Exploring and Proclaiming the Depths of Scripture
FOCAL POINT MINISTRIES

True Strength – Part 2
When God Refuses to Remove Your Weakness
Pastor Mike Fabarez

There is a phrase that is found in the Bible that is used to describe what should be found in Christian lives, a phrase that your friends, your family, your coworkers, people in your life should see visible in your life, and I fear that it's often not visible in our lives. It's found in Philippians Chapter 4 verse 7, and it says that when we come out of our times of prayer, we ought to be characterized by peace. It describes it as the peace of God, "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding," the peace that surpasses all understanding. Now, it's not because you always get what you are asking God for, because if that were the case it wouldn't be hard to understand, right? Everyone would understand that. No one would have a hard time understanding that because you ask God for stuff and he gives you precisely what you want. No, this is the kind of hard-to-understand, if not impossible-to-understand peace that you have because you've asked God, the context uses the word "supplications." You've given him, that word you don't use every day, but you've given him these urgent and even you might say you've begged him for something. And the answer has been no. And still you come out of it with a peace that people don't understand. It surpasses their understanding. They don't get it. They scratch their heads and say I don't understand. How do you have peace when you don't get what you ask for?

It is hard for us to have this, but I just want to ask you if you are happy and joyful when God gives you what you asked for and you are sad and you're frustrated when he doesn't give you what you asked for, how different are you from your non-Christian counterpart who may not even be asking for stuff? But when good things happen to him or her, they're happy, they're joyful, and when bad things happen to them they're sad and they're frustrated. We look exactly like the world if you have that response, because I know you may add the layer of prayer to it, but even they pray in the foxhole of life when things go wrong and they're happy when God does for them what they ask, they're happy when just they say oh, good fortune has shined upon me. And when bad things happen they get mad. And Christians, I just wonder if we're really guarded as it says in that passage in our hearts and our minds by a different response. Now, if you're going to have that response you're going to need something going on in your hearts and your minds that is radically different than what the world is engaged in. And you're going to find it in God's Word, particularly in a very familiar passage that I know you've heard talked about before in Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 7 through 10. And in that passage we're going to read some truths that have to be clearly in your mind, or you're never going to have peace when God says to you no, when you say God, I really want this and he goes, no. That is going to be impossible unless you understand this. And it's on display in Paul's life here in this autobiographical section in Second Corinthians Chapter 12. But if you can get this and you can understand it, you can look really different than your non-Christian counterparts.

So let's look at this text and see if we can't leave today with some sort of key that's going to unlock this idea of having peace and contentment and even some joy, even when God doesn't do what you want him so desperately to do. Let's look at this text and remember the

context because we've been dealing with this for chapters now in Second Corinthians. It's been kind of tough, some of it, because Paul is talking with a lot of dripping sarcasm throughout this as he's trying to engage in a comparison with people he's saying I don't want to compare myself with. But he needs to because these people he has sarcastically called the super-apostles have come in and they've tried to vie for the loyalty of these Corinthian Christians. And Paul is saying these guys are false apostles. They are messengers of Satan. They're like angels that try to masquerade as angels, but they're really not, they're messengers of demons. They're not the kinds of people you want to listen to. They're going to teach you the wrong things. And really at the heart of it you might remember we've looked at the fact that they've held on to a definition of leadership that Jesus use to talk about. They want everyone to serve them. They don't want to lift a finger to do anything that's going to be hard. That's the kind of, you know, corner office, be at the top of the heap, CEO-kind of leadership structure, and that's what they're looking for. They're a self-aggrandizing group of people.

And the Apostle Paul starts to list things, particularly in Second Corinthians Chapter 11 as we've studied, where he's saying, you know, you want to look at my resumé? I'm going to highlight these things, look at how much I've had to suffer to speak the truth, look at how much I've had to suffer to go and do ministry even among you Corinthians. I mean, I've been through so much because that is how Jesus put it. If you're going to be a leader, if you're going to be a leader who is worth listening to, you're going to have to, as we put around here, go the extra mile, stay the extra hour and spend the extra dollar, because that's what service to Christ looks like. Paul says I'm pouring out my life like a drink offering at the end of my life. He says, that's what it looks like. You're spending and you're being expended for the souls of people. That text was right there in the middle of this argument. And so he lists these things starting at the beginning of his Christian life in Acts Chapter 9, where he has to be lowered in a basket over the Damascus wall because the governor is after him. So all of this he says those are the things you ought to look at. Look what my leadership has cost because I was willing to speak the truth. And just like they crucified Christ, they've been after me the whole time.

Now he adds to it one more thing here and it really touches on the prayer life that all of us have experienced. And that is, we've come to God with something that's been painful. We've said God, take it away, and God says no. This is the famous thorn in the flesh passage. So let's look at it. It's only four verses but that's plenty for us to chew on today, so let's start in verse 7. It says in verse 7, "So to keep me from becoming conceited," so that's his conclusion here after all has been said and done, "because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations." Now remember the first six verses of this passage we're inferring, obviously, like Colossians Chapter 2 says, there are false teachers there puffing themselves off by going into great detail about the visions they've had. So Paul says well, you know, if they want to talk about visions, I could talk about experiences I've had. But, you know, there are experiences I've had that I'm not even allowed to talk about. But clearly, as an apostle, he can't be writing Scripture or teaching God's Word in the New Testament era in New Testament truths unless God is bringing revelation to him. So he has had plenty of revelatory experiences, and God has utilized him to teach and proclaim New Testament truths without a written New

Testament. And he's writing the New Testament even as we read. And he says, "because of the surpassing greatness of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh." And wouldn't you like to know what that is? Well, so would your commentators because they're writing and spilling a lot of ink on what it is. And can I give you some advice? Stop. Just stop. Stop asking and stop trying to read another commentary to figure out what it is. Because if the Apostle Paul or God, let's just put it that way, wants you to know what the thorn in the flesh is, he would, and he didn't. So let's just leave it at that.

When God is purposefully ambiguous in his Word, there's a reason for it. And I think in part because this passage has been very helpful for Christians through the centuries with all kinds of painful things that have happened, because when was the last time you had a literal thorn in your literal flesh? What did you want to do with it? Take it out. I mean, that's just the reflexive things that we humans want. There's pain. Can we mitigate it? If it's a thorn in my finger, let's take it out. That's all we need to know. Has there been any pain in your life lately that you wanted to take out and you knew a pair of tweezers wouldn't do it? You need God to take this pain out. So you've asked God to take it out. It's as simple as that. So let's just leave it at that. We don't need to know about eyeballs or epilepsy or whatever. And he calls it a messenger of Satan. That's why some people think it's actually people. I don't think it's people because I think "in the flesh" means literally in his body. So we'll use that motif because that's commonly how people understand that. But it can be beyond that. Whatever is paining you this morning let's identify and put ourselves in the sandals of the Apostle Paul, and let's experience this unanswered prayer chapter in his life and let's see what we can learn. That messenger of Satan, right? This is something that Satan is good at. He loves to be the adversary of God and his kids and in this case his noble servant, the Apostle Paul, to harass him. But all that harassment, all of it has been, first line of verse 7, the last line of verse 7, "to keep me from becoming conceited." Why? Because I'm such an honored vessel of God's revelation. Right? And now he's even engaged in the act of the inspiration of putting out there in writing the Word of God. As he says later to Timothy it is as though these are God-breathed words coming to people through his writing.

This is an amazingly heady thing. And he says you know what this thing, this thorn in the flesh, let's just call it a chronic illness or some kind of malady of the body. Let's just say that. Or even if it's not, even if we're wrong about that, it doesn't matter. It's pain in his life that is in his life and he says this has really kept me humble. Okay, great. That's his conclusion. Well, before he came to that conclusion, verse 8, he does what all of us would do. He pleads with God. "Three times," he says, "I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me." Well, we all engage in that. "But," well, there's the contrastive conjunction we don't like. We'd like it to be "and," and the Lord took it away. But God doesn't. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, and my power is made perfect in weakness.'" Now that sounds like it belongs on a Dayspring card and everyone can rattle that off at your small group. But I hope you know my disdain for people using phrases they don't know the meaning of. And this is one of those phrases we can throw around and we sure need to understand what that means. And I suggest that today we better leave making sure we know what that means. I hear people use it all the time, and I like to stop them and say, what do you mean by that? "My grace is sufficient for you." What does that mean? "My power is made perfect in weakness."

How? In what way? What are you talking about? "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses." Now, in the context we've defined what the weaknesses were: to stand up for truth, the thing that should be a credential in my life for you to know that I'm telling you the truth, is look at how much it's cost me. Those were the weaknesses. I was beaten up with rods. I was whipped by the Jews. I was in shipwrecks trying to go out there and take this message elsewhere. They threw rocks at me. Look at all the stuff that happened to me. I've been humiliated. I've been opposed. I've been run out of town. All of those are the weaknesses on my resumé that show I've been faithful to the word. I'm not adapting the word. I don't have stadiums filled with people wanting me to sign the books because I'm telling people what they want to hear. That's what the false teachers do. I'm telling the truth. I'm serving people. I go the extra mile to do what is right and it's cost me.

So that's been part of the weakness. Now he's adding another thing in this autobiographical statement. There's now this thorn in the flesh. There's been something in my body, I assume, that is hurting him. And so Paul says God, take it away. And he said, nope. This is part of what it means for you to do the work I've called you to do. You need to stay humble in the work I've called you to do, and your work requires that. So I'm giving you this thing and it's not going to be taken away. And so Paul goes, okay, I'll be glad in that, "I'll boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, that so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." I don't want what God is powerfully doing through me, the impact I'm making as an apostle, I don't want that to go away. I don't want to stop being useful. So I'm okay with this because the weakness he's adding now on this list, on his resumé of weaknesses, is this thorn in the flesh. And he summarizes it all. He adds the list that we've already dealt with in the previous section in Second Corinthians Chapter 11, "For the sake of Christ, then," for what Christ is doing through him, "I'm content with weaknesses," right? Which in the current context, the immediate context, is the thorn in the flesh. And then to go back to Chapter 11, the end of Chapter 11, "insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I'm weak," with all these things that I don't want in my life but are the cost of doing business as a servant of Christ, "then I'm strong." Okay. We'll figure all that out because those are phrases that are used and we need to make sure we understand them.

But let's start with the chronology of what's going on here. And what's going on here is the Apostle Paul gets some thorn in the flesh. It hurts him. And it doesn't start in verse 7 with the conclusion, well, I know what it's there for, it's to keep me humble. It starts in verse 8. I'm going to start begging God to take it away. So let's start our exposition in verse 8, okay? Verse 8, "Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this." What's this? The thorn in the flesh, "that it should leave me." Okay. Now you're going to think Pastor Mike didn't need to go to seminary for this first point. I understand that but write it down anyway. Are you ready? Let's just assume it's a malady of the body, some kind of illness, chronic sickness. Okay, number one, "When You're Sick, Pray to be Well." Don't applaud. (audience laughing) I understand, I know you want the offering bag back to put more in it right now. I get it. That's just so profound. Okay. That sounds obvious but let's put it in some context because there's a lot of weird thinking about this. It should be reflexive; it should be understood. But I want to put it in the largest context. Matter of fact, a lot of what we're going to hear this morning about this truth needs to be put in a larger context. It'll almost feel like a little systematic theology about

all of this, but that's okay. Sometimes we need that. So let's start with this and let's give it a six-point analogy starting with me putting you in your imagination back into the ancient Near East. Are you ready to do that? And I'm going to put a crown on your head. You were either the king or the queen, the reigning monarch of an ancient kingdom. Are you ready to do that? BAM! My magic wand. I just made you this king or queen, the reigning monarch, the sovereign of an ancient kingdom. Okay.

Now I'm going to give you six things to think through. Here's the first thing you need to think of in my analogy. I'm going to take one slice of the pie with you as a sovereign over a kingdom. Okay. And we can get this just by reading all of the Bible. Let's say you're living late in the divided kingdom period somewhere in Second Chronicles, let's just say, ruling over Judea. Okay. You should know this by reading everything earlier in history, in the books of Chronicles and First and Second Kings. You should know this. As Jesus put it in Luke Chapter 21, "Nation will rise against nations and kingdom against kingdom," right? You're going to have, as Jesus put it elsewhere, "wars and rumors of wars." So let's just get that, Letter "1a," you should know in a fallen world there are going to be bordering nations that are going to want your minerals, they're going to want your land, they're going to want to capture your people, indenture your people, they're going to want to tax your people. You should know wearing the crown that you're going to have attacks on your nation. Let's start with Letter "1a," attacks are the norm. Letter "1b," you've read enough of the Bible living here let's say in the seventh century B.C., sixth century B.C., let's just go near to the end of the kingdom of Judah. You have read in the Scriptures themselves that occasionally, and by occasionally I mean very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, VERY rarely, very rarely, you know that because you are ruling over the covenant people of God that very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very rarely God can go in when these battles start, you might have one next month, next year, that he can go out and he can send like he did in Second Kings Chapter 19 verses 34 and 35, if you're a copious note taker, and he can go in and send the angel of the Lord when 185,000 Assyrian soldiers are surrounding your borders, and he can go in the night and just take his angel of the Lord and kill them all. You can have, as I wrote down, a warless victory. You know that God can do that. And how common is that? Shall I repeat it? Very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very rare in Scripture. Very rare. But it happens.

But because it's very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very rare, here's the thing you should write down, Letter "1c," you as the king, should have a standing army. You should have a standing army. Okay? We've read about it a lot in our Daily Bible Reading if you're keeping up with that. Second Chronicles Chapter 17, for instance, Jehoshaphat becomes the king. And when he becomes the king, like a lot of the kings, we read it this morning if you're keeping track of the Daily Bible Reading, it just says here so well, he comes and takes the supplies, gets them together in Judah, he takes soldiers, mighty men of valor, and he starts to count them. He musters them by their fathers' houses, and he gathers together 300,000 men of valor. He gets them ready to fight. He makes sure he has them ready to go, even back all the way to the book of Judges. All the pictures of God saying you need to do this. I need to make sure you know how to defend your borders. We need to make sure you know how to fight. You need to have a standing army. Even Jesus said this to the Twelve at the end of the

ministry. He said this to them as they got to the end of the three and a half years. He said, you know what? If you don't have a sword then you'd better sell your cloak and go get a sword. Better for you to be cold at night and shiver a little and have a sidearm than for you not to have one, because it's dangerous out there. Now you could see Thomas and Philip scratching their head. James going I don't get it. You told us at the beginning not to take a sword. You told us at the beginning not to even take a wallet or a backpack. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you know why? Because very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very rarely amazing things can happen. We cannot bring a backpack with food in it and all of a sudden now food just appears and fish appear out of nowhere. It can happen, but that's not the norm. So it'd be good for you to make sure you have a means of defense or a means of food. It would be good for you to have a wallet with some money. We never send people on mission trips from Compass Bible Church and tell them don't bring a passport, don't bring a wallet, don't bring a backpack, don't pack anything. Just show up. We love the Lord, right? We trust in the Lord. Okay.

You should have a standing army. We see that even Nehemiah didn't even have an army. But if you're going to build the wall in 52 days, you better have a trowel in one hand and you better have a sword in the other. That's how they built the wall. They're ready for a defense. So can God do it without an army? Yes. So "unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stays awake in vain." You know that principle. Well that leads us to the next thing. Letter "1d." Godly leaders and godly countries should pray and trust God for victory. They should pray and trust God for victory. It doesn't mean they don't have a standing army. But just like David says in Psalm 20, "some trust in chariots and some in horses," which David had a lot of. We read all about them. They're numbered, "but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." Or as Isaiah put it in Isaiah Chapter 31, "woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they're many and horsemen because they're very strong, but don't look to the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord." That wouldn't be good. Well, wait a minute. I have to have a standing army so I can trust in an army. No, no, no, no, no, no. Get a standing army so that you can trust in the Lord and he can utilize the army to win the battle. Letter "1a" attacks are the norm. Letter "1b." Very, very, very, very, very, very, very rarely God wins warless victories. Letter "1c." The norm is to have a standing army. Letter "1d," you ought to pray and trust God just like Asa did. There's a great statement we read in our Daily Bible Reading this week, "Asa cried to the Lord his God, 'O Lord, there's none like you to help, between the mighty and the weak.'" Whether we have a lot of armies or a little army, "'Help us, O Lord our God, for we rely on you, and in your name we've come against this multitude.'" In your name we have. "'O Lord, you are our God; let not man prevail against you.'"

We should feel so allied with you that the victory has to be yours. Like David running against Goliath with a slingshot. He didn't come empty-handed. He came with a slingshot. It didn't look like he was going to win against this formidable foe with his armor on, this really tall Philistine. But David came and he said, "I'm coming against you in the name of the Lord," in the name of the God of the armies of Israel. So we're trusting in God. We're using the tools that we have, whether it's Nehemiah with just a few builders who are doubling as soldiers, or whether we're Jehoshaphat or Asa or David, we're getting our standing army together. Letter

"1e," we should engage in the war wisely and justly. We should engage in the war. When it's time to fight, it's time to fight. As Solomon put it at the end of his time, there's "a time for war, and a time for peace." And as Deuteronomy Chapter 20 says, if you want to go back to the beginning, this is like, this is a long time, 400 years before we had a king. God is writing through Moses; here are the rules for warfare. And they were in warfare long before the king came along. But here's how you engage in just war. And I mean, that's a precursor and some nomenclature that comes later in the early part of church history when people start to articulate, Christians can go to war, they should go to war. There's a just time to go to war. Sometimes you wouldn't be just if you didn't go to war. So Christianity is not pacifistic. That's a new thing of late. Well, that's not new, but it's the fringe idea. Don't be a pacifist. Be biblical. There's a time for war, and so we just need to make sure when we engage in it, we do it justly. And so if you're Asa, if you're Jehoshaphat, if you're David, you do it right. You do it justly. And so godly countries should justly fight for a righteous cause. There are plenty of examples of that.

Letter "1f," you should wisely work through the outcome when you lose. You should wisely work through the outcome when you lose. Let me talk about winning another time but this sermon is about losing, when you don't get the victory you trusted God for. Okay? Just jot this down. We don't need to write a lot of passages down next to this. 721 B.C. 586 B.C. If you've taken some classes at Compass Bible Institute you know those dates. In 721 B.C. the Assyrians took the northern tribes. In 586 B.C. the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar burned down the city of Jerusalem and took the southern tribes. He decimated a lot of them, left them, and took some of the cream of the crop to Babylon. So what happens? We read about it in the prophets Hosea and Amos in the northern kingdom, and we read a lot about the southern kingdom, Jeremiah in particular, Ezekiel, Daniel. We learn a lot about how you're supposed to process the loss. What do we do now? What are we supposed to think? So much about that in the second half of the book of Isaiah. How are we supposed to think through all of this? There's a lot to learn in the midst of a loss. Okay. Look at them. Attacks are the norm. Very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very rarely there's a warless victory. Countries should be ready with a standing army. Godly countries should pray and trust in God for the victory, not in their armies, even though they should have them. A godly country should justly fight for a righteous cause. And Letter "1f," they should wisely work through when they lose. There are plenty of examples of that. Okay, that's the paradigm.

In parallel let's do six more here as they relate to us personally. Let's start with the first one. As long as I quoted Luke 21:10, let's quote Luke 21:11. Luke 21:11 after it says, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." He then says in the world you're going to have things like this: famine, which means your stomach isn't getting enough food and you're going to really hurt physically. You'll have no strength. You may be famished. You may faint. The next one is pestilences. I don't know if you used that word this week, but you know what that means, diseases. There's going to be, you know, germs. There's going to be bacteria. There are going to be viruses attacking your body. So your body... Now you don't have to imagine this. Take your crown off now. You are in your body. So in your body Jesus warns the king that he's going to have his nation attacked. I'm telling you, Jesus is very clear about this, likewise your body is going to be attacked. Sometimes your body isn't going to have

enough of what it needs and your body is going to suffer. Sometimes things are going to attack your body and your body is not going to be healthy. Okay. Again, Letter "1a," you should expect that. Letter "1b," very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very rarely, very rarely in the Bible there are rare and purposeful fixing of the body when there is an attack upon the body. It could be someone with some congenital birth defect like blindness or maybe there's paralysis and "silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you ... rise up and walk." BAM! Instantaneous healing. Yeah. Does that happen? Sure it happens. It's happened in three primary ra'ashes, waves, during Moses and Joshua, during Elijah and Elisha and during Christ and the apostles. We have those ra'ashes, waves that I often say from this platform, Hebrews Chapter 2 verse 4, are often associated with revelatory attestation of the fact that God is bringing truth and often leaving behind written Scripture through the apostles and prophets. More on that in another sermon that's coming up in Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verse 12. We'll see that. But what's the point? It's a very, very, very, very, very, very, very, very rare thing in Scripture and out of Scripture. Okay? Letter "1c," we should be ready. You should be ready for your body to be attacked both here in your brain and it'd be good for you, I don't know, take some vitamins, get enough sleep every night. I don't know, hit the gym once a year or once a month, I don't know, every now and then. Right? And I say that only because First Timothy Chapter 4 verse 8, I don't want anything like this passage where it talks about bodily discipline ever to give you a license to be the guy sitting there in the mirrors flexing his muscles all morning for four or five hours at the gym, sort of be Jack LaLanne, if you know that name, I can't think of a modern one because I'm not in that world. But you cannot be a health freak, okay? I'm sorry. Bodily discipline is of little value. You're working against the decree of God, just so you know.

So you can be healthy. Great. Be healthy. You're healthier than I am, most of you, 75% of you right out of the gate. So congratulations. But what's the point? You can't make your body your idol. I understand it's the temple of God, but it's also a temple that has been decreed to turn to dust. And you just need to know this. Take care of it. Take care of it. Take care of it. Did pastor Mike say to take care of it? Yes, he said that. And he joked about once a year. You should go once a week, I don't know. Or more than once a week. You should take care of yourself. Take a walk. I don't know, do something to be sure you have a standing army. You should have a few things in your medicine cabinet. You should be ready for an attack. You should do something to stay healthy if you can. Okay?

Letter "1d," when you get sick. Right? What does our point say? You should pray. And what is prayer? You're shifting your trust. Let's put it this way. James Chapter 5 verse 13. The context is about getting sick and it starts this way, "If anyone among you is suffering? Let him pray." Reflexive. Clear. I have a splinter in my finger. I should go and find the tweezers. That's exactly what we should do. We should know that God is the one who can control the microbiology inside my body. If I'm diagnosed with cancer. Right? The doctors, they're doing their best but I know God is the one in control. And even if I have a watchman on the wall and I'm taking my chemo, I know ultimately God is the one who's directing everything. So I need to pray. And you can get a disease in your foot like the Bible talks about. And the king can say, yeah, I have this problem. Let's get all the physicians over here. Well, you can do that. But if you don't seek the Lord, God's not going to be happy. So you have to seek the Lord.

Some trust in horses and chariots, some trust in surgeons and physicians and they don't trust the Lord. Now, David, did he have horses and chariots? Of course he did. Should you have a doctor? You should have one. Should you go and have a physical? I don't want to be a hypocrite right now, but probably (audience laughing) if you can find the time, if you're not too busy. What's my point? Besides being way too transparent with that statement, the point is you should definitely pray and seek the Lord when you are ill. You should say I want to make sure that I am going to say, God, I know that you, as people said in the olden days, are the Great Physician. And I know ultimately my trust is in you not the medicine.

Letter "1e," when you are sick and you have prayed properly, fight your sickness, righteously fight your sickness, go after it. Don't sit there and tell me you're trusting God and you're not going to do something about it. Even in the context of James Chapter 5, and I was going to blow your mind, but in James Chapter 5 I don't think it's about a ceremony when we're putting oil on your forehead. I think the concept, much like the whole story about the man going down to the road to Jericho who gets jumped, which is one reason Peter and James and John and Philip and the rest were supposed to carry swords, is that when he gets jumped on the road to Jericho, the guy comes along, the Samaritan, and one of the things that he's clear in the text that he's supposed to do is put oil on the guy's wounds. It's a very important and standard staple of the medicinal way you would deal with someone, depending on what their illness is. And it was one of the things that they were putting on just about everyone who was sick in the ancient world. Why the elders of the church? Because the elders of the church, much like on the mission field today, were the most educated and usually the wisest people in a place. And James, writing to these people scattered all over the place, these weren't, you know, metropolis cities, right? You would go to the pastors and they would probably be the ones to try with medical knowledge as best that they had in that scattered little village to give you some kind of medical treatment. And I've seen it on the mission field. Someone gets hurt. As I saw one time someone had an ax that cut their arm or their leg, I can't remember which. They went immediately to the missionaries and that's just how that worked. And so seek medical care. Seek medical care. Don't come to the pastors for the medical cares. Come to us for prayer. We will pray for you. And that's important. But we're going to send you to the doctor and that is what you should do after you make sure your trust is in the right place. Letter "1e," properly fight your sickness.

Oh, and by the way, I'll give you some verses, First Timothy Chapter 5 verse 23. In the ancient world, certainly in Ephesus, water was filled with all kinds of bacteria. You could definitely get sick in your stomach. Timothy, just trying to do what he should do and that is to avoid every appearance of evil. He didn't want to be a drunkard. He was avoiding drinking any wine because of the alcohol, even though it had a small amount of alcohol. And so Paul has to write him and say, hey, you're getting sick in your stomach all the time. Drink "a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments." Right? That was something very important. There was a medicinal value in having alcohol to make sure you didn't have all this dysentery or whatever you're going to have, this upset stomach. So he tells them to do that. So Timothy is regularly ill. This isn't about a Pentecostal, you don't have enough faith to be healed, right? Clearly, he has enough faith to be healed. This isn't about a healing, a miraculous healing. This is about you making sure you get the medicinal help that you need.

Justly, rightly, righteously fight your sickness. I could go on in other passages but this will just give you one to write down.

Lastly, Letter "1f," and this is our passage, Second Corinthians Chapter 12, wisely work through the outcome when you remain sick, when you have a chronic illness, when your arthritis is degenerative, when your tumor doesn't go away, when your tumors are advancing, when your cancer is getting worse, when your body is breaking down. Okay. When you get sick, you should know, Letter "1a," you're going to get sick. That's what you should expect. Letter "1b." Right? The miraculous healing is super, super, super, super, super, super, super, super, super rare. And we should be ready to do the best we can with the body we have. We should pray and shift our trust immediately when there is an illness. Letter "1e." Fight it. Fight it with the medicinal things that we have available, and then wisely work through this when we don't get the outcome because we have prayed and we've sought the kind of help we should seek in terms of medical help.

And by the way, the Apostle Paul traveled with a guy named Luke. Do you remember what Luke did? He was a plumber? No. What did he do? Construction worker? No. Tent maker? No. Luke was a physician. So just remember when Paul's talking about a thorn in the flesh if this was some kind of problem, people think it was a problem with his eyes, whatever. Who knows what it was? Some think it's epilepsy. A lot of theories on it. He traveled with his personal doctor, so just know he's seeking medical care. Are you following all that? Only one other thing, really, really, really, really quick that I want to get out of verse 8 here because some people misunderstand this as well. It says in verse 8, "three times I pleaded with the Lord." Does that strike you that it was only three times? How many times have you been praying for some chronic illness? Adam, take your clicker and start keeping track. I bet it's more than three, am I right? Okay, so what's with this? It seems like he gave up pretty quick. Maybe that's why God didn't answer. I thought I was supposed to be persistent in my prayer. I thought I'm supposed to "pray without ceasing." What's with that? He went to the wrong Sunday school class because my Sunday school teacher told me, keep praying. Okay, now here's what I'm going to tell you. You should always pray without ceasing. You should always be persistent in prayer. Yes, but you should not always, because you've heard to be persistent in prayer, persist in the same prayer request forever. The Bible never tells you to do that. Matter of fact, there are plenty of examples like this one to know that you're done praying for that prayer request. There's no longer any reason for you to pray for that prayer request.

Do you want more examples? How about this one? Deuteronomy Chapter 3. Deuteronomy Chapter 3 verses 25 and 26, Moses keeps going, man, you know the Promised Land is going to be great. Well, here's the thing. God already said you struck the rock when I told you to talk to the rock. Right? My glory was on display here and you really showed a lack of respect. You're not going into the Promised Land. Oh, yeah, but it sure is great. I'd sure like to go, God, please, please, please let me go into the Promised Land. Here's what God says in response to this prayer. "The Lord was angry." And this is the first-person Moses writing, "the Lord was angry with me because of you and he would not listen to me." The "you" is the crew,

the people of Israel, because they watched him do this. "And the Lord said to me, 'Enough from you; do not speak to me of this matter again.'"

So here's a godly man who was told to stop praying about that. And that was about himself and his own desire to go into the Promised Land which seems like a totally reasonable request. You're the leader of the group. Okay. How about someone praying for someone else? Jeremiah Chapter 7 verse 16. Jeremiah Chapter 7 verse 16. He's praying for the people not to go into exile and not to be defeated by Nebuchadnezzar's army. Right? This is in the sixth century B.C. when they're surrounded by the Babylonians and he's praying that this doesn't happen. And here's what God says, "As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry in prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you." That's what God says to the prophet. There's a time for you to stop praying for things because God's answer is no. There are examples. I mean, First Samuel Chapter 16. These are godly men, Moses, Jeremiah, Samuel. And God is saying, stop, I know that you want Saul to keep continuing on. I need you to stop with the Saul thing. We're moving on to David.

So there are times God wants you to stop praying for a particular thing in a particular way. In Paul's case, it was three times. I don't think it was like morning, noon and night. I prayed before breakfast, lunch and dinner. This was probably a season. Who knows? I'm guessing now. We'll find out. Maybe he prayed and fasted for three days over here. Prayed and fasted the next week over here. Prayed and fasted... Who knows? Whatever it was he said he pleaded with the Lord. So this is probably some protracted prayer time. And he got the message. The message was God's going to provide.

Okay, let's talk about what Paul's conclusion was. First line of verse 7. Last line of verse 7, "To keep me from becoming conceited." Did Paul figure out why God did not answer the prayer? Yes. He pleaded. God said no. And he said, I know what this is about. Did he know it right away? No, he didn't know it right away or he wouldn't have asked for it to go away. He found out because God said no, I figured it out now. And specifically he did whatever he came away with in verse 9, which we'll look at in a minute, in verse 7 he got specific. So he figured this out. I don't think God gave him a note. I don't even think this was an audible answer, but he figured out "to keep me from becoming conceited," and the last one "to keep me from becoming conceited." So I have such a heady role in the early church, God has given me a chronic pain which keeps driving me back I'm assuming, as he says in Chapter 1 of Second Corinthians, to God, to rely not on myself, but on God. So this has worked out to be a good thing to keep me humble. Okay.

Number two, just to identify here, we need to "Seek God's Purpose in Your Pain." Do you have pain and you've asked God to take it away? Maybe today is the turning point for you to stop praying for God to take it away. Maybe today you're going to realize because you've sought him and you've prayed. You've supplicated, you've begged him, you've urgently asked him. You've had enough time to say yes I've seriously prayed about this. I'm going to stop asking God to take this away. I'm going to now start looking for the purpose in this. Okay, let's start with that. Now again, it sounds like systematic theology, but let's step back and think this through, okay?

What are some of the purposes of pain? And I want to start with the general. Let's make two categories, general purposes for pain and strategic purposes for pain. Okay. So that's going to be for Christians. We can think about non-Christian strategical but I'm only going to preach for two hours, not three. So let's just stick with the two categories. I definitely only got a mild chuckle from 20 people, (audience chuckling) so the rest of you either didn't hear me or you're going to bail after 45 minutes. First category, general pain. Let's go back to Genesis Chapter 3 just to think through general pain in your mind. You know what happened. They sinned and God said I'm not going to leave a perfect world for imperfect people, so I am going to curse the earth because of you. "Cursed is the ground because of you." So what happens now? Several things happen. Everything that would have been just pleasant and wonderful and joyful and happy like your work, is going to become laborious and hard and painful. How much happens to you in working that becomes painful even in your body? I mean, don't even start. I mean, I know I work behind a desk, obviously, but, you know, Mondays I have to work on the house and Tuesdays are painful. And the older I get the more pain it is. And then sometimes it bleeds into Wednesday. Don't even start. I don't want to talk about it. What's the point? Work is no longer what it was before the Fall. And all I'm saying, because of the thorns and thistles and all that, it'd be great if in my backyard I looked out the window every day and say this is like the Garden of Eden out there, but it isn't. If it was last Monday, by next Monday it's not. So we know this. There's going to be pain just because God has cursed the ground and there's pain in work and that hurts, hurts our bodies, hurts a lot of other things.

Also, pain in the fact that I'm made from the dirt. Right? God takes Adam out of the dirt and then he curses the dirt. And clearly the cells of which Adam is made are now cursed. And what happens with that? As long as I'm talking so transparently about myself today, which I know you don't like, let me just say this. And you older people can identify with this. I used to hear old people talking about how increasingly they experience pain and not that I'm that old, but man that was a true statement if I've ever heard a true statement. I'm standing here before you now preaching. I used to preach when I was 20 years old. I could preach the whole time and not feel any pain. I could catalog the pain I've been feeling just standing here preaching to you. (audience laughing) And I have done no physical labor other than to preach this morning. I'm just telling you this. The older you get, you don't have to say amen or right on to this, but the older you get the more pain you feel. Am I right about that? I'm right. Okay. The old people tried to project. It was hard for them, but they agreed with me on that you young people. And you know why? Because the whole point of this, particularly after the flood, is that we're dying fast. And so we reach a peak really early, and even the first part of our lives isn't always perfect, but we go downhill quickly and we incur more and more pain. And it ends in this thing called death. So no matter how much you want to pray, God make my grandmother, my grandfather make them healthy, those prayers are not going to be answered because the decree is that they're going to wear out and die. That's just how it works. So all of it is that way.

And speaking of wearing out, the psalmist talks about the earth itself, the whole cosmos wearing out and being cast off like a garment one day. Entropy in the cosmos. Put it this way, Romans Chapter 8 is a great passage on this and the heart of it is verses 18 through 21. And

that is that God uses words like this, "The creation itself," is in "bondage to corruption." There's a word and it's all about "futility," there's another word. So the creation itself and everything about the world, pain is built into creation. That pain is going to intersect with you. Earthquakes. We're going to have an earthquake, right? It's going to happen. We're overdue for a big one. So here's the thing. When it happens it's going to hurt some people. It'll kill some people if it's the big one they're saying. So what are we going to say? Or you say, well, I'm listening on the radio in the Midwest, we don't have earthquakes. Okay, well, you're going to have a tornado coming to tear down your barn. And then, you know, there's whatever. You live in Florida. Okay, well, the hurricane's going to take you out. The world is subject to corruption and futility. And that means the earth itself, the world, the structures of the world are going to hurt people. So the world is full of pain. So let's just say this. There's no possible way for you to slalom your way through this world without pain. General pain is going to affect you and it's going to affect your body. I just talked to somebody in the lobby between services, and she said to me this is my third surgery. She's wearing a boot on her foot. And I said, why? And she went through all this stuff. I never even heard how she started but I crushed my foot somehow. I was like, okay, it started with something and she's been dealing with it for decades in her life and who knows what happened, who knows? Twisted her foot in a gopher hole or something. I don't know what happened, but I'm just telling you the world is full of pain and it's going to happen. So before you start saying there's some spiritually deep reason for this like the Apostle Paul, it could just be because you live in a fallen world. Okay, let's just start with that.

So that's one category. The other category which we're much more interested in if you're seeking God's purpose in your pain, it could be a strategic pain because you're in Christ, God cares about you and let's think of three really quick. Letter "2a," discipline for disobedience. Hebrews Chapter 12. Just to get to the heart of it, verses 10 and 11 talk about our parents "disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best for them," and it was for our good that we could be good kids, "that we may share in holiness." Right? We wanted to be good. And God wants us to be holy. And it says in the next verse, "all discipline seems painful." So God is going into his toolbox to do something to hurt you in some way "rather than pleasant, but that later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Discipline is a training. Now don't come to my office and say this. Don't say this has happened to me, God is punishing me. Can I just change your vocabulary please? Just remember this: Romans Chapter 8 verse 1, Romans 8:1, "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ." Do you know who there's condemnation for? Non-Christians who are going to be cast in the Lake of Fire. Praise God if you're a Christian that's not for you. So there's no condemnation for you. There's no punishment. You're not being punished by God. You may be chastised and that doesn't feel any different sometimes of being on the receiving end, ask your kids. Chastisement, by the way, is an old-school word. It means spanking, right?

So God is a disciplinarian. He's going to do something that hurts. And that hurt, though, is out of love that you as his child would be more holy on the other side of the pain. So you should ask at some point, as Psalm 139 guides us to ask, God see and look into my life, "try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me." See if there's any grievous thing inside of me. "And lead me in the way everlasting!" If I'm going down the wrong path and

there's some pain in my life. I've been diagnosed with something. I have this aching hurt. I have this pain. I was in a car accident. Now my body's messed up. Ask God. It could just be we live in a fallen world. Broken world, broken stuff, broken bodies. But maybe it is discipline. And you need to ask, Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24.

All right, Letter "2b," it could be assurance, a testing and a pain to bring you to assurance. First Peter Chapter 1 verses 6 through 9. First Peter Chapter 1 verses 6 through 9. Here's why this is more important than you think, because the Bible keeps talking about sheep and goats, it keeps talking about wheat and weeds, it keeps talking about people who are genuine and not, people who are wolves in sheep's clothing. It talks about soils. Two of the four soils look like real fruit-bearing plants and trees, but they're not. So we need to make sure we're Christians. And I've had so many people, ask any pastor you know, people coming with great consternation and saying, I just don't know if I'm really a Christian. You know that's a terrible way to live. And it's not some great counseling appointment that's going to solve that for you. Do you know what it is according to First Peter Chapter 1 verses 6 through 9? Pain. It's something that God does in your life to where you no longer doubt that you're a Christian. Because as it's put there, just even in one phrase, you can read the whole passage on your own later, it says "so that the tested genuineness of your faith." So there's some kind of grief it says, you've been grieved by various trials. It could be any kind of thing, including a physical malady, some kind of pain in your body. But that chronic pain, that pain that God didn't take away when you asked him could be for the testing, the testing "of the genuineness of your faith."

Now, isn't that what Job, at least Satan was saying about Job? Didn't Satan say here God, the only reason he loves you and thanks you every morning and prays to you every day is you give him the cushiest life of anyone in this land. That's why he loves you. And I just wonder, did Job ever have any moments of thinking like that? I mean, did he wake up every now and then and just wonder if I'd really love God and thank him every morning the way I do if my life wasn't so good? I mean, contemplative people ask those kinds of questions. Let me say this in Job Chapter 1, I don't know, maybe he thought that. Now I know this wasn't for that reason, but I guarantee you this in Job Chapter 42, he never asked that. Right? There is no possible way that Job thought maybe I just love God because, I don't know, maybe my faith in God isn't real. Especially because in the end, starting in Job Chapter 38, God never answers the question. Job never even finds out what's going on. He just knows his life got really, really hard and really grievous, and then restored and he loves God. He worked through the testing of the genuineness of his faith.

Letter "2c," James Chapter 1 verses 2 through 5. Now some people see this as the same but I think this is distinctive and I'll tell you why. Let me read it for you. "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith," and that's why some people think it's the same as First Peter Chapter 1, but here's why I say it's different, "it produces steadfastness." I don't like the word so much, "Hupomone," endurance, this stick-to-it-iveness. "And let steadfastness," stick-to-it-iveness, "have its full effect, that you may be," now here's the part that makes it clear to me, "may be perfect." Now that's the Greek word "Teleios." It has nothing to do with like you never make a mistake.

Teleios is like you get shaped to be the right tool for the right job. Teleios means you have what you need, and it's complemented by this word teleios and complete, "perfect and complete, lacking in nothing." What does that mean? You have everything you need. Well, yeah. For what? For building a business? No. What? For winning the decathlon in the Olympics? No. This means you have everything you need to do everything you're supposed to do, right? Whatever God wants you to do you'll have everything you need to do it.

And the next verse says, "if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God." What could that be? Why is that juxtaposition of those things together? God has a plan for you. Think about it this way. Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 10, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them." So God has a plan for you, just like you had for the Apostle Paul. And one of the things for the Apostle Paul is that he has all these amazing opportunities to have all this revelation, a heady position in the body of Christ, writing a ton of New Testament books, having experiences with God that we will never have, at least on this earth. And you know you need to stay humble in all this because God is opposed to the proud. So here you get this pain and what it's going to do for you is to keep you complete and teleios, just right for the job, dependent, reliant. You won't get prideful. You'll lack nothing for what I need you for. What I need you for is to be the apostle I need you for.

That takes us to where he goes, Second Corinthians Chapter 12 verses 9 and 10. Back to our passage. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you.'" What does that mean? Well, let's parallel this to the next phrase. "My power is made perfect in weakness." Now, grace is sufficient for you. For you, well, he's seeing himself now as weak. I'm bodily weak. But grace is in this text, at least the parallelism, is his power. So the grace that he's talking about is some kind of provision to keep Paul going, to keep him moving forward. Well, you're not going to move forward if you're a prideful apostle because that's what the false apostles were. They were puffed up. That's why they went into great detail regarding their visions, Colossians Chapter 2 says. So he has to stay humble. God is giving grace to the humble, he's giving favor to the humble, he's giving opportunity to the humble, he's giving fruitfulness to the humble. So God is going to give him all that he needs to do what he wants him to do, what he's made him to do. And so he's going to be just right, perfected. He's going to be just what he should be in the state that he's in. And that means you're not going to be healthy. You're going to be chronically ill if that's what this thorn in the flesh is.

"Therefore," Paul says I'll be okay with it, "I will boast all the more gladly of my weakness." To whom? To the Corinthians. That doesn't mean every morning he gets up and gets excited and, you know, cheers on his illness. No, but he's making a case to the Corinthians. That's what that means. "So that the power of Christ may rest upon me." To do what? To do the ministry God's called him to do. Now, if you can track me over there real quick, First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 10. He says, by the favor of God, "by the grace of God," First Corinthians 15:10, "I am what I am." What is he? He's an apostle. That's what he's talking about in verse 9. I'm an apostle and I can't believe I'm an apostle "because I persecuted the church of God." But "I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain." He put me in a position and I've been going, man, I've been going. "On the contrary, I worked harder than,"

any of the other apostles, "any of them, though it wasn't I, but the grace of God that is with me." The provision and the power that God gave me. Now what does that mean? I'm passive? Have you read my aggressive sanctification blog, AggressiveSanctification.com? If you can spell it, go there and read it. Because what it means to be empowered by grace has nothing to do with your putting your feet up on the dashboard and being passive. There is no passive sanctification. You are always going to be, as Peter said, making "every effort to supplement your faith." Paul says, "I worked harder than all of them." That's going to be the experience. But when you are weakened either by persecution, being beaten by rods, shipwrecked, afloat on debris on the Mediterranean overnight, you're sleepless, you're hungry, you're deprived, you're let down in a basket or you have a bodily ailment. Whatever the weakness is you need to understand this. You'll have what it takes. You'll have what you need. Even the weakness or the gap within your life that you think you... You'll have enough to do the work you're called to do. And so you ought to lean into the work. You ought to do it.

Number three, put it this way, you need to "Accept the Weakness and Get to Work." Number three, accept the weakness and get to work. I don't mean to be non-compassionate. I know some of you think I am, a Nazi or whatever you think I am. I'm totally compassionate toward your pain. Let's sit and go through a box of Kleenex. But once we're to the bottom of the Kleenex box, we need to wipe your tears away. And we need to say, okay, all that happened, all that's painful, but let's get up and get to work. Let's get up and get to work. God has work for you to do. He has a whole pathway of work for you. Let's get to work because God and his power, and by that I mean all that he's going to provide for you, even though you don't have what you think you need to be fruitful, he has a fruitful path for you. So let's get to work. Let's do what God wants you to do. Let's work hard at this like the Apostle Paul did.

Now, he had a bad background as a persecutor of the church. He had all kinds of opposition, and he had a bodily ailment of some kind that made him feel like maybe I can't do this. No, that was an asset. His weakness became an asset to have him trust in God. It all worked together. It almost sounds like Romans 8:28 God is working all things together for good. Even the weaknesses, even the pain, even the setbacks. And you're looking at things in your life that are beyond the physical. You're looking at relational things, status things, all kinds of things, and then a bunch in the physical realm, you're thinking this is a liability, this is a liability, this is a liability. That's why I'm sitting on the sidelines doing nothing for God right now. Stop it. You can't do that. Your pains, do you understand this? Your resumé, your background, the things that you think are so terrible that make you incapable of being useful for God that's just the opposite. It is just the opposite. God is saying all of that is "for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to," the last two words, "his purpose." You have to believe Ephesians Chapter 2 verse 10. He has a purpose. He wants you to be maximally fruitful.

Turn to this passage. The last one I'll turn you to is John Chapter 15. John Chapter 15. We read this one recently also didn't we in Daily Bible Reading? John Chapter 15. By the way, DBR, do you all know what the DBR is? The Daily Bible Reading, you should be doing it. It's on our website. It's on the back of your worksheet. Just keep up with us and that way we can talk about it together as we read through the Old and New Testament every year together. I

know you're going to read more. You're going to study more, you're going to memorize more, but this is just our reading schedule. We'd love for you to be on it with us.

John Chapter 15, "I'm the true vine," Jesus says, "my Father is the vinedresser." He's the one mapping this all out. "Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away." Okay, that's a different sermon. Here's this sermon. "Every branch that does bear fruit," I hope that's you, "he prunes." Does that sound fun? It doesn't sound fun. Does that sound pleasant? No. It sounds painful. "He prunes, that it may bear more fruit." He wants you to be maximally fruitful. The pruning is going to make you more fruitful. The pruning is going to make you more fruitful. The pruning is going to make you more fruitful. The pain is going to make you more fruitful. The pain is going to make you more fruitful. That's how Second Corinthians started. I "don't want you to be unaware," of the sufferings, the pain, all "the affliction we experienced in Asia." Why? Because we felt "we had received the sentence of death." Why? Because "we despaired even of life." Why was that? So that we would not "rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead." That reliance on God was the key to his fruitfulness. Keep reading in this passage. Look at John Chapter 15 verse 8. "By this my Father is glorified," that you stay on the bench and just get more Bible study, watch more blogs, watch more YouTube, just read more godly books and stay out of trouble, don't bother anybody, sit at home, don't serve, just be by yourself and worship. Verse 8. Did you read all that? That's a great verse, isn't it? We're going to put that on a plaque and sell it in the bookstore. No.

You know, here's how the Father's glorified, "by this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit." And by the way, just like the pains and the trials, "and so prove to be my disciple." More assurance is going to grow. This is a great passage. Drop down to verse 16, verse 16, same chapter. "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you." And what are you asking for? I want the pain to go away. No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. That's the pruning. The pruning is there so that you'll bear much fruit. And if he says nope, nope, nope. I'm not taking the pain away because this is the pruning. I want you to ask for more fruit. Pray for more productivity.

David was to become the king, was he not? He was anointed by Saul in a ceremony in which he was brought to Jesse's house and picked. He's the runt of the family. And he was for years on the run from King Saul. You know the story, right? Saul is out to kill him. He's envious of David, he wants to kill him. So David ends up running and he runs and he runs, and he ends up doing something just almost unthinkable working in essence for the Philistine king. He at this point has 600 people who are loyal to David. This is before he becomes officially the king. In God's mind, he's officially the king. But in the nation he's not the king. He has 600 malcontents, mercenaries in essence, who are following David around. And they're at a little compound called Ziklag, a city called Ziklag. And in Ziklag he goes out on one of his battle campaigns, which is just the picture of 600 guys, and they have their kids, they have their daughters and sons, and they leave them all behind, and they go off on this battle. And the enemy comes in and pillages their village, their town and takes all the kids and all the wives hostage and they leave. David comes back from the battle and he sees this and everybody

sees this. And let me read verse 4 to you. When "David and the people who were with him," saw this, they, "raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep."

Now, that's bad enough, right? Your wives, your kids, everyone's been taken. Your place has been pillaged. Everything under your tent has been dug up. All your money is gone. Your silver coins are gone. Verse 6, "And David was greatly distressed." Now think about this, you're the anointed next king of Israel. Only 600 people recognize that but you are. You know you are. "The people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters." You can totally understand that. But can you imagine you're sitting there, you have no strength to cry anymore and they're saying let's kill him. Let's kill him. And you're listening. You see this. You watch people stand up and walk behind you. Amazing. Talk about a low point. I mean, it's one thing to run from Saul and his armies, but you have your guys now.

Next line, this is First Samuel Chapter 30 verse 6 "But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." There are a lot of passages like that in David's life, he went out and refreshed himself and the Lord. Just great pictures of David saying I know where to go when I'm hurting. I know where to go when I'm low. And then I love the next verse. "And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, 'bring me the ephod,'" right? The ephod was this thing they used to divine God's will in the Old Testament. "So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the Lord, 'Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?'" And God answered him, 'Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue." You will surely win. You'll overtake them. You'll rescue your families. "So David set out and the 600 men who were with him, and they came to the brook." And on they went and the story unfolds. There's some drama along the way with an Egyptian. And they go and they win and they bring everybody back. The thing I love about that passage is that it starts with him knowing where to turn. He doesn't lick his wounds. He doesn't say it's terrible, woe is me. He goes and he says, God, I need strength right now. He "strengthened himself in the Lord," and then he gets to work. He says, God, I need wisdom. What do I do now?

What's the New Testament equivalent? God says ask me for wisdom. I love the prayer for wisdom. I'm good at answering that prayer. Ask. I'll give it. And then Paul gets to work. Let's go. There are battles for you between now and the time you're done. When you're done, I hope you can say with the Apostle Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Let's do what we're called to do. The pains are going to be there. They're assets more than you might imagine.

Let's pray. God, help us, please in this life filled with pain. And then the strategic pains that sometimes we so badly want to get rid of. Of course we do. Reflexively, we're all going to pray when we hurt for the pain to go away. Just let us be more wise and less thick-headed to sometimes stop a lot sooner than we have been used to stopping and asking you to take it away when we learn now this is here for a reason. If it's discipline, let us be quick to repent. If it's just to give us assurance, just let us come away from it saying, I'm so glad that I've learned to trust God in the pain. And I know for a fact that I know that I know that I'm a real Christian. That would be so helpful in so many ways. But if it is that last thing that's getting us ready to

be teleios, to be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing to do the things you've called us to do, then we can stop and ask you for wisdom and we can get to work. I pray we would see our weaknesses for what they are, things that you have sovereignly put into our lives. You've allowed these messengers of Satan to harass us. You do it with a leash that is completely calibrated to just exactly the extent that you plan, and you get us ready to do the things that you want us to do, and all of those liabilities that we think are such terrible liabilities are assets. God, I know we sometimes struggle to see how that all works but give us faith to believe that you're in charge and that you know what is best for us, and help us to see this in a whole new light so that we might have a "peace that surpasses all understanding" because we've come and begged you for things. And if you've said no, let us know in our hearts and our minds that you know what you're doing.

In Jesus' name. Amen.