



When Life Beats You Up – Part 2

The Reciprocity of Comfort

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Proverbs Chapter 19 verse 21 begins with the words, "Many are the plans in the mind of a man." Many are the plans in the mind of a man. There's no doubt about that. Everyone can affirm that. We as people make a lot of plans. And I suppose, like me, there are many of your plans that were made and they were unrealized. Or I think about some of the plans I've made they've crashed and burned. They have completely tanked. And some people even talk about their plans that didn't get achieved, they talk about shattered dreams. And that's not an overstatement depending on the severity of how your expectations, your plans, your hopes have been dashed. I mean, sometimes it's catastrophic, very painful because there's grief and loss and all kinds of pain associated with some of the things we hope for that don't work out. Things that we envision that never get realized. Things that come to a screeching halt in a painful way. The rest of Proverbs 19:21 not only does it say, "Many of the plans in the mind of a man," but the next half of that proverb says, "But it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." That's a strange juxtaposition of concepts, right? We plan and then God purposes. But he is making a plan, apparently, that is so strong it's never going to be thwarted. His plan is not thwarted. It's his purpose. He makes a plan and it works. And I'm thinking about my plans and the struggle in that very verse is the problem with a lot of people when they think about Christianity in general. Because they start to say, well, why would we have a God who is so good and all-powerful and all-knowing not let me realize my good plans and I can attest to that as a pastor. I spend a lot of time planning and a lot of the plans, I'm confident these are biblical ideas, biblical parameters that help me plan. And then all of a sudden this plan crashes and burns. And are you telling me that it was the purpose of the Lord to have my dreams crashed or my plans thwarted? I mean, God wouldn't take responsibility for that, would he?

When in Isaiah Chapter 45 verse 7, he does exactly that. He says, "I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and I create calamity; I am the Lord who does all these things." That's the verse you didn't learn in Sunday school when you were a kid. Are you meaning to tell me that calamity in my life when things don't work out the way I want and sometimes they're so profoundly painful that this is God's purpose? Jeremiah Chapter 32. Israel was asking that question and here's how God responded, "Thus says the Lord: Just as I have brought all this great disaster upon this people," these are his people, "just as I brought all this great disaster upon this people, so I will bring upon them all the good that I promised." I've got good that I purposed here and I've got disaster that I've purposed here for them. That's a hard truth. And it goes back to the very beginning, if you think about it, the good plans of Adam when he left the Garden and got kicked out was to start cultivating his own garden. That's what he was. He was a gardener, so to speak. He was a farmer and here's one thing he didn't plan for. He didn't say, let's see how many thorns and weeds I can grow in this garden. And yet in Genesis Chapter 3 verses 17 through 19, that is precisely what God planned that he would do. His purpose was to send thorns and weeds into Adam's garden. Romans Chapter 8 verse 20 says that the "Creation," all of creation, "was subjected to futility, not willingly," not because it wanted to be, it's not that we want bad things to happen, but it was subjected to



futility by the "one who subjected it." God was the one in Genesis 3 who not only said there's going to be weeds in your garden, you're going to have trouble, you're going to have pain in childbirth, you're going to have problems in marriage. All of that was promised in that little section of Scripture. But you yourself will die. You'll return to dust. That's my decree. The futility, think about that, the futility of having a plan to watch your children grow up and get married and have children and thrive, and to have that dream shattered when you have to plan a funeral for your child. It happens all the time.

Compass Bible Church, Huntington Beach, they buried one of their teenagers out there. Car accident. Not his fault. Not drinking, not doing anything wrong. Compass Bible Church, Huntington Beach having to bury one of the teenage girls in their church. Plane crash in Fullerton. You might have seen it in the news. And you mean to tell me that God isn't involved in all of that? Look at what the Scripture says. Amos Chapter 3 verse 6, "Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?" How about Lamentations Chapter 3 verses 37 and 38? "Who has spoken it and have it come to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and bad come?" I mean, that's from the hand of the Lord. That's the purpose of the Lord? You got to be kidding me. You're out there pitching Christianity to your coworkers and your non-Christian relatives, and you don't start with that. We talk about God's good and he's going to do good for your life and he's got a great plan for you. These aren't the verses we stitch into some piece of art and hang on the wall. These aren't printed in greeting cards in our bookstore. But this is precisely what the Bible teaches. When Job was having an argument with his wife, and you must remember the context. Right? Seven of his sons and three of his daughters were all killed at one time as the roof collapsed where they were meeting. A storm came through and also after the Serbians came in and stole the herd and all kinds of disaster came upon Job and his wife said, "Curse God and die." This is just done. Because like many Christians today, they think that all that God has planned for you are good things. And Job responds by saying, "Shall we receive from the hand of the Lord only good and not evil?" Think of that word "evil" from the hand of the Lord. Are you kidding me? That's not what I was taught at the 21st-century megachurch I went to. The hand of the Lord has the purpose of suffering.

I mean, there's hardly any more shattered dream in the most extreme way to describe a broken dream than death. And according to Psalm 139, every day that is planned for every human being who God forms in the secret place in the womb of his or her mother, every day is written in God's book before there was yet one of them. Everything. "Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand." That's a hard truth for us to grapple with. But once you do, if you get that clearly in your mind, then when you're suffering, whatever your losses, maybe you haven't had to bury a loved one lately. Maybe, though you've like we've had several here this weekend, lost houses to fire up in Pacific Palisades, up in Altadena. They've lost their homes. Two people in the last two services both of them had lived in their home in Pacific Palisades for 41 years. One of them lost his business and his home. Wow! That's the purpose of the Lord that's standing or is that what we're supposed to say? Their plan was to live out their years in their home that they had spent so much time trying to decorate, model, they've invested their money in it. When suffering happens a lot of Christians say, well, where's God in all of this? Proverbs 19:21



would be a good place to start. They say why? I'm not saying that's a bad question to ask, but it's almost like this is unique. This is like I didn't think death would ever visit our family. I didn't know we'd ever get sick. I didn't know there'd be weeds in our garden. I didn't know our marriage would have any problems. I didn't think there'd be any pain in our lives. Once you recognize that it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand when you go into suffering you won't put everything on pause in your spiritual life and say, well, I can't wait for this to be over. So get back to, you know, rejoicing with Jesus on the other side.

You'll start to say if this is the purpose of God in my life, this unemployment, this cancer, this death in the family, this joblessness. If we can say no, no, this is the purpose of God for you. This is the path that he's laid out for you. Then we can start to look at this a little differently. We can lean into this and at least say I'm not a masochist, I don't enjoy it, and God doesn't want you to enjoy it. But we should be asking some questions about it and going about it a little differently. We're not supposed to just put everything on pause, try and dig our way out of this as though God wasn't paying attention and he was looking the other way when you got into trouble and now all of a sudden, you know, God, get me out of this trouble because, you know, clearly this wasn't your plan for me. We can start to embrace the reality of the truth of Scripture, which is hard for some people because they just have a very shallow, one-dimensional view of God. If we can get there then we can think about suffering a little bit differently. And I think we can come through our suffering much, much better than if you view it as a mistake. It's not a mistake as it relates to God's purpose. It may be something unexpected and unanticipated in our planning. I never plan the problems that I encounter. I never plan the pain, the sickness, the diseases, the conflict. I don't plan any of those but they've been purposed for me. And so we must say what do we do with it?

Now the theme, I know you thought it would be much more encouraging here in Second Corinthians Chapter 1, is a theme of comfort, but it's against the backdrop of suffering. We introduced this topic last week just looking at the first three verses of Second Corinthians. I'd like to tackle the next four verses. Now the whole theme carries all the way through verse 11. But let us look today at verses 4, 5, 6 and 7. And I want to recapitulate go through a second time, 4, 5 and 6. Let's look at it twice. I know you want to get to the comfort part, but let's start with the affliction part. Try and marinate in that and try and figure that out. And then we'll settle in on verse 7, which is a good way to end our time together. So let's read this together, Second Corinthians Chapter 1, beginning in verse 4. And I guess for the sake of completeness we should look at verse 3 because that started the sentence, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort." We thought of this in terms of the resources we have in the midst of our trial. But now we get into the action. What is this Father of mercy and this God of all comfort do? Well, "He comforts us in all our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." Verse 5, "For as we share abundantly in Christ's suffering, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we're afflicted, it's for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it's for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. For our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you share in our sufferings, you also



will share in our comfort." Now we got suffering and comfort. And this great unshaken hope of the apostle Paul.

But I want to look at verses 4 through 6 and just focus a little bit on the reality of affliction and suffering that he's going to talk about here, that he, as we looked at, kind of looking ahead in this passage starting in verse 8, he describes it, he too is someone who suffers. And he said, when I was in Asia, for instance, I was suffering there on this missionary journey, "despairing even of life itself." I thought, after all, "we'd received the sentence of death." We'll look in more detail about that next time. But he says, I know what it is to suffer. And of course he's going to lean in on this idea of comfort and he's going to say that's my hope and I'm confident you're going to be comforted. But we got to deal with the affliction problem and the suffering problem to start with. Because not only does Paul suffer, but he's assuming here and probably has some detailed information about the kind of suffering the Corinthians are going through. He comforts us in all of our affliction. And that "our" there probably includes the Corinthians too. He's starting this concept of how God responds to our affliction with the fact that we're all going to be comforted but it's all of our affliction. We all share in this. And the comfort is we want to be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. "For we share," look at this word, "abundantly in Christ's sufferings." You want to talk about someone doing the right thing for God and you think about Paul and Titus traveling around as missionaries. Well, that's a good thing. But Christ was sinless, and he was to suffer? All that suffering was that a mistake? Was God looking the other way? The Father was saying well, I didn't know you were going to get into that trouble with the Pharisees. No, it's the purpose of the Lord that will stand for Christ, for Paul, for Timothy, for the Corinthians and for all of you sitting here in this auditorium. "We share abundantly in Christ's sufferings." And that means your life is going to share abundantly in suffering. "So that through Christ we share abundantly in comfort." Well, we'll get to that.

"If we're afflicted," and of course we all are going to be, he just told us in verse 5, "it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we're comforted, it's for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure." That's a word we encounter a lot in our study. The word "Hypomonē." "Hypo" means "under," "Monē," means "to stay." To stay under. We're going to have to stay under this affliction. We have to patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. So suffering is here. Suffer. Affliction. Suffer. Suffer. Suffer. That is the reality. And I think the first thing we need to do when we're suffering is to number one, "Suffer Perceptively," we need to think about what's happening. You need to be perceptive. You need to even be inquisitive. You need to think about it, not like some people do -- Why? As though this wasn't supposed to happen. But let's start with a little systematic theology that it is going to happen because we live between Genesis Chapter 3 and Revelation Chapter 19. We're going to live in this period of a sin-laden world where God himself, as I quoted in Romans 8 verse 20, he has purposely "subjected creation to futility." And we need to think of this in two ways: the thorns and thistles, the weeds that are in the garden of Adam's garden. Right? That's what we would call natural evil. If you're talking to a philosopher or you're sharing the gospel with someone, having to defend the faith and apologetics, you need to distinguish two kinds of evil. And even in what Job was saying to his wife, shall we receive both good from the hand of the Lord and not evil? Of course we need to receive evil from the hand of God



because that's what he promised in Genesis 3. And what kind of evil did he encounter? Well, he encountered some bad people stealing his stuff. That's not natural evil.

But he did encounter a storm that knocked down a building and killed his children. That's what we call natural evil. Storms are something that no one makes a moral decision to do. This is the futility of creation. And God has subjected the world to it. When he cursed the ground of which we're made all the materials of earth and we have part of what the earth is all about, the soil built into our constitution. And that is cursed. Our cells do not replicate perfectly. Our DNA doesn't even replicate perfectly. Our lives are messed up. And because of that there are people in this room who have cells that are rebellious. They don't have a soul. They're not a moral agent. But those cells, we call them cancer because they don't do what they're supposed to do. Because in the world, the nature itself, that plate tectonics they're not greased quite the way we would like them to because we have earthquakes here in Southern California. And who knows, before the day is over, we might have a huge one for all we know. And it will knock down buildings as sure as the Santa Ana winds fueled the flames that burned down a massive amount of buildings in Southern California. Natural evil. And there was going to be natural evil in Eve having to suffer the pains of childbirth to bring a child into this world. That's natural evil. And the world is filled with it. When a volcano on some South Pacific island kills a bunch of people who live on the mountainside of this inert volcano that decides to become active, well, it doesn't decide, it's natural evil. When there are hurricanes in Florida, when there are tornadoes in Oklahoma, and we sit back and read about the death and the devastation, we watch people's homes scattered like toothpicks on the scene of the helicopter after the disaster. That's a natural evil that comes because God has subjected the world to futility, including all meteorological realities, all geologic realities, all cellular realities. These are all subject to futility. So natural evil is what God endowed the world within Genesis 3.

In Genesis 4 we see moral evil. When Adam and Eve have to bury their son Abel, who's a pretty bright and godly young man. And now he's dead because his brother Cain was envious of him and decided to pick up a rock and smash his head. Can you imagine having to bury a child and it's because one of your other children killed that child? That's the moral evil that strikes to the heart of Eve and you can only imagine what it was like to suffer the broken dream of having your child killed by your other child. Moral evil is taking place in this world and you're not exempt from natural evil. Your house can fall just like your neighbor's house in the next earthquake. And you can be the victim of crime. You could be murdered before we get together and study the Bible again, because we're all subject to moral evil and natural evil. So systematic theology would step back and say, well, why is there suffering in the world? That's not what you're asking when you say why God? You're asking about why me? Why is this happening to me? But if you want to start with the biggest question why this? It is because of what I've just explained. Natural evil which God imposed on the world, moral evil which God is allowing to play out in this world. And it's all part of his purpose. If you happen to be a victim of it, that doesn't sound good in Sunday school, but it makes sense for mom and dad to figure it out as they sit in big church. We better understand moral evil and are non-exemption from being victims and subjects of moral evil.



There's another kind of suffering the Bible talks a lot about and that's self-imposed suffering because you sow to the flesh and you reap from the flesh. Here's a word that is painful, "corruption." Sowing and reaping. It's all over the Bible. Read the book of Proverbs. There are a lot of things that can happen, and you can be lazy and then you can starve, right? You can be a crook and the Bible says sometimes being a crook will lead you to punishment and you can end up dying over that, being killed. You can't scoop fire in your lap and not be burned. And speaking of fire, maybe you can look past all of the surgeon general's warnings on the pack of cigarettes and smoke six packs a day and end up dying of emphysema or lung cancer. And you can say, well, if I hadn't smoked this wouldn't have happened. And you're right, that's called sowing. And God builds into the world when you transgress things that make sense in God's moral climate of reality, that you end up reaping the consequences of it. You can enjoy so much the dopamine hit you get from taking your paycheck and driving out to Vegas and wasting it all on the craps table that you end up becoming a broke person looking for government assistance. You can suffer because you do something that you know is wrong. Your conscience yells at you when you lay down another bid and all of a sudden now you are doing something that you know is going to end up hurting you. You bring this pain upon yourself.

When we suffer perceptively we should all be praying the prayer of Psalm 139. That'd be a good passage to jot down because we should be praying it often because we're going to suffer often. Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24. And it's a great little prayer that you've certainly heard. And it goes like this, "Search me, O God and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! See if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!" When you start praying that prayer God may identify for you what kind of suffering this is. Even you being allied with Christ, we've talked a lot about this in the past and if I had time I'd go deeper into this. But you remember the prophecy regarding Christ that he would be "a sign to be opposed." This was told to Mary as she was told, there's going to be a sword that pierces your heart raising the Messiah. It's going to be hard. You're going to watch him get crucified. But that sign to be opposed, we talked about that way back when we studied Luke 1 together. The world's going to target him because it's a fight "not against flesh and blood, but ultimately against spiritual powers and principalities." And they're going to hate what Christ is there to do. And if you align yourself with the bull's eye of the cosmic powers, guess what you're going to be, you're going to be hit too. As Jesus put it, if they hated me, they're going to hate you. Or as Paul put it, you can't desire to live godly in Christ Jesus and avoid being persecuted. You're going to be persecuted. So a lot of the pain may come just because you're a Christian or just because you live in the world.

But I'm more concerned with the sowing and reaping not just the kind of general sowing and reaping, but you claiming to be a follower of Christ. And when you are we know we have the potential to grieve the Holy Spirit. And if we do that, here's one of the reasons you may be in a season of suffering and we should start here. It's not the only place we're going to go but one of five reasons. Let me start with this one. You're being disciplined. Let's just jot that down, right? One of the reasons you could be suffering and if you're suffering perceptively, you're going to ask God, God is this the reason? Is there something in my life you're disciplining me for? Now it says in Hebrews Chapter 12 there is no discipline that's going to seem pleasant. It

all is painful. So you're experiencing pain. It could be I planned this and this happened. Think about the Old Testament. They went out in the marketplace, they turned a profit, they put it in their wallets or their purses and it was like putting it in a purse with holes in it. Why? Because they weren't giving to the Lord and they were supposed to give to the Lord, especially in the post-exilic period. It was very important that they gave to the Lord. They didn't give to the Lord so God says I'm going to take all your wealth and spread it out to the wind. You're going to do good in business but at the end of the month you going to say where did it all go? Because you're not giving. There's an example of you being a Christian and you may say well, God, why is this happening to me? It may be happening to you that you're not making ends meet or that you're not healthy, or that you have some problem because of some sin in your life. And as a Christian you're not doing this. So you ask God just like you as a parent. If your kid comes to you and says why am I grounded this Friday? I have no problem telling you why you're grounded. I'll tell you why you're grounded. Happy to oblige you for that. We want our kids to know why they're suffering, especially when they brought it upon themselves and we are imposing the suffering on them. The purpose of the Lord can stand and maybe God has broken some of your plans and shattered some of your dreams because he's trying to get your attention that there's sin in your life that you need to confess and repent of.

To put it in terms of First Corinthians, this is who he's writing to after all, the Corinthians in the First Letter of Corinthians as we call it, in Chapter 11 he says, you've turned the Lord's Supper into a potluck, and it's a joke because you're sitting there elbowing each other to get to the front of the line. And this is ridiculous what you're doing. The kinds of divisions within the church had made the Lord's Supper a joke. And he says that's why some of you are weak, some of you are sick, and some have even died in your church. Think about that. In this passage, by the way, he says you need to discern yourself when you're engaged in this so that you don't drink judgment on yourself, "eat and drink judgment on yourself." Here's what he goes on to say after he says many of you are weak, many of you are sick, many of you have even died. He said, "But if we judged ourselves truly," honestly, if we really prayed Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24, well then "we would not be judged," right? That's a great statement. That's another way of saying if you would just figure out what you're being disciplined for and confess it and repent the discipline would stop. That's the promise here. "If we truly judged ourselves we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord we're being disciplined." And according to Hebrews 12, it's a privilege to have God care enough about your life and your call to be a Christian to correct you when you're wrong and the way he gets your attention is through suffering. So that's one reason.

Another reason, turn to this one if you can, First Peter Chapter 1 verses 6 and 7. It says, "You've been grieved by various trials," bottom of verse 6, "so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold ... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." When Christ comes back real Christians are going to be so jazzed that it's all taking place. When you get caught up to meet the Lord in the air that's a good day. But if I asked you are you sure? Like he asks in Second Corinthians 13, "Test yourself to see if you're of the faith and you make sure that Christ is in you." Are you really saved? Which I know some people rebuff at anyone questioning their testimony. Not a bad thing. If we love you, we're going to say are you sure you're of the faith, just like Paul says. So



is your faith real? Did you read the Daily Bible Reading this week? In the Daily Bible Reading Jesus explains the parable of the four soils, and he talks about one soil that springs up as though it's going to be a really healthy fruit-producing plant. But instead, right here come as he explains it in the interpretation, here come the temptations. Here come the pressures. Here comes the suffering. Here comes the price tag of being aligned with Christ. And because of that it immediately wilts, immediately it dies, immediately it's done. Don't want anything to do with this because it's too costly. You know what that's called? Suffering. The second reason you may be suffering is God is trying to prove to you that you're really a Christian and he'll do that through suffering. There's no possible way you can get through the Christian life if you live any amount of time after you become a Christian without him bringing some trial into your life just to bring you assurance that you're truly saved. That's the assurance that we need. And you need that assurance because when someone asks me are you a Christian, I want to be able to look at my life and say here's the thing, my faith has been tested. I'm not running out of the kitchen just because it gets too hot. I'm not in this as a fair-weathered person who just likes Christianity as long as it feels good for me. When persecution arises because of the Word are we going to stick it out? That's what's going to give us assurance. So maybe you're suffering because God just wanted to make sure that there's no doubt in your mind that when Christ comes back it's all going to be good.

Maybe, James Chapter 1, speaking of one to look at with me, James Chapter 1 verses 2 through 4. Maybe you just need bigger muscles. God wants strong Christians. I don't care about your physical biceps. But you and I should care about our spiritual biceps. And we should be strong. Strong Christians are important in this world. We need strong Christians. Christians like Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to use their Babylonian names, we need strong Christians. And the Bible says you should count it all joy when you go to the spiritual gym because this is going to hurt. You meet trials of various kinds for you know that the testing of your faith produces, now here's the word we find also in Second Corinthians 1. It's the Greek word "Hypomone" we've talked about it, to be able to steadfastly remain under the difficulty, patient endurance, those two English words translate the word hypomone. And here it's translated "steadfastness," which I wish it weren't because no one, when someone asks you how you're doing, none of you says steadfast. We don't use that word much anymore. But nevertheless, it's a throwback word. But it's supposed to communicate that stick-to-itiveness of being able to be strong. Well, it's more than just being assured of my salvation. Let that hypomone, that steadfastness have its full effect. And what is that? That you may be perfect. Here's this word "Teleios." I often talk about the word teleios. It doesn't mean that you never make a mistake, but it means, as my dad used to say, you got to have the right tool for the job and you've got to be sharp enough to be used for whatever God wants to use you for. That you may be teleios, "you may be just right and complete, lacking in nothing." When God wants to go into the tool chest of the church at Aliso Viejo, Compass Aliso Viejo, he wants you to be a tool that's just right, to be useful.

So you need to be stronger because all Christians need to be stronger. And I guess this one overlaps. Just jot this one down. John Chapter 15 verse 2. John 15:2. That's the illustration Jesus uses as the "Father is" the farmer, "the vinedresser ... I am the true vine." If you "abide in me, ... you'll bear fruit." And then it says this in verse 2, if the vinedresser sees a vine that

bears fruit, "he prunes it so that it will bear even more fruit." Now, I don't know how you want the sharp scissors of God messing with your life cutting things off. That's painful. But it's the pruning that produces more fruit. The strength is not just so that you can be strong and we can stare at ourselves in the spiritual mirror of the Word. Although there are times you read the Bible and go man I remember wrestling with that two years ago. I'm glad I've got that. It's a habit of my Christian life. I'm glad I got through that temptation. Good. As a young man in Christ that's a good thing. But it's so that you can go out and do something productive. And maybe the pruning and your strength and your spiritual muscles are so you can be useful. You can bear fruit. He doesn't just want you bearing 30-fold fruit. Maybe it's time for 60-fold fruit. And the reason you went through that season of suffering and your dreams were shattered in this particular area of your life is because you got through it with the Lord and now he's got you ready to do more effective ministry. Maybe you're being disciplined. You need to pray and ask. Maybe you need assurance. Maybe you need to be stronger. Maybe you need to be more productive.

How about one more, the fifth one? Maybe you're producing 100-fold fruit then why would I suffer? Well, we've dealt with this example from many different directions already. Second Corinthians Chapter 12. Paul has a thorn in the flesh. If you want to talk about 100-fold fruit guy, that's him. He's bearing a lot of fruit in the book of Acts, and yet he gets a chronic illness that he calls a messenger of Satan and he pleads to the Lord because you know what? It's only affecting him because the Lord is allowing this to affect him. Just like in Job's story in Job Chapter 1. It only happens because God is giving the leash out a little bit on Satan to attack Paul. Paul gets the thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet his body, he's in pain. He cries out to God determined to have God take it away three times. He's got faith, I mean, like crazy. And God didn't take it away. He says, "No, my grace is sufficient." And he explains in verse 7 why that's happening. Because he said he wants me humble because of the exceeding revelations that he's experienced. I mean, if you're writing the New Testament and you go to somebody's home fellowship group, you're going to feel pretty prideful I'm assuming. You're going to be tempted to be prideful. What does this mean? Well, let me tell you, I wrote it. I mean, that's going to be a moment of tempting pride. Well, if you're there with a chronic illness that brings you pain every single day, perhaps this is something that you need. Humbling. Why? Because "God is opposed to the proud, but he'll give grace to the humble." He can use humble servants. He will keep you producing fruit if you can stay humble. So this is part of maybe why you're suffering. Maybe you're suffering because you're being disciplined. Maybe you're suffering because you need assurance. Maybe you're suffering because you need to be a stronger grown-up Christian. Maybe you need to produce more fruit. Or maybe it is that in your producing of fruit you need to stay right where God wants you, and that is reliant and dependent and humbly bowed before God.

There are five reasons. And you could maybe put together a couple more from the New Testament but that's a good start for you. But you're never going to figure this out if you don't suffer perceptively. What is happening? Is this sowing and reaping? What's going on? Is this discipline? Are there unconfessed sins? Do I need more assurance of my salvation? Do I need to be stronger? Do I need to be more productive? Do I need to be humble? What's going on in my life? That's a good place to go. Paul figured it out in Second Corinthians

Chapter 12. We need to figure it out by suffering perceptively. Keep your ears open. Some people are thinking, "Well, this was not the encouraging sermon I thought it would be Pastor Mike." Well, let's go back. We looked at the affliction and suffering side. Let's look at the comfort side. But I just want to give you a preview. It's not going to be as encouraging as you think. Sorry. And I'll tell you why. Let's just read and we'll figure it out. "Who comforts us in all our affliction," yeah, finally, "so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction." There's the rub, "With the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God," that's nice, comforting by God. "For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings," we already dealt with that, "so through Christ we may share abundantly in comfort too." That's good. Because "if we're afflicted, it's for your comfort and salvation; and if we're comforted, it's for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings we suffer." Comfort, comfort, comfort, comfort, comfort. That's great. But it's a comfort that I'm supposed to understand so that when I'm comforted in my afflictions, I might like Paul and Titus do and just like Christ did, I might be able to help you. And here's the thing I naturally don't want to do when I'm suffering. Worry about you. I want you to worry about me. Right? I want to curl up and say this is my pain, my problem, everyone needs to help me, please. Help me, I'm suffering. That's my natural tendency. Is that yours? I'm sure it is. You don't need to answer. Yes, it is.

But here's a passage challenging us that when we're comforted, it's for a purpose, just like the affliction, he says. Look at this in verse 6, "If we're afflicted, it's for your comfort and salvation." We just passed right pass your comfort, even though that's been clearly stated in the passage. If you're afflicted, it's so I can comfort you. My affliction is purposeful, let's put it that way. Number two, you need to not only suffer perceptively, you need to "Suffer Purposefully." I'm going to see the purpose that God has. As I get through this, I want to help others. Help is such a small word compared to what Paul has in view that he even enlists the word that's hard for us to understand in any other context than having our name written in the Lamb's Book of Life. But look at it again in the passage, so you don't misunderstand verse 6. "If we're afflicted, it's for your comfort and salvation" Now let's just for fun, just think about the difference between the two salvations we can talk about. There's the salvation that matters most that most of the time we use the word, even in the New Testament, where we're thinking about our name written in the Lamb's Book of Life, us being clothed in Christ, us never hearing, "depart from me, I never knew you." But having the great welcome into the kingdom. That's salvation. Salvation is future. That's true. But all you have to do is read more in the Bible to find that that word, even in the New Testament, that word is sometimes used as it is here for getting through the bad thing that's happening. It's a lot in the Psalms. Look in the Psalms and see how often we see the word "save" to talk about being in trouble and getting out of it. Let's put it this way, Job was saved out of his troubles. I mean, it took 39 chapters, but it happened. Ultimately it didn't happen until the last chapter, Chapter 42. But the idea of him getting through this, that happened, James 5 says it.

The idea of salvation here is I want people around me in my church to get through their trials. It's going to hurt, but I want to get them through it. So when I'm suffering, I'm supposed to be thinking about them. How can I have my comfort and me getting through my trials something I can utilize in your life? That's the way we need to think. Now, of course, you're going to have



to attend to a lot of the problems that come in your life when you have your dreams shattered. You got a lot of care that you need and you're going to use all the instrumentality, as we said last week, of God and his people and his Word. All of that's going to be used to comfort me. But even as I'm getting that comfort, or even when I walk into the dark tunnel of a trial, I need to say, okay, God, you're getting me ready to minister to other people. I'm going to be able to help other people. Now I'm all about comfort and having you comforted but just know if you're comforted in the midst of your trials it's so that you can comfort others. Let me read for you verse 4 again. Who comforts us in all of our afflictions so that we may be able to comfort those who are in the same exact affliction that I have. Highlight the word same exact affliction. Do you see that there? Is that what it says? No. You're supposed to correct me when I read the Mike Fabarez version of the Bible. That's not what it says, but that's what a lot of people think. What does it say? A-N-Y. Any affliction. Any affliction. Even in the Greek text in the New Testament it is a strong word. Anything. Anybody struggling in the church. If I lost a child in a car accident or a plane crash and I get through that as God is comforting me and getting me through my grief, I can comfort the guy who's lost his job and can't find a new job. The guy who's lost his job. Right? He's able to comfort someone, a gal who's lost her husband and the gal who lost her husband may be able to help the gal who's infertile and can't have a child. You don't have to comfort the person who's got the same exact affliction.

And that's why we don't have all these support groups for well, okay, here are the people who have had this trial, and over here we have this support group for these people who have this problem. That's not how it works. We don't have that by strategic purpose. Because in your small group, your home fellowship group or your sub-congregational small group, if you're part of a ministry, you should be in a circle where the chairs are face to face. All of our sub-congregations have that small group time every week. If you're in a home fellowship group that's what it's about. You're there face-to-face. Everyone in that circle because they're Christians, as it says here, they're going to go through affliction. Everyone in that circle has gone through afflictions. I don't care if it's a bunch of teenagers. They've gone through some affliction. And they're able to take you through your affliction whatever that affliction is. So how do we get ready for this? How do you purposefully suffer? A couple of things. And we started this last week. But let's think of it again. We need to identify how we are comforted. Think about how you have been comforted and some of you have suffered just some grievous losses. You've struggled through really painful situations. And I just want you to think, we started thinking this way last week, how were we comforted? How did people minister to us? How was it like it says in Acts 15 verse 32 that Judas and Silas encouraged and strengthened the brothers with many words? I remember preaching through that passage with you and thinking, wow, what were those words? We know words are a big part of it. I mean, just the right letter that's written to you, just the right text that you receive, just the right words that are said in a small group or at your bedside when you're suffering in the hospital. There are certain words that can be so useful, an apt "spoken words are like apples of gold in settings of silver." It's a great proverb. Life and death and the power of the tongue you've been ministered to. You've had new life brought back into you, so to speak.

I mean, it's the perfect word about encouragement. The words have come alongside of you, "Paraklētōs" they've been called in alongside of you and it's propped you up. Well, take note



of those words. Take note of those words because I assure you there are some words that didn't work very well. I'm sure people have tried to comfort you with words that didn't work, that were counterproductive. Like Job, you can say at times when you were suffering and Job was suffering massively and he turns around and says to the three friends he has, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, he says to them, "miserable comforters are you all." All three of you guys' stink at this. And I want you to think about why. Let's just think about Job's comforters. Part of the reason the book of Job was written was to remind all the people in the Old Testament and us today that everything in the Proverbs are not promises and in every case there's no exception. "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he's old won't depart from it." Well, that's a great proverb. It's a proverb, right? If you're lazy you'll come to poverty. Well, I know a lot of trust fund kids who are really lazy. If you work hard, you'll have an abundance. I know a lot of people who work hard and that hasn't gone well for them. Godliness, it comes with reward, with life and honor and peace. Well, Job sitting there scraping the pus off the boils of his skin with pot shears, broken pieces of pottery, with all of his kids dead and all of his wealth stolen was a godly man, we know that and all this bad happening. It's called the Retribution Principle in the Old Testament. The retribution principle is if you're good, you'll do well, if you're bad, you'll get punished. Job is getting evil from the hand of the Lord. It is purposed for the Lord to have his life collapse circumstantially. And here's the exception. And you know what these three friends of Job kept saying? It must be a secret sin in your life somewhere. You've done something wrong. They presumptuously blamed Job for all of his problems.

Now, is it bad for me? And I can do it publicly here with all of you because you're not in the middle of some terrible thing that I know about. I'm not speaking directly, I'm speaking to all of you. I can say to you maybe you're being disciplined and I hope you can receive that and spend some time asking God, Psalm 139, "God search me and try me." But if you've got a person who keeps asking you that over and over again in the midst of your trial, at some point it's going to sound a lot like Job's three friends that if you say, "No, man, I have searched my heart. There is no pang of conscience. There's no passage of Scripture coming. I have no unconfessed sin." If you have friends like Job's friends who constantly presume that all of this was brought upon you because of course God would never do this to you if you were a godly person. That's miserable comfort. Take note of that as well. Psalm 62 talks about suffering, sitting in silence, waiting in hope for the Lord. God is going to come through. Sometimes some people have ministered to you not with words but just by sitting with you in silence. It's good not to sit alone in silence waiting for the deliverance of the Lord. Sometimes in the grieving process and there is a period of grieving and sometimes it's good not to sit in silence alone. It's good to have someone else sit with me. Have you ever been administered to by someone in the midst of your pain just coming and not saying anything to you? Just being there with you. Okay. We'll take note of that. Because if you've been ministered to that way, well, then you should be getting a notebook together to say these things work, these things don't. I know how this is ministering hope and encouragement and strength and I know how these things are just frustrating.

There are some people and you may think I'm this kind of person because I have to preach here authoritatively from the pulpit. But there are some people who are miserable comforters



because they come in and just say, suck it up, suck it up, suck it up. Just suck it up. And I would love the opportunity to prove to you that that's not the way I'm going to comfort you. I mean, that's not the sermon I've ever preached at a funeral. Suck it up. Hebrews Chapter 13 verse 3 speaks of the Body of Christ in such a profound way. Maybe you haven't read this passage lately, it says, "Remember those who are in prison." Now, these weren't in prison because they were drug dealers or larcenists or whatever. They're in prison because they're Christians and godly and the government is cracking down on them. "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated," as though you are, "since you're also in the body." If they're in the Body of Christ then you ought to care. It's like Romans says, "Weep with those who weep." It expands it here. You should feel with them in their pain. I went through crushing pain this week with somebody as their pastor and all I could say is not suck it up, but this really hurts. This is bad. And in some really tough funerals, if you've been to some of my funerals that I preach at, I have said that death, it sucks. It's bad. And we should say that because First Corinthians 15 says that. It's not helpful to lack compassion, to just point people to the end of the tunnel when they're in the tunnel. Right? We got to say, hey, it is hard. We need to be able to feel the pain that people feel. There's got to be some sympathy here that runs deep.

And I think you've seen people who have done that well and people who have none of that. People who are always saying everything's good, everything's good. It's all going to be good. Well, that's true. But there are truths that can be delivered without much discernment. And Lamentations Chapter 2, I just love the juxtaposition of the two verses in verse 10 and verse 11 when he speaks of the people in Israel looking at their city in ruins and they're sitting on the ground in silence and throwing dust on their heads. And Jeremiah responds in verse 11 in the first-person pronouns, and you know what I'm doing? I'm just going to weep with them. My stomach's going to turn for them. Because I'm a part of this too. We're part of the Body of Christ. If someone is mistreated then in your small group you're going to have to be sympathetic. And if someone has been sympathetic with you in the midst of a trial and you've said, "Man, that really did help, I didn't feel so alone." Well, then take notes. Some of you, if you look at the words in our passage, look at it again. There's a statement here in verse 4, the bottom of verse 4, "Comforted by God." Now, I talked last week about the instrumentality of people, right? "God who comforts ... the depressed ... comforted us," Second Corinthians 7 says, "by the coming of Titus." Now God uses people, but sometimes there's no one around. Paul says that in Second Timothy Chapter 4 verse 16, everyone has abandoned me. But in verse 17 he says, "But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me."

So there is a time for you to know how you were ministered to by God himself. Maybe in an extended quiet time, maybe by reading certain passages, maybe just by sitting before God silently. And that's something you can direct someone to do. It's like David, you remember David in First Samuel Chapter 30 when he was leading his band of people and everyone had their relatives kidnaped? It says they were all bitter in soul and David came back to the camp and it says there was talk of stoning him. They were going to kill David. But I love this little line, the bottom of verse 6. "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." How do you do that? No one was for him, just like Paul. Everyone had abandoned him. Everyone had turned on him. But there's something going on and I want David to come out and tell me how



to do that. And maybe you've gone through that and you've really had God strengthen you in the midst of a crisis. Take notes, identify how you were comforted. Note the lame attempts at comfort and then replicate good encouragement. That's what I'm asking you to do. The right answers at the right time, the right words at the right time. Making sure you don't abandon people in the midst of their trial, calling them back to be a part of the congregation, and that we talked about last week. And don't ever limit your comfort. Some say I can only comfort people who have the same exact trial as me. We started with that in verse 4, no, in any affliction.

Verse 7. Second Corinthians Chapter 1 verse 7. I just want to center in on this positive view of the Apostle Paul. "Our hope for you is unshaken." I have no doubt. "For we know that as you that as you share in our suffering," you're suffering like we're suffering. It may not be the exact same kind. But we know you're suffering because if you're a Christian you're going to suffer in the sin-laden world. And we know we're confident "you will also share in our comfort." I love the optimism of that. And I would tell you to be on the receiving end of that statement from the Apostle Paul, which is God himself telling you. Let's put it this way. Number three, you need to "Suffer Optimistically." You need to have an optimism. And the Bible is clear that you as a Christian should suffer differently than the non-Christian world. And he says that thinking about you burying a loved one. He says, if we don't grieve like the rest of the world. Do you remember this, he tells the Thessalonians? Because they grieve without hope. Paul says my hope is unshaken. I don't care how bad it is. I don't care if you're dying of cancer. We can work on comforting you with something that the non-Christian world can't be comforted. Number one, they don't have a real relationship with a living God. And secondly, they have no assurance of what's coming after death.

One last passage. Turn to First Peter Chapter 5 with me. Let me give you three sub-points for this optimistic suffering. Verse 9 is helpful. Let's start with this. After talking about the kind of attacks that we're going to have from the adversary in verse 8, he says we've got to resist them, stand "firm in your faith." And then he says this, how are you going to make it? How are you going to stand firm? How are you going to get through this? "Knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world." You may think you're the only person struggling the way you're struggling, and that is just not true. That's such a lie. And you can't tell yourself that because even someone who's infertile might be able to deal with your divorce. I'm just telling you, you don't have to have the same exact situation. But even if you were to think I don't think any Christian had a kid that has done this, I guarantee you there are other Christians and it may be someone in a whole other place. You don't need to find that person to get comfort, but just know you never suffer as a unique Christian who has never suffered that way. Not only that, this is the beginning of the Church age. Here we are, what I hope is the end of the Church age. You look back through church history... One of my favorite things to read are biographies about pastors. And you can imagine because I get to hear how rotten they had it so many times. There's not a problem I read about that I can't identify with in one way or another. I think, man, they've been dealing with this since John Chrysostom's day, right? The same problems, which by the way, they grabbed him on Easter when he was preaching and pulled him out of the church and fired him. There you go. I think, you know, I've been through some hard times close to that, but



never quite like that. I think to myself, everybody has had the problems we're having, and I'm not alone. That's the first sub-point. I always want to think when I'm suffering I'm not alone. Everyone is suffering and everyone, even though my church is suffering. And you know what? Throughout church history and around the world, Christians have suffered. And it's not because they're not in the center of God's will. It's not because, you know, God's not paying attention. It's because the plans of man are many. But, you know, God's purpose, it stands. And God's got a purpose in the kinds of pain he brings into your life and mine.

Verse 10. Number one, I'm not alone. That's verse 9. Verse 10. "And after you've suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who called you by his eternal glory in Christ, will restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you." Think about that. None of our suffering is permanent. Some say, "Well, wait a minute. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. You said he never got over it." That's true. He had a chronic illness to his death. But even the day he was writing the last chapter of the last letter we have from the Apostle Paul, Second Timothy Chapter 4, he's about to be executed. I quote this often and he says, I'll be brought "safely into his kingdom." Well, you're going to lose your head in a little while here. The Romans are going to kill you. Yeah, but I'm being brought safely into the kingdom. You understand that all our suffering as Christians is temporary and is always tempered with hope. That no suffering is going to last forever, and even temporally I want you to think about it. I don't care what you've been through. I've watched Christians go through some horrific things. And you know what? They end up standing on their feet. They take advantage of all the resources that God gives them. They lean into the church and they walk with joy and they get past their time of grieving and their loss and all the shattered dreams. Yeah. It's always in their past. It's in their resume, but it doesn't define who they are. And it's so important for us to realize it's going to end well. "A little while." I hope it is a temporal little while for us that we'll get through it. But even if it's not, our life is going to be just a small dot on the timeline of eternity. It's going to end well for all of us. We're not in it alone. It's going to end well for us.

Let's get the last one from verse 11, Letter "C." "To him be the dominion forever and ever." That ends us where we started. I quoted Proverbs 19:21. "The purpose of the Lord will stand." That's going to be established. The word "dominion," I mean, that's what we're talking about. He's in charge. The dominion of the Lord. "To him be dominion." We know we can't control our lives. We can't control when our family members die, we can't control our cancer cells. We can't control a lot of them. We'll do the best we can to mitigate trial and get out of trouble and stop suffering. But in the end we defer to his dominion. He's a good God who has a good plan and calls us by his eternal glory into a hopeful future that is going to end with restoration, confirmation, strength and establishment. And so I'll defer to his good hand, which it says earlier in this very passage, "Humble yourself under his mighty hand." Just humbly roll with his plan because his plan is a purposed plan and it's going to happen and no one can thwart his plan. Our plans are thwarted every other day. So you need to praise God for relief. Praise God for his sovereignty. That's hard to do. I know it. But in his sovereignty, if he's gotten you through illnesses or trials, well then praise Psalm 103. "Bless the Lord, O my soul and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Forget not all of his benefits," and he starts listing them. Look at all the things he's done. I mean, we're all sitting here still alive. We lost some people in our church last week who died. I get that. But you're still here. And so far, God has



established you and brought you through whatever you're struggling with. And the minute someone in our congregation dies, which seems to be every other week, guess what, they are if they are Christians as the one this week I'm thinking of who graduated into glory and we one day will be reunited in bodies that we'll hardly recognize. A good day is coming for us. We're in a whole different category than the rest of the world.

So let me leave you with this benediction that comes from Second Thessalonians Chapter 2 verses 16 and 17. It's the end of the book, really, I mean, he gives this long, lengthy ending, which of course is God-breathed like the rest of it. But he's ending this section here with the doxology, and here's how it reads. "Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us," I love this phrase, eternal comfort, ultimately, "eternal comfort and a good hope through grace," I mean that ties everything together, "eternal comfort, good hope through grace," you didn't earn it, may he "comfort your hearts," I love this, "and establish them in every good work and word." There's no better doxology to wrap up what I've been trying to say. There is a God who's called us to eternal comfort. There's the endgame and a "good hope through grace," may he "comfort your hearts," I want you to be comforted, "and establish them in every good work and word." When you're suffering and needing comfort, I want your heart established to do good things and to say good things, particularly in trying to help someone else through whatever they're going through. If you're not in a small group in this church, I just got to tell you, you're not going to have the forum to do this in. You need to be in a place where you know people by name, you know their birthdays, you know their status of life, you know what their job problems are. We've got to get to know each other in the Body of Christ. That can't just happen in the lobby. It's got to happen in small group ministry, and that's throughout our church. Whatever our programming is, it always includes small groups. Please, I exhort you in Christ that your hearts would be comforted not in a vacuum, but to establish you in that comfort and every good work and word.

Let's pray. God, let us lean into the good that you have for us to do before, during and after our seasons of suffering. There's so much that you want to use us to do when you sharpen us in the midst of our suffering, you affirm our faith. Sometimes you discipline us just to do what is good. And even as it says in that text, no discipline seems pleasant. It's painful, but it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. God through the other side of discipline or just being a victim of the sin in our world or being a part being purposed to go through the trials of growth or keeping us humble, muzzling our flesh or whatever it is you're putting us through, God may we understand how you want to use us. May you establish our hearts for every good work and every good word you want to use us to accomplish and effect good things in other people's lives. Make us useful, God. Let us never suffer and only think of ourselves. Let us be perceptive and know what's going on. Let us be purposeful and ultimately let us be optimistic. All of our suffering is going to be something in the distant memory, the rearview mirror of life. It'll be gone. We can't wait for that day. But until then, till we get to the other side of this sin-laden period of time, God may we do our best in the midst of our suffering to glorify you. Thank you so much for your kindness to us in every way.

In Jesus name, Amen.