



Message Transcript

God's Perspective on Suffering

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Well, thank you so much for choosing to worship with us today. Will you do me a favor? Welcome our Broomfield campus, who's worshipping with us this morning. It's so great to have you. And as we've been worshipping and seeking the Lord in prayer, let's continue that heart of preparation and prayer as we get ready to hear the living Word of God. Would you pray with me?

Lord Jesus, we give you all the glory, honor, and praise for who you are. And Lord, we thank you for your Word. You're living an active Word that has the power of speaking directly to our heart and our soul, and Lord, changing who we are. And so Lord our prayer in the next few minutes that we spend together is that you would have your way with us. That we would hear you clearly, that we would believe what you say out us and that we'd put into practice the very things that you show us. And for what you're going to do in advance, we give you all glory, honor, and praise. And now all God's people who are ready to hear his Word, believe it, and put into practice the very things he shows you, agree with me by very loudly saying the Word amen.

Amen.

Amen. What a beautiful day it is here in Denver. Isn't it?

Whoo.

Yeah.

It's hot.

Have you ever noticed how weather makes a difference in our attitude. Many times, like before a big sporting event that you're going to attend or a wedding that's

going to be outside or something, we'll pray for good weather because we know that when weather is good, our attitude changes. There's a difference waking up when there's great sunshine and we overlook the mountains, versus waking up when it's overcast and lightning and pouring rain. It changes our attitude. And yet the reality is that depending on your perspective, the weather's not so bad.

If you've traveled, like I have, and then in on an airplane, even on days where it's raining and pouring, as soon as you take off, about five minutes after takeoff and you get up above the clouds and you look down, you realize that the sun has been shining all along. That the clouds actually look beautiful and it's just from your perspective where you were underneath the weather that it appeared bad. But when you were up above the weather looking down, you thought to yourself, "It's not so bad after all."

Weather is one thing, but when we go through trials and we go through sufferings for being a believer in the Lord, Jesus Christ, that's how it often feels. Oftentimes we believe that when we come to know Jesus, that it's going to be so great every single day for the rest of our lives and we love Jesus and it's going to be great and we're always going to get along and our marriage is going to thrive and our kids are going to be great. And everybody at church is going to get along and it's going to be awesome and work's going to be fantastic and God's going to favor me and there's blessing and hope and prosperity, and it's all good. And then we hit a time of suffering. We're like this, "Isn't the weather I wanted and this isn't what I would've chosen."

But what we want to do is we want to get up of the weather. We want to take a

look above the sufferings. We want to see what God's perspective is on our sufferings because when we see how God sees it, then we know how to respond the way God would want us to respond. And the reality is for many of us in this room today, and for many of us in Broomfield today, we're going through a season right now that we would say, "This is one of the hardest seasons I've ever had in being a Christian."

Others of us have come out of that season recently, and there's others of us, whether you realize it or not. I'm just telling you prophetically, you're going to go through that season pretty soon. And no matter who you are, you need to see what God is saying to you when you go through suffering so that you can respond the way that God wants you to respond when you're in the suffering.

And so if you have your Bible with you, I want to encourage you to open up to 1 Peter chapter 5, starting in verse 6, and we're going to finish not only this chapter, but this book. Which has been a great study, not only for us, but for me personally, as I've been preparing all these messages. 1 Peter chapter 5:6 and following, I will read those and then we'll take a look at four ways that God wants us to respond to suffering.

He says, "Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because he cares for you. Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. But resist him firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren, who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who hold you to His eternal glory in Christ will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen."

"Through Silvanus, our faithful brother, for so I regard him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God, stand firm in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ."

And as Peter ends, his letter to believers who are scattered throughout the region, he really is showing them God's perspective on suffering and how it is that we as believers can experience God's perspective on suffering. How it is that when we're going through that time of suffering, when we're disappointed by the circumstances that are happening only because we're trying to serve the Lord well, how do we experience and see things from God's perspective and do things God's way?

And to experience God's perspective, firstly, you must trust God's sovereignty. If you're going to experience suffering the way God sees it and you're going to experience it God's ways, you have to trust God's sovereignty. Notice what he says in verse six, he says, "Therefore, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you at the proper time."

Now he's just gotten done talking to the young men and to the entire church to submit to elders, and then with all humility cloth themselves with all humility towards one another. Why? Because God opposes the proud, but He gives grace to the humble. Now there's a lot of definitions we could give for humble. But when we talk

about trusting God's sovereignty, we're trusting the fact that he has supreme power and authority.

God has all power. God has authority, which means this: there is nothing that ever happens in your life that's an accident. God has either caused it or has allowed it to happen. There's never a time in heaven where God looks down and says, "Oops." It's not like at the end of the day, God looks over the entire 7 billion people on the planet and says, "6 billion, 9 million, I did really, really well, but this 100,000 I kind of, oops, I'm sorry."

100% of the time, everything that goes on in your life, know this, God is powerful in it. He's authoritative in it. He's over it all. And here's what we're called to do, trust His sovereignty. Which means this, when, because of our faith in Jesus Christ, we go through a time of suffering, we begin to ask questions like this, "Does God really love me? Does God really care? Why is this going on? I was only doing it God's way. This happened, that happened. How come? How come?"

Here's what I'm asking you to do, trust in God's sovereignty, humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that in due time, He may exalt you. Humble yourself. That means posture yourselves in such a way that says this. When you go through suffering. "God, okay, you have a design, you have a purpose for this. I don't see it. I don't understand it. It doesn't make sense, but I'm going to trust that you have your way in doing it." That's what it means to humble yourselves before God. And notice what it says, "In due time, he may exalt you."

He may exalt you at the proper time. He's going to lift you up. He's going to elevate you. The way up is really the way down. The more humble you are, the more God can elevate you. How does that work? Because the Gospel is Christ in you, the hope of glory. The more humble you are before God, the more that Christ can exalt himself in and through you. And in time, God will elevate what you're going to do.

Now, ultimately for believers, when we die, that's going to happen and that's going to happen when Jesus Christ, according to Jude 24-25, presents us perfect and faultless before our Father in heaven with exceedingly great joy. He will exalt us perfect. But I even believe that in this world, when you go through times of suffering and you humble yourselves in the suffering and you trust God's sovereignty in the suffering, there comes a season where God elevates what you do and what he's doing in and through you as a result of your humility in trusting God while you were suffering unjustly.

That's what He's saying in the text. So He's saying, "Trust His sovereignty." Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, because He has all of the in power, that in due time or that He may exalt you at the proper time. Now notice verse seven. Great verse. Great verse if you want to memorize it. "Casting all your anxiety on Him because he cares for you."

You know what anxiety is? It's worry. It's turmoil. It's, "I don't know how this is going to work. I don't know how this is going to happen. It's I didn't see this coming. Or how's this going to happen? Or it's going to get bad. It's going to get ..." It's anxiety.

Now notice what it says in your text, and read it with me. Verse 7, casting how many of your anxiety? Casting?

All.

Say it really loud so people can hear you.

All.

Casting all your anxiety. Now some of us are good at casting some of our anxiety on Him, like when it's really big stuff and we can't take it anymore because we're control freaks and it gets out of hand. Then we cast that on God, but we'll control the little stuff. Others of us are good at casting things on God, but we don't want to cast the little things on Him because. "Well, does God really care about that? This is not a big deal. I'll work on this one. Yeah, sure I get angry sometimes, but that's not a big one. It's not like one of those big sins. I'll cast the big sins on God, but the little one I'll ..." No, no, you cast all your anxiety on Him. Why? What does the text say?

Cares for you.

Because he cares for you. The God of the universe that has all power and all authority loves you. He cares for you. Even if you haven't trusted in Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and savior, He still has a love for you. But if you believe that Jesus Christ died on the cross for your sins, that He was buried and that He rose from the dead and you've confessed him as your personal Lord and savior, He has a special love for you. You're His child. You're His son or His daughter. You're His beloved. He loves you with an unconditional love. And when you go through suffering, you need to

be reminded of the fact He loves you. He cares for you. Cast all your anxiety on Him.

Now, if we had time this morning, we could bring each person up one by one and say, "Okay, tell us about your anxiety." Everybody would have something to share. And if we probed a little further, you would have even more to share because in our flesh, we tend to get anxious about a lot of things because we recognize, whether we'll articulate it or not, we can't control anything. We can't control anybody. We can't control circumstances, and sometimes we can't even roll ourselves. Right?

Amen.

And when we get to that place of admitting it, that's humbling ourselves before the Lord, and then we start casting all our anxiety on Him, because we know He cares. And so part of our prayer time should always be telling God why we are trusting in Him. Prayer time is a time that you can be anxious. Prayer time is a time where you can bring all your worry and all your anxiety before the Lord. Because we'll read scriptures, like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 6, starting in verse 24. He says this, "Do not be anxious about your life." What you will eat or what you will drink or what you will wear. Look at the lilies of the field. I tell you, Solomon in all his splendor wasn't even dressed like that.

Look at the birds of the air, they don't store or reap in barns, and yet your heavenly Father takes care of them. Not one even falls to the ground without him knowing. Your Father knows what you need before you even ask Him, therefore seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added. And

we say, "Oh Jesus, that's such good teaching."

But when it comes to practicality, what do we do? We worry all the time. Like, "Yeah, He'll take care of my clothes, He'll take care of this, but He's not taking care of my kids. He's not taking care of my marriage. He's not taking care of my finance. Why, what's going on?" Do not worry about your life. You're going to humble yourself and trust God's sovereignty that He's in control to do all that.

When you get to Philippians 4, Paul picks up on that same theme in Philippians 4:6 and following he says, "Be anxious for nothing."

Nothing.

"But in everything by prayer and supplication with Thanksgiving, present your request to God and the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your heart and your mind Christ Jesus."

So here's what the Bible gives you permission to worry about: nothing. Here's what the Bible gives you permission to be anxious about: nothing. Why would you be anxious if the sovereign God of the universe that has all power and authority loves you and cares for you and whatever situation you're in, He's the one who's designed for you? It means if you really trust in God, worry doesn't go along with that.

Now you might say, "Then why is it that I worry? Because Pastor Jeff, I do believe God's in control and I do believe all this." And here's why, one is when it comes to God's sovereignty, one thing you don't trust is God's wisdom. You don't trust God's wisdom. In 1 Corinthians 1:25, we hear about what God's wisdom looks like. 1

Corinthians 1:25. Here's what it says, he says, "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

One of the reasons we don't trust God is we don't trust His wisdom. We ask questions like this, "Why am I going through this and how's this ever going to work out? And I don't see the beginning from the end and how come this circumstance? And I prayed this way and it went that way? And I don't understand. I don't." It's because you're focusing on your wisdom and what you see and God says he's smarter than the ... God's foolishness is smarter than the smartest man. God knows what He's doing.

One of the reasons that you're anxious is that you don't believe that God knows what God is doing. One of the reasons we humble ourselves is we say this, "God, I don't see what you're doing. I'm uncomfortable with the way this is going. I'm uncomfortable with the way I see this landing. But Lord, I'm going to trust that you're wiser than me, and so I'm comfortable in this situation, even though I'm telling you, you know me, I'm not comfortable at all. But I want to be comfortable with you because your wisdom is wiser than anything that I would have. So I'm not going to be anxious because I'm believing, God, because you love me and you care for me, you're going to work all this stuff out."

God's wisdom. God knows what he's doing. Think about what you're anxious about right now. God knows what he's doing. He has an exact understanding of what he's doing.

Number two is this, God loves you. We've talked about it. Cast all your anxieties

on Him because He cares for you. God loves you. John 3:16 says that God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten. God loves you. When we go through suffering, sometimes we think, "Well, God doesn't love me anymore. When God's blessing me and everything's going well, God's doing things for me. God's blessing me. It's really, really good. I love that." But when it's not going so well, what are we thinking? "Well, it's not very good anymore. God must be upset with me. God must be disappointed in me. God must be punishing me."

Now there's a time of reflection, like if I'm blatantly sinning, maybe there's a consequence for my sin. But we're talking to Christians here who are walking out the Gospel who, because they're walking out the gospel, they're suffering and they're anxious and they're wondering why all these things are going on. And here's what you need to be reminded of, God's love for you, and God's love for you never, ever ends.

I pick up on what the Apostle Paul says in Romans 8:38 and following. Here's what he says, and I agree with him. "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor death, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

God's love for you doesn't change. He lists everything and then he says, "By and any other created thing." Which means, "Even when I mess up, I'm a created thing. I can't even separate myself from the love of God. God loves me no matter what I do." It's an amazing, eternal love that God has. And when you're going through times of suffering, you need to hear the Words that we end every service with at this church,

which is you are loved. You're loved. God loves you.

The enemy lies to you when you go through suffering and says, "God doesn't love you anymore. If he loved you, this wouldn't be happening. If God knew what he was doing, this wouldn't be happening." And then he lies number three, and if your God were powerful, he'd do something about it. We don't trust God's power.

We read in the Bible that God created the universe in six days. We read in the Bible that God flooded the universe. We read in the Bible about all the incredible miracles of Jesus or Elijah calling down fire and we read about all that and like, "That's the God we serve. He's awesome. He's so powerful." But when we're going through suffering and we don't see God moving, then we start to doubt His power and we're like, "Yeah, God could do this, and He's either not doing it because He's not powerful enough or He's not doing it because He doesn't love me enough, or he's not doing because he doesn't know what He's doing."

Now, He knows what he's doing. He's all-loving and he's all-powerful. Do you remember when Job complained to God about what God was doing and how God rebuked Job and at the end of Job in Job 42:2, Job responds to the Lord, and I confirm what he says. He says, "I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

God takes us through suffering sometimes just to remind us of the fact that He's totally in control. "God, I know you can do all things and nothing that you're ever going to do will be stopped. Nobody can stop what you're going to do, God. You're all-

powerful." And if God has all-wisdom and God is all-loving and God is all-powerful and we truly believe that, then how come we still are anxious. Here's why, because we don't trust God's timing. Like, "God, I know you're loving. I know you're wise. I know you're powerful. So do it now, make it happen. It's not happening."

Have you ever wondered why God doesn't do it on your timing? Anybody here?

All the time.

Yeah.

Anybody? Six of you. Okay, great. Hey, all the time. We always wonder. So I want to give you a scriptural answer to why God doesn't do it on your timing. Do you want to hear what it is?

Yes.

Because in case you're wondering how come God hasn't acted yet if He's all-loving and all-wise and all-powerful, I want to give you the scriptural answer for what that is, and it's found in Isaiah 55:8-9, Isaiah 55:8-9. Here's what God says to you when you're in struggles. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts nor are my ways your ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts."

Praise God.

Yep.

How about this? God, how come you haven't done it yet? "Because I know more

than you and my ways are better than yours. And the reason we're doing this is because I say it's good, and so hang in there because this is why you're in that season and I'm doing it for your good and I'm doing it for my glory and my ways are better than your ways. So hang in there. I'm still all-wise. I'm still all-powerful. I'm still all-loving. And my timing is perfect for you, even though you're uncomfortable with my timing."

Amen.

That's what it said. That's what it means to trust God's sovereignty. That's what it means to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. And so when we're doing this, when we're praying, praying is humble. Every time we pray, we are declaring our dependence on the Lord and we are humbling ourselves before him, and prayer elevates humility and it decreases anxiety. The more you humble yourself and the more you pray, the less anxiety you're going to experience.

When you don't pray, you'll use your flesh. You'll have a way that you're going to try to work stuff out. The more you work at it, the more you will elevate your anxiety and the more you'll decrease your humility. And so even if you control a situation and kind of navigate your way through it to an end that you're somewhat comfortable with, at the end, who's going to get the credit for that? Well you are, because you've elevated yourself.

Here's what God says. "No, you humble yourself, and at the proper time, I'll exalt you. You humble yourself. You cast all your anxieties on me because I care for you

and I'll take care of you and I'll do it my way." That's what it means to trust God's sovereignty, and that's what God's asking us to do when we're living out the Christian life and when we're suffering unjustly for living out the Christian life, we're just trusting God sovereignty. It's all part of His plan. It's all part of His purpose, and it's good.

If that's the first thing we're to do, is to trust God's sovereignty, the second thing we need to do to experience God's perspective and to get above the suffering is to trust God's warnings. Trust God's warnings. Notice what he says in verse 8, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert, your adversary, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour, but resist him firm in your faith."

What does he tell us? "Be sober-minded." That means to be self-controlled, be alert. That means to be ready, be ready. Why? Because you have an enemy. You have an adversary. Your adversary is not flesh and blood. Your adversary is the Devil himself and all of his helpers. You have an adversary, you have an enemy. You need to heed to God's warnings. It means you need to be ready at all times for the enemy. Why? Because he's crafty and he's alluring and he has a way of getting to you in a way that you didn't expect.

Most of us have watched too many cartoons, so we picture the Devil in a black cape or a red cape with horns on his head and a pitch fork, like just getting people to do hot work projects. That's not what the Devil's like. The Devil's described as a beam of light. He has an attraction. The reason you follow after him and do some of the things that he wants you to do is because there's an attraction to him and there's an invitation to him.

Go all the way back to the first sin in the garden of Eden, what did he do? He was alluring. He was crafty. He was tricky. He was trying to deceive Eve to believe that God was holding out on her and God was holding out on Adam. So she eats the fruit and gives some to Adam who says, "Please don't hog it. Give it to me." Because why? Because he's alluring. Be on the alert.

In the same way Peter tells us to be ready to give an answer for the hope that we have within us, we're always called to be ready and we're always called to prepare our minds for action. Be ready because you have an enemy that's after you at all times. And do you realize this? Satan has a ton of game film on you. He's studied your life. He knows the proper time for you. He knows when to launch one of his attacks.

Really interesting that one of the first attacks we see in Jesus' life is after Jesus had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights and was hungry. Who shows up then? The Devil. Why? Because he's going to be weak in his flesh at that time, and that's when the Devil begins to tempt Jesus. And what happens after? Jesus defeats Satan with the Word, it says he's going to look for another opportune time. When's the next time we really see Satan show up? In the garden of Gethsemane when Jesus is totally weak in his flesh to do the same thing.

Do you know when you're weaken your flesh? Are you aware when those things happen? Many times it's when we're tired and many times is when we haven't eaten. Many times it's after a high, a spiritual high or an emotional experience that we've had or something special. Are you aware when he attacks you? Are you aware? Be alert,

be ready. He's crafty. He knows just how to get to you. He knows just what kind of bait to put down so that you'll nibble on it. Be ready and self-controlled and alert for he prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Now, if you ever watch the Discovery channel, who does the lion go after? I've never seen a lion go after a herd. I see a lion look for one that's kind of wandered off, eating grass or doing ... When they get singled out, they get picked off. What's the purpose of the church? It's to come together and have accountability with other people in our lives that know us well at our core that can speak truth into us so that the enemy doesn't have as much of an opportunity of seeking to devour us. Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy, the Devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour, but you must resist him, standing firm.

The Bible doesn't call us to cast out the Devil or speak to. Stand firm, that's how you resist the Devil. That's how he will flee from you. You stand on the Word of God. It means you don't live in fear. You're not living in anxiety. You're standing firm. You're trusting God's warnings that He's after you.

Now, here's why this is really important, because I find that Satan has two major strategies that he uses against me and you all the time. He definitely succeeded in them prior to us being believers. But after being a believer, he still tries to allure us back to these two things.

The first one is this, it's your flesh. Your flesh is the appetites you have to please you. Prior to being born again, you didn't even know you had a flesh, you just lived it.

Everything you did was to please you. It wasn't about pleasing God. It was about pleasing you. And all of us have a history of how we fed our flesh. Some of us fed our flesh by doing all sorts of licentious things. Others of us fed our flesh just by simply being prideful and thinking we were better than everybody else. But either way, we fed our flesh.

After we're saved, our flesh does not go away. We have to crucify our sinful flesh. We've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us. But guess what? The flesh doesn't go away. Wouldn't it be cool, as I've said many times from this pulpit, if when you became a believer, the sinful flesh just went away too? You wouldn't have any appetite for sin. You wouldn't know how to sin. All you would know how to do is love Jesus and love God's people. That's all you'd know how to do. The flesh doesn't go away. There's a battle that takes place and you either feed the flesh and live for the Devil or you starve the flesh by living out the spirit-filled life, allowing God to live in and through you and the flesh goes away.

So there's the flesh. That's one thing the Devil uses. What's the second thing? It's the world. The world system. The world system fulfills everything that your sinful flesh would ever want. Anything your sinful flesh wants. Listen to me, you're not going to get this from any pulpits. Anything you want to do sinfully, our world will fulfill it for you today. What do you want to do sinfully? The world will fulfill it today. You want to be greedy today? You can be it. You want to be sexually immoral today? You can do it. You want to be drunk today? You can get it done.

Whatever you want to be selfishly, the world can provide that for you

immediately. So what the Devil knows is for the believers, since he's lost you for all eternity, what does he do? He appeals to your flesh. He says, "Well, this world's really about you. This world's really about how people treat you and who you are and that's what you're about. And let me show you, this is what the world should be doing for you." Every advertisement, if you watch it, it's all about feeding your flesh and how that company's going to provide your flesh. That's what it is. That makes great advertising, by the way. That's free of charge, if you're in advertising.

So feeding your flesh and feeding the world. So here's how he works. Okay? Here's a steps and strategy for how he's going to work in your life. This works in your family. This works in the church. This works in your marriage. This works with your kids. This works in your job. This works everywhere that it gets established.

Number one is this, because the world is about you, you will have false expectations or unrealistic expectations about every relationship that you're in. Okay? That's how it starts. So if you get married, it's your spouse's job to make you happy 100% of the time. Okay? That's an unrealistic expectation. I'm an expert on this. It's an unrealistic expectation. When you think somebody else's job to please you, that's where it starts bad. And so this happens everywhere. "It's my boss's job to take care of me. It's my spouse's job to please me. It's my kids' job to please us as parents. It's my parents' job to make sure they do everything right for us as kids. It's my neighbor's job to make sure they're nice to us." Wherever you start, you start with faulty expectations that are going to be unmet. That's how it starts.

Then when your expectations are unmet, here's where he goes number two. This is the number one sin for every single believer and unbeliever that I know. Okay? In practice, all sins are the same, but this is number one, it's unforgiveness. When you have unmet expectations, then here's what you do. Because your life is about you and this part of the world didn't fulfill you, don't forgive them because they didn't do for you what they should have done for you. Be mad at them. Be upset with them. Don't ever forgive them. Make them say they're sorry to you.

Yeah.

Oh, yeah.

They owe you an apology.

Come on.

Okay, that's the number one sin. And why do they owe you an apology? Because they didn't meet your expectations. Here's what they should have done. Here's what my boss should have done. Here's how they should have handled it. Here's how my wife should have handled it. Here's how my husband should have handled it. Here's how my neighbor should have handled it. Here's how my friend should have handled it. They didn't, they did it wrong. So don't forgive them.

Then it goes to number three. Ready? Ready? Ready? Tell me you haven't lived these out. Tell me I'm not the only one here let's live these out. Number three, you gossip about them. Now that you're hurt, now that you're bitter, now that you're resentful, you gossip about those people. You understand? That's what you do. You

gossip about them.

Ouch. Ouch.

So now, okay, now what you do is this. Now what you do is say, "You didn't treat me right, I don't forgive you. Now I'm talking behind your back and I'm slandering you." Isn't it great that never happens in the church?

Oh, God.

Isn't it great that we don't have any unmet expectations in the church?

Oh, yeah.

Isn't it great that we always forgive one another in the church? Isn't it great that our marriages are always forgiving in the church? Isn't it great that we always extend grace to everybody in the church because we're modeling for Jesus what He wants. Isn't it great that we never make this mistake?

Yeah.

Isn't that awesome?

Yeah.

Feeling conviction, aren't you? Because our flesh says this. "You owe me, you didn't meet my expectation. Number two, I'm not forgiving you. Number three, I'm gossiping about you. Now guess what I do number four? Now I'm going to distance myself from you. So if you hurt me, I'm done with you. Now we assume I live together in a marriage, but I'm distancing myself from you, and until you say you were wrong,

I'm done with you. I'm distancing myself from the church because the church hurt me and I'm done with church for a while. I'm distancing myself from my neighbors because they didn't do ... I've talked about them long enough now, I'm pulling back."

And then guess what we do, number five? Then we redefine the definitions of what God has. So here's what we do. Something happens in church, we get mad because our expert expectations weren't met. So we have unforgiveness towards the church. Then we gossip about the church. Then we distance ourselves from the church and then we redefine church. And here's what we say. "Yeah, church really isn't necessary anymore. I don't need to go there. I don't go to church. I am the church. I don't need other people in my life. Who needs that? I redefine it."

Or I do the same in marriage. I say this, "Here's what it was. My spouse hurt me. There's unforgiveness. Now I'm gossiping about my spouse. Now I'm either distancing myself by either being in the marriage and being distant or divorced, and then I redefine what marriage is, according to my terms. And hey Pastor Jeff, you don't understand. I know that God says I shouldn't get divorced, but you don't understand my circumstance. Here's why I ..." It all goes back to the same thing, which is, "This is my life and it's not being filled and the world promised me this really good life."

Isn't it interesting what Jesus' definition of discipleship is? Anyone who would come after me must do what?

Deny Him.

Deny himself. So it ain't about you. What you're mad about. It's not about you

anyway. It's about what Christ is in you, and what would Christ do? Take up His cross, which means you die to the world, and then do what? Follow me. You can't be a Christian and live with unforgiveness in your heart and serve the resurrected Christ.

Amen.

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to think about themselves so that he can devour you. Because if he can get you to believe that your marriage is about you and your job is about you and your neighborhood's about you and this world's about you and everything's about you, he's got you. And yes, you can be saved to the full and go to heaven. And yes, you are completely forgiven. But in this side of heaven, you will be not only miserable internally, but you will make everyone else around you miserable as well.

Yeah.

Right.

Because unforgiveness bleeds on everybody. Be self-controlled and alert, your enemy the Devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. But what must you do? Stand firm in your faith. Knowing what? Was this message just for me? Are you sitting there saying, "I know I need to forgive that person. I know I need to not make it about myself. I know I need to repent. Is it just you?" Here's what he says, "Knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world."

Here's the truth. You ain't alone. You're not alone. When you go through times of suffering, you are not alone. Everybody's going through this in some measure. You're not alone. It's not as if Satan looks out at the world and says, "I'm only going to attack these three people." He's going after everybody. You're not alone. And when you suffer for the sake of the Lord, Jesus Christ, and you have denied yourself and you are taking up your cross and you are glorifying him and you're still suffering, here's what he says "You're not alone. You're not alone."

This world here was never intended to help Christians glorify God. That's not the purpose of this world. It wasn't the original creation, but once sin entered the world and once sin became part of humanity, this world is not about glorifying the resurrected Christ. It's not. This is the only place, meaning in churches that herald the Word of God is the only place you're going to get this. Go out into the world and proclaim this and see what people say. They'll look at you like you're strange.

Of course, this world's about me, and of course the world's about fulfilling me. And even many churches start proclaiming that this world's about you and make your life good in this world. And what are they teaching you? They're teaching you how to serve the Devil better.

Right.

That's right.

Shocking, isn't it?

Yes.

See, here's what we say, deny yourself, take up your cross, follow Jesus. Let's glorify him and let's live a new way. Amen.

Amen.

That's what He's saying. So trust God's sovereignty. Amen. Trust God's warning. And then how about this? When I'm going through suffering, trust God's purpose, trust God's purpose. Notice verse 10. "After you have suffered for a little while."

Now, a little while. What's a little while? Sometimes you can suffer for about 30 seconds. If you're suffering, 30 seconds can feel like an eternity. It's a long time. Some of you have medical procedures done, 30 seconds can be a long time after you've suffered for a little while. Well, here's what a little while we think is, enough. However long I've suffered has been a little while. That's enough. A little while is according to God's plan and all eternity.

So no matter how long you suffer in this life, it's just a little while. It's just a little while. In light of eternity, it's always just a little while. And here's what he says in the text. "After you've suffered for a little while, the God of all grace."

Now, what does it say in your Bible? We're called to cast all our anxieties on Him. Who's the God, the God of some kind of grace? The God of a little bit of grace?

No.

The God of all grace, the same God that's sovereign and powerful to save you from hell. The same God that's powerful to dispense the Holy Spirit in your life. The same God that allows Him to live His life in and through you in every way. This God of

all grace, this is what He's going to do, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ. Meaning when you're suffering, here's what you should be focused on, where you're going and what's about ready to happen. That Jesus Christ is going to break through the sky and come back and redeem those who are eagerly awaiting his return. This God will himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. I want that in my life. Those four words are really four words that are synonyms that are all saying the same thing. It means he's going to strengthen, uphold, root you, make you stronger in who He is. And what most of us will say is Christians is, "I'm strong enough. I don't need to go through any more suffering. I'm there, I believe in you, Jesus. I believe in you, Jesus."

Suffering is a way to take you through a season where you thought you were strong in Jesus, now you love Jesus, but you're even stronger in Jesus. Christians, can I get an amen from anybody that's gone through suffering?

Amen.

Amen.

Yeah.

Suffering has a way of establishing us and making us stronger in our faith in the Lord, Jesus Christ.

A couple years ago when we purchased this building, I bought some shelves from Ikea, which miracle of all miracles, I was able to put together. I was very, very proud

of myself. I didn't-

Whoo.

Thank you. But what the instructions said is you have to mount those things to the wall. Now the shelves were done. The shelves looked good. The shelves were fitted. They were fixed. But I had a friend of mine who's a carpenter come in here and he rooted them to the wall and he rooted into each other. My kids could climb on those shelves right now. Don't do it, but they could climb on those shelves right now, and they're not going anywhere. Why? Because they're fixed and perfected and they're confirmed and they're established in my office.

The shelf was fine before, but now the shelf is rooted. It's mounted. Why do you go through suffering? "I'm already a Christian. I already believe." Yeah you do, but when you go through suffering, there's a fixing process that happens in your life where you love Jesus, but now it's just deeper and now it's just stronger and now you just love him more and now you're willing to endure even more trials because you know that Jesus really is your strength and your source. Amen.

Amen.

Good analogy.

And that's God's purpose. God's purpose is, one His purposes is to strengthen you. We look at suffering as a bad thing. From Heaven, He looks down and says, "Oh, this is good. I'm only making you stronger. I'm able to perfect you, it's going to ... And then he says this in verse 11, "It's going to bring Him glory. To Him be dominion and

power forever and ever, amen." Dominion's His rule and reign. It means as you get more firmly rooted and established, you know what you're going to do a better job of? Worshiping the Lord.

What's the end game of the church? It's worshiping the Lord.

That's right.

Okay. Preaching is an element of the church. Prayer is an element of the church. What is the end game of all church? It's bringing God glory in everything we do. Suffering has a way of establishing us in such a way that we worship God even more than we ever would before we were suffering. Suffering has a way of bringing us together and encouraging us to trust God more and worship him even better. And here's the reality, when you get to heaven, all you're going to meet is a bunch of people who have been through suffering in some way in their life.

Everybody suffers. It's a promise. Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ, Jesus, will be persecuted. I had you underline that in your Bible a couple weeks ago. It's a promise. You're never going to get to heaven and meet somebody that says, "I don't know what y'all were talking about. I was on earth for 73 years. I didn't suffer once. It was perfect. It was awesome." You'll never meet that person in heaven.

Here's who you'll meet. "I loved Jesus and I went through some really hard things. And because I went through those, I love Jesus even more and I couldn't wait to get here." That's what it means. That's what it means, that He's going to confirm and perfect and establish and strengthen you. Trust God's purpose. And if you could trust

God's sovereignty and His wisdom and His purpose, then there's one final aspect if you're really going to experience God's will in suffering, and that's this. It's to love God's people. Love God's people.

See, we have a tendency when we suffer to isolate ourselves and get away. God calls us to community. God calls us to be together. God calls us to love one another. You'll see this in almost every New Testament letter, where they talk about their love for one another. Verse 12, Peter writes, "Through Silvanus." Who's also called Silas in the New Testament, if you remember Paul and Silas, this is the same guy. "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother for so I regard him, I have written to you briefly exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it."

What's he saying? "Silvanus, here's how I refer to him. He's my brother. That's how I think about him. Why? Because we share the same dad, so anybody that shares the same dad, we're all brothers and sisters in Christ. This guy's as close to me as my own brother. And I've had him write to you, exhorting you on what the true grace of God is."

What's the purpose of community? What's the purpose of small groups? It means we need other people to come alongside of us to speak truth into our lives. Speaking the truth is always a loving thing to do. Okay? Now there's ways to speak the truth. The truth is called to be spoken lovingly, but it's always loving to tell people the truth. There's nothing sinful about telling people the truth. There can be a sinful way that you tell people the truth. Like you can shout at them. You can badger them. There's bad ways to share the truth, but sharing the truth is not unloving.

Why do we need to be in community? Because we need to have people know us well enough, that see us well enough, that can speak into our lives well enough, say, "I know that they love me and they're speaking the truth to me. They're exhorting to go. God's way. They want Christ in me to be glorified and they care about me enough."

I know the people that care about me enough. I don't always like being around them. My closest friends, I don't always like being around them because they know they have permission to speak into my life about me. They know they have permission to call my wife. They know they have permission to speak to me about being a pastor. Why? Because they know, they know me and they know my gut and they know my motivations and they call me out on anything. Which is a good thing, but my flesh hates it. Because my flesh says "No, who are you to talk to me? This world's for me." Right? But what do we need? We need people that speak the truth in our lives.

Why is Peter writing this letter to people who are suffering? He's like, "I'm coming alongside of you, telling you that suffering's okay because you're going to be strengthened. You're going to be glorified. You're going to give God more praise. It's a good thing. I'm telling you the truth." You don't see anything in this text that says, "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. It's so bad. I feel bad for that marriage. I wouldn't have married him either. I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry that I'm so sorry."

Here's what he's saying, "I am sorry, and I want you to know suffering's a part of this life and because it's a part of this life, I want you to know how you can respond to this in a way where you can get above the clouds. Where you can see it from God's

perspective, where when suffering happens, you still trust God's sovereignty and His wisdom and His goodness and his love and His purpose for who He is say." Amen.

Amen.

Love God's people. When people are suffering, lovingly tell them the truth. Have them stand firm in the truth. He says in verses 13 and 14, he says, "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark."

Now who this woman in Babylon is, we don't know. We don't know if he's talking metaphorically about the church out of Babylon, which is the evil wicked world and it's the church greeting. We don't know if it's his wife. We don't know if there's some special woman saint who's been chosen together that the readers would've understood. It doesn't really matter to our understanding. Whoever it is, is sending greetings, and so does his son in the faith, Mark. And then he says, "Greet one another with a kiss of love."

Now, what's he talking about? Greeting in the first century was welcoming. It was hospitality. The reason you see in Romans 16, "Greet so-and-so, greet so-and-so, great so-and-so, greet so-and-so." And you might ask yourself, "Why did the Holy Spirit see fit to put in this whole chapter of greeting in there? Here's why, because relationships in the church were foundational to everything Jesus Christ was trying to accomplish. Relationships are everything."

Here's the question. Do you have relationships here? Because what we tend to do is because we think life is about us, we pick our three people that will make life

about us, and then that's my small group for the next 40 years. That's not biblical community. Biblical community is, I'm in for Jesus. I need people in my life. I'm welcoming people in my life. I'm welcoming others in my life. I want to be welcomed into their life. We're and sisters in the Lord. We're closer than my own earthly, biological family, by way of the cross of Jesus Christ. That's what Christian community is. And he says, "Greet one another with a holy kiss."

Well, in the first century, that was their way of greeting. Instead of shaking hands, they would kiss one another. If you go to Eastern Europe in some places or Russia in some places, that's still how they do it. Here, it just doesn't fit our MO. Okay?

Yeah.

Right.

So the model's the same. We still want to welcome everybody, probably inappropriate in America to go around kissing everybody in the church. Right? It's just not how we greet. It's not what we do. It's how they do in the Near East. And I've had missionary friends go there, guy's like me and he's like, "Dude, I was in this church and I turned around to say hi, and this dude with a big beard planted one right on my lips." Very uncomfortable. That's why we don't do that here. It's uncomfortable. But the spirit of it is not.

That's right.

Welcome people. We're glad you're here. You're welcome here. You're part of

my life by being here, I'm part of your life by you being here. That's what it means.

Greet one another, welcome one another. And then he ends by saying this, now listen to this. He says, "Peace." Now this is in the middle of suffering, in the middle of trial, in the middle of suffering. "Peace be to you all who are in Christ."

Who is peace for? Everybody. We think of peace as a circumstance. Peace is not a circumstance. Peace is a person. No matter what circumstance, no matter what suffering, no matter what you're going through, if Jesus Christ is on the center of that, you can have peace no matter what you're going through or what you're enduring. Peace. Romans 5:1 says, "We have peace with God through the Lord, Jesus Christ." Ephesians 4:3 says, "Be diligent to preserve the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."

What does God want for you in this body as you trust His sovereignty and His wisdom and His purpose and His goodness and as you're loving God's people? He wants you to experience His peace.

Church, listen to me, you can experience God's peace no matter where you are. You can experience God's peace no matter what you're going through. You can experience God's peace presently right here by humbling yourself under God's hand and by saying, "God, you're in charge, and God, these are circumstances I wouldn't have picked. And this isn't the way I thought my life was going to go and this isn't the way I thought it was going to happen. But you're still good and I still love you and I still care for you. So Lord, give me your peace."

And the peace of God's Son, Jesus Christ, can rest and remain on you in every single way. And isn't it good to know that God may not change our circumstances, but God can change our heart in the middle of our circumstances as we trust in who he is and as we love His people? That's what it's all about and that's why Peter ends with his great exhortation for us. "Hey, go live in peace because the God of the universe loves you and cares for you." Amen.

Would you stand with me? Lord Jesus, we just give you all the glory honor and praise for who you are. Lord, suffering is so uncomfortable for each and every one of us, we hate it. We don't want it to come. We don't like it when it does come. But Lord, when it does, may we trust your sovereignty. May we trust your wisdom. May we trust your purpose and may we love your people so that in it, we might experience more and more of the grace of God. Lord, we give you all the praise, be enthroned in our life so we can experience you in Jesus' name. Amen.