thinking of it even as suffering because everything they're suffering is bringing them closer to it and they could not have that goal without going through those steps. Glory comes through suffering. Should not the Christ have suffered and come into His glory, Jesus said in Luke chapter 24? Or Paul said in Acts 14, I think verse 27, he said, through much tribulation we enter the kingdom of God.

You can't get there from here except through this path. There's no glory except by the

path of suffering and the glory is the goal. Therefore the future benefits are unseen to us at this time but because we know they are true and we're talking about the personal character benefits, it makes it worthwhile and to keep your eyes on those rather than the momentary sacrifice of suffering makes a big difference.

Another unseen thing, also future, are heavenly rewards. Now, that's sort of the same but different because we reap the character benefits here and now. There's also heavenly rewards for those who are faithful through testing.

In Hebrews chapter 10 verses 32 through 36, the writer said, but recall the former days in which after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated for you had compassion on me and my chains and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence which has great reward for you have need of endurance that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise. Notice, you joyfully endured the plundering of your goods.

If someone came and plundered your goods, would you joyfully endure that? You'd endure it. What else could you do? You'd endure it. You'd survive it.

But would you joyfully endure it? It says they did. How in the world they do that? Well, it says you joyfully endured and accepted the plundering of your goods knowing that you have a better and enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. The rewards in heaven are so enormous that the loss of any earthly possession or comfort is not comparable.

Remember what Paul said in Romans 8.18? He said, I'm convinced that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that should be revealed in us. Romans 8.18, not in your notes. Jesus said in Matthew 5.11 and 12, Blessed are you when they revile you and persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you, falsely for my sake.

Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. So, there are rewards in heaven.

You don't see them now, but you will someday. You've got to keep your eyes not on that which is seen, but what is not seen. And one other thing in the unseen realm that you need to keep your sights upon if you're going to benefit from your sufferings is God's right to be God.

God is Himself invisible and most everything that can be said about Him is an invisible truth if it is true at all. And certainly one thing that is true of God is He has all the rights. He has the right to be God and we have no rights to anything.

This Job discovered, and we discover by reading the book of Job in an almost frustrating way because we read of this righteous man's suffering through no fault of his own. Then we find his counselors coming who are totally in the dark and they don't have a clue why it is he's suffering, but they speculate, as most people would, he must have done something wrong. Why else would God bring such horror and sufferings upon him? And so they philosophize and speculate for chapter after chapter after chapter notwithstanding Job's protest to the contrary.

He says, I haven't done anything wrong, this isn't because of that. But they keep saying it has to be because of that. And the reader who knows that Job is right and they are wrong is just waiting for God to pull back the curtain and show those guys that they're wrong and explain exactly why Job really is suffering because those guys are all wrong in their theories.

And so, eventually, near the end of the book, around chapter 38, God does just that. He pulls back the veil. He speaks from heaven.

Apparently, Job and his counselors all hear God speak and God goes on for four or five chapters. But the frustrating thing is God never does what you kind of hoped He would do. He never does tell why Job suffered.

He never says, you guys were wrong. You thought Job was suffering because of X. But I'm telling you he's suffering because of Y. Instead, you know what God says? He says, who are you to darken counsel with your puffed up words? Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Do you feed all the wild beasts on the hillsides every day? Do you bring out the stars and the constellations in their course every night? Who do you think you are to ask me to explain myself? That's essentially what God says. And it takes many chapters saying it as Job gets smaller and smaller and smaller because although his counselors were wrong, he was wrong too.

Because he basically said, I just wish I could stand before God and I'd demand an explanation here. And God says, you would demand an explanation. And when Job finally sees God and God answers, Job doesn't say, ah, now I understand what happened and why it all happened.

He didn't. We don't even know why it happened. And we read the whole book.

We even read the chapters that Job didn't get to read at the beginning. But you see, Job said, I have heard of thee with the hearing of the ear, but now my eye seeth thee, and I abhor myself, and I repent in dust and ashes. That's the kind of self-image people need.

I abhor myself. It's not what Dr. Dobson tells us we need to do with our self-esteem, but it's what the Bible says throughout. Because it's when we think God owes us an explanation that we are thinking high of ourselves and low of God.

A high view of God is the only one that is ever appropriate. And a high view of God has got to acknowledge that God is and does whatever He wants. And He has the right to do it.

It's not like He has to have a good reason that He can explain to us. He has the right because He is God. Now, it could be otherwise.

He could be a bad God, but He's not. He's a good God, so it's good for us that He's a good God since He can do whatever He wants and no one can stop Him. But it still is His right to do whatever He wants.

You didn't create God, so He doesn't have to answer to you. In fact, you didn't even create yourself, so you don't have any rights of your own either. All the rights belong to God.

If God says, okay, it pleases the Lord to bruise Him, then we say, well, that's a strange thing, but God has the right to do it. I'm not God's judge. I'm not here to complain against God.

I'm here to try to conform to God. And if I simply will resign myself, that if I never understand what this was about, yet God has the right to be God and to do what He wants to do. That is an invisible truth.

It is truth, and therefore it is to be believed. It is invisible reality to be laid hold of. These things, I guarantee you, if when you suffer, whether you suffer in a little way, slight irritations from your children or from your spouse or whether your sufferings are great and you're actually subjected to torture and martyrdom or anything in between on that scale, if you look not at the things that are seen, but the things that are not seen, if you keep your eye, if you keep your focus on the sovereignty and the goodness of God, on the example of Christ, and not only of Christ, but also of the other saints.

Remember, James in James chapter 5 tells us to remember the prophets who have spoken in the name of the Lord as an example of suffering, affliction and patience. Not only Jesus, but other righteous people before us. And then, of course, there's the future.

The character benefits as well as the heavenly rewards. And if nothing else, just the fact that God is who He is, He has the right to be just who He is. He doesn't owe us an explanation.

The smartest thing we can ever do is let Him be who He is and accept from His hand what He chooses. That can be done. It cannot be done without dying to yourself.

But that's just what your sufferings are there to get you to do. And when you do, you will suddenly have discovered the secret of tranquility, of peace. When you can die to yourself and be resigned to God, then you have discovered what the world is all seeking.

And that is the secret of contentment and of peace and of security. And you will not have problems with your relationship with God based upon sufferings that He brings into your life. But on the other hand, you will gain by it.

You will grow through it. I alluded last time to a song that I could not quote in its entirety. In the meantime, I got the words down here.

And I printed it on the bottom of the sheet for you. It may not do as much for you as it does to me. I hope it does, because it does a lot for me.

This song, the author is unknown. I got it from an album by Phil Kagey. He put this to music.

And as I understand it, he got the lyrics off of a... Someone had written them on the wall of a bathroom stall at a Christian camp. And I don't know what he was doing when he found them, but he wrote them down and put them to music. And it's a beautiful song he wrote.

And there's just something about this song that if it resonates, if it strikes a chord with you, I suspect it's because you have known him in the fellowship of his sufferings. If you have not, I don't know what this song will do for you, if anything. But I know that when I heard it, and every time I hear it, it just strikes such a wonderful, God-honoring chord.

And it says all that I've been saying in such a more succinct way. Succinctness is not one of my talents. But this is somebody's talented way of succinctly saying all that we've said tonight.

It's called Disappointment, His Appointment. Of course, His Appointment means He has appointed it. It's something that He has ordained.

It may be to me a disappointment, but from God's point of view, it's something He has ordained. And it goes like this, Disappointment, His Appointment. Change one letter, then I see that the thwarting of my purpose is God's better choice for me.

His Appointment must be blessing, though it may come in disguise. For the end from the beginning, open to His wisdom, lies. Disappointment, His Appointment, proves the Lord who loves me best, understands and knows me fully, whom my faith and love would test.

For like loving earthly parents, He rejoices when He knows that His child accepts unquestioned all that from His wisdom flows. Disappointment, His Appointment, no good thing will He withhold. From denials, oft we gather treasures of His love untold.

Well He knows each broken purpose leads to fuller, deeper trust. And the end of all His dealings proves our God is wise and just. Disappointment, His Appointment, Lord, I take it then as such, like the clay in hands of potter yielding wholly to Thy touch, all my life's

plan is Thy molding, not one single choice be mine.

Let me answer unrepining, Father, not my will but Thine. That's how Jesus answered, who is our example of suffering, and what became of Him. Well, after He said, not my will but Thine, something very unpleasant happened to Him.

But several days later, something very vindicating happened to Him. And the Bible says, therefore God has highly exalted Him and given Him a name that is above every name. And God intends to highly exalt you.

He intends to vindicate you. He intends that when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, you also shall appear with Him in glory. And we cannot share in His glory if we are not sharing in His sufferings.

And to share in His sufferings, as I said, is to suffer not only in the same ways that He suffered, but with the same spirit and the same response. The cup that my Father has given me, shall I not drink it? Every cup of suffering that you have, your Father has given you. Will you receive it? Will you drink it? Will you resign yourself to Him? Will you keep before your mind at all times that He is your loving earthly parent, that He is your Father who is good and faithful and afflicts only in faithfulness? If so, then you will find your character carved by your afflictions, and you will find that the things that God has said He wishes to see worked in you will be worked through that chiseling and that workmanship of God.

We are His workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus for good works. The word workmanship means a work of art.

We are His craftsmanship. He is shaping us. He is working on us.

He is making us something. But it is through the tools of affliction that He makes these changes.