

Suffering

by Don McClure

The sermon explores the purpose and power of suffering in our lives, and how it can lead us to seek another world and another kingdom, God's kingdom.

Duration: 38:37

Scripture: Romans 8:18, James 1:2

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Suffering Sanctification"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of suffering and how it plays a vital role in forming character, depth, and a closer identity with Christ. It highlights the concept of undergoing spiritual 'surgeries' through suffering to see, hear, and handle the world as God intended, leading to a transformation into His likeness. The speaker encourages embracing suffering as a means to experience the glory and joy that will be revealed in us, surpassing the temporary trials of this present time.

Transcript

I usually say how glad I am to be here at this point. I've been here so many times, and I don't know the right word. None of us do.

I suppose that's maybe appropriate that sometimes we just don't know what to say. I just know I miss a dear friend, one of the dearest you could ever dream of having, and yet I know the Lord has wonderfully taken care of him beyond our dreams, and I know he'll take care of you. You would never, ever for a moment hold me accountable to be a good steward of my life and to offer who I am to him and expect me to be a good steward of it and for him not to be a great steward of his own church.

He's the pastor here. He always has been. There's only one true pastor and everyone else, so we're all just undershepherds here serving for a time with the honor of being a part of his body, but today we sorrow.

In fact, we grieve. Paul says we grieve, but not as though they have no hope. In fact, I suppose a Christian grieves more than anyone.

I don't think anybody could ever grieve more than a Christian because nobody knows love like a Christian. Nobody knows closeness, friendship, fellowship, identity like a Christian, and when that's severed, there's great suffering that comes with it, and yet it's not a hopeless grief. I don't know what the world does when

it's all over, it's done, they have no plan that they'll ever be together again, that they're just separated for a time and there'll be a reunion beyond our dreams, but that's what we look forward to and that's what we will have.

Well, this morning I'd like to share with you and just deal with some of these things direct and to deal with you on suffering. Obviously Pastor Steve suffered much, and he wrote much on suffering, and now we suffer, and so rather than being overwhelmed by suffering, but to quote the title of a great book, Overwhelmed by God. I believe that's what he would have us to be.

So I want to read to you out of Romans chapter 8, beginning at verse 18, so if you'll turn in your Bible and follow with me. The Apostle Paul writing, of course, For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that has subjected the same in hope. Because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption unto the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only they, but we ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption to wit, the redemption of our body.

Father, we thank you today that as we gather together, it's before you. And Lord, you are our pastor, you are our shepherd, the great shepherd of the sheep. And Lord, you're the one that brought this church into existence, you're the one that has fed it and led it.

Lord, we thank you that you love to use human beings, but we acknowledge you as the great leader. And Lord, we mourn when we lose one. And Lord, we ask that you would just bless again today.

We bring Gail and the kids, we bring the leadership, the directors here of the ministry. Father, have your hand upon them in these coming days, give them great comfort and wisdom and direction. But Lord, this morning we ask that you would open up your word and that you would speak and that you would comfort and minister to every one of us as we look at suffering.

We have, Father, we ask it in Jesus' name, amen. Well, you know, in Romans 8, these verses, I think, are oftentimes easily passed over. They're not exciting verses like some of the others that talk so much of, you know, that we're conformed to his image and the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we're children of God and heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ.

And these wonderful kind of positive, there's so many things of the life and the spirit that Romans 8 is filled with. But here with these verses they tend to be just kind of shy away and move over them quickly. But they're verses that I think that if understood, if you to write, they become incredibly insightful and powerful and blessed to us for the awareness of the love of God and the work of God is so beautifully revealed to us through suffering of all things.

You know, there's a tremendous gap, I think, when we come into this world, it doesn't take long to realize it, between the desires for and about and in this life, and the realities of life. We think of all this life that we want and the fulfillment and the plan and the thrill of it and all that we want, but yet then the reality is the struggles that go on within it. And it's kind of like there's what is many a slip between the cup and the lip or something.

We've got this whole world of all these plans of what it could be, but the reality of it oftentimes is quite different. And as also with just the natural man, that is the man that's just confined to nature. That's all they see is the world around them.

That's the natural man. He's somebody that basically he just sees life on this planet and there he pursues his pleasures, his comforts, his rest, his joys, his enjoyments, his sense of fulfillment and wealth and blessing or securities and stabilities. That's basically all the natural man sees and seems to comprehend.

But the spiritual man, on the other hand, he realizes that there's another life way beyond this, that we were made to be creatures of heaven. That's where our destiny is. And this life is merely a process on the way to heaven.

And there are many steps and wonderful ways and processes through which God wants to bring us to in preparing us for heaven and the glory that has yet to be experienced and revealed to all of us. So the spiritual man is somebody that hopefully he sees the vanity of this world. He sees all the same things that everybody else sees, but he isn't deceived by it.

He doesn't hunger for it. He knows that's not the reason that he exists. That's not going to determine his identity or his success.

There's another world and he wants to know it. That's what he's all about. And you know, it's interesting when sometimes you do ponder and you look at the people that have everything that the successes the world does dream of.

You know, you go in the checkout place at the market, you see all these people. They're always in the front pages of all the magazines there and that have all the things of this life and of this world. And yet you look in real, what's a miserable bunch? What an absolutely pathetic, immature, childish, arrogant, proud, empty bunch of people the majority of them seem to be.

And while they have all the things that the world lusts for, they also, their life is absolute vanity. And most everybody, it doesn't take a scientist to see it by any means. And you know, sometimes when you look back and you think of some of the world's great names, great successes, you know, I suppose Mozart is a name that would stick out to a musician.

I mean, a history. I mean, not just simply he wrote a song, not just simply he could play an instrument, but somebody there that was a master, incredible in the world of music, and yet he's a man that when he died, they laid him in a pauper's grave. Only a few even attended, you know, his funeral, and no one went out to the graveside.

The weather wasn't too good, so they didn't even go there, and to this day they've never even found his grave. Don't even know where the man was ever buried, Mozart. Or you look at Alexander the Great, a man who came into the world with a determined, I am going to own the world, the world, the whole planet.

I am going to conquer it. And he did. He went there where he conquered the world, and yet there he sat and he wept when it was all conquered and achieved, because he realized this is it.

This is it, the fulfillment that he supposed he would hope to have. And it said of Alexander the Great that his orders there for his graveside, that when he was laid to rest, that in laying carried to his grave, that unlike others who would be, their bodies would be wrapped, he wanted his hands to be left open, face up,

and empty, that the whole world would see that he came into the world with nothing, and he was going out with nothing. And it seemed to take him an entire lifetime to come to that awareness that there, you know, the possessor of the East and the West and the treasures of all, but yet his hand couldn't hold the smallest treasure when he left the world.

And the beggar and Alexander the Great came in and left on the same terms. As Job says, naked came I into this world, and naked I go out. And when we realize that if somebody's sights are set on this life, if they look at what it is all about, the absolute emptiness of it, the vanity of it.

Betsy Patterson of Baltimore was famous in her world at the time, regarded as the most beautiful woman in the world, so much so as people to meet her, because of her beauty and charm, they would let you come to meet her. Napoleon's brother came to America just because of what he had heard. He was so infatuated with her, he convinced her to marry him, and they got married.

Napoleon helped ruin the marriage, and it ended. But as the woman went on with her life, later on in her remarkable career that she seemed to have had, she wrote, Once I had everything but money. Now I have nothing but money.

She wrote to a friend in the middle of her life, and she confessed, I am dying with boredom. I am tired of reading, and all of my ways of time, they're killing me. I doze away my existence.

I am too old for coquet, and without the stimulus of boredom, I'm dying. The Princess Galizan tries to keep me up with the toil of dressing me and telling me that I am a beauty. I'm tired of life.

I'm tired of having lived. I mean, we look at these people that are all around, and we see the emptiness of it. In time, President Calvin Coolidge, he was walking outside the White House while he was president with a senator, and the senator looking at the White House, looked over at it, nodded, and he says, Oh, I wonder who lives there.

Coolidge looked over at him, he says, Nobody. They all just passed through. Everybody in this life, when we come to the emptiness of it, the vanity of it, they realize what Solomon once wrote.

He says, Then I looked at all the works of my hands that wrought, and the labor that I had labored to do, and behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit. There was no profit under the sun. Imagine Solomon pouring his life and his energy and the wealth of a nation to build his own little world, these incredible homes, these incredible gardens, part of the seven wonders of the world, and is here as he achieved them.

But yet he looked there at the end of all of this labor, and he says, When I look at all that I've done, all this labor is so wrapped up and captivated my energies and my planning in my life, day in and day out, of which I had labored so hard. It's all vanity and vexation of spirit. There's no profit under the sun.

You know, essentially there, when a person is of this life and of this world, that is the natural man, they live for self. And when that happens, whether it's living for music or pleasure or beauty or politics or sport, one day they'll all look at it and realize it was vanity. It was utter vanity.

It was a black hole that sucked them into it and completely overtook their life. That's what the natural man does. That's what it is.

And you may wonder, why is it that way? Why is it so vain? Why is it so empty? Well, here Paul tells us in the section we read, verse 20, For the creature is made subject unto vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him that subjected the same in hope. God deliberately, He designed the world in such a way as absolutely nothing within it could ultimately bring any continued satisfaction. Oh, there could be joy and sin for a season, but it was only seasonal and it was only deceptive.

Ultimately, it would bear its fruit of being absolutely vain. God deliberately designed it that way for the simple reason that it subjected us in a hope. In other words, if I could make myself happy in this world, if I could actually live a life without God, without His love, without His hope, without heaven, and find complete satisfaction in it, I would do it.

So God says, I love you too much. I won't allow anything, you know, that can maybe captivate you and deceive you for a time, it won't last, because it's my great hope and your hope that you realize that. You come to the end of it, that something happens where you're absolutely done with it and then you begin to seek another world, another life, another kingdom, mine.

It seems like somebody, as they once said, there's two great tragedies in life. One is not getting what you want. Most of us know that one.

But the other is getting what you want. You see, it's like both sides of the fence. Some people that just live on one side looking over, oh, if I could get on the other side, I'll be happy.

But then when you look over at the people who've been on both sides, sometimes they're the most miserable of all. There's no other fence to go over for them. And there's no other place to go, and they're the emptiest and the starvinest of all.

Because vanity is this great illusion of when somebody begins to live life for themselves, that is, their own hopes and dreams and objectives, it will never work. It will never work at all. But here in Romans 8, in this section, what it's all about is this is a message for those who choose not to live for the vanities of life.

They haven't been deceived by them. They look at them and they see them for what they are. They don't seek to find comfort and identity and pleasure and fulfillment within them.

But rather than that, they know that there's another destination, there's heaven, there's another world, and it's God's. Sometimes I think if there's one great missing note in the choir today of our generation speaking to Christians, it's that we're not confronting people well and teaching them well on suffering, what it's all about and what a vital part of life it is, how powerful it is in forming character and depth and personality, bringing us into a greater understanding identity with Christ that can be done by no other process. And as verse 18 says here, that the sufferings of this time, Paul says, I reckon they're not even worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be formed in us and will be revealed in us.

He says, what God has in store for those that are willing to suffer, it's incredible. The glory that we'll know, what will happen one day, how it will all come together when we understand what suffering is all about. I think we have such a, all we think, we think of the word suffering, it's almost like your fingers on a chalkboard.

I hate the word. Don't do that to me. Don't tell me I must suffer.

I don't want to suffer. And yet, as I understand, Pastor Steve's last sermon was out of Romans 5 here, where Paul says, even so we glory in tribulation, knowing that tribulation worketh patience, patience experience, and experience hope, the hope maketh not ashamed, for the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who is given to us. Paul says, I glory in it.

I absolutely glory in tribulation. I glory in the sufferings. And you may say, why, why is that? Why must it be that way? Perhaps you remember, it was in the late 1980s, my mind reflected on it the other day.

But there was a couple with a son. Their name was Rothenberg. They were from New York, actually.

They were in the middle of a bitter divorce. They had a son, David, and they had the father, he had to get away for a weekend. He brought his son out here to the West Coast, was going to take him to Disneyland.

I can't remember if they ever got there or not. But here in the bitterness and the hatred that this couple seemed to have for one another in the process of their divorce, their father, in absolute anger and hostility, he took his young eight-year-old son, put him in a hotel room, doused him with kerosene, lit it on fire, and jumped in the car and drove out of the hotel with the blaze coming out there to kill his son somehow or another to get even with his wife. Well, the blaze didn't kill him.

It did everything short of it, it seemed, though with it. There was something there that he was so disfigured, so disformed, to see when you would, if you remember the story, they had pictures, it was hit the press, it seemed to hit the world. It was something you saw these pictures of this young, healthy, happy little boy, and the next, absolutely disfigured, over 90 percent of his body with third-degree burns, no ears, no nose, no hair, no fingers, there are just little stubs and toes left, no mouth, no lips.

Beyond human recognition to realize is he even alive. And oh, how he suffered, it was terrible suffering. It was, and it so moved the world that their doctors stood up, hospitals stood up, people sent in all sorts of money out of sorrow for this child to do anything that can his life be saved.

And he went through all these skin grafts, all these terrible, excruciating, painful surgeries there to try to save his life as he hung on for days and weeks. And then he finally, ultimately survived after, you know, many surgeries, many skin grafts, many painful wounds there being healed, but he lived. But there's something there in the process of it so disfigured, his senses obviously dulled so much through his body and the callous skin, the excruciating pain.

On one hand, in one sense, it was over, but it ended up to be the beginning of greater pain. For you see, for then years and years and years to follow, David, because of this money and the doctors at the hospital, and he voluntarily went through many surgeries. He voluntarily went through one thing where they look and said, we can take your skin from one part of your body, we can fit in the cartilage and other things, and we can make a new ear and we can put it on.

It'll be very painful, but you'll have an ear and you'll be able to hear again, and we'll get you eyelids again, and it'll be painful. We've got to take skin from here and all of this. We can give you a nose, we got to take cartilage from here and other places and skin around and all these grafts, but we will get you a nose again.

We will get you the skin around where your mouth and the jaws will reform it, and we can make lips for you. And here is he began to look at that because he remembered what he once was. He could look in that mirror and see what he was, and he was willing, he subjected himself to all of this suffering, all of these surgeries, because he remembered what he once looked like, and he wanted to be human again.

He wanted whatever humanity could possibly restore, and in a sense, that's the story of the true Christian. He's somebody there that he's willing to go through things that nobody else understands because he knows that when he fell in sin, when the whole world fell in sin, the flames of sin came up and they so deformed and distorted and maimed and crippled and took away so much of our nature. We came out, and in one sense, we could see, but we couldn't see heaven anymore.

We could hear vaguely things around us on one level, but the sensitivity to heaven, no voice from heaven again, a heart became hardened that had once walked with God in the cool of the garden in the day, it was gone. Hardness is taken over, deadness is taken. There's a nose, but it couldn't smell the fragrances of real life.

There was a jaw, but it could move, it could make noises, but no lips that could speak love. There was a terrible deformity that came over all men, and some tragically are content with it because we're all like it. Because we all look at one another, and as Jesus said, oh, you measure yourself by one another.

Nobody can hear. Nobody can see. Nobody can touch.

Nobody can handle. Nobody has their feet move like they were created to move. Nobody can reach out and touch like they were once touched.

And so, because it's all common between all of you, and men lived that way until the second man came. That's what Paul refers to Jesus as in Corinthians, when there, you know, God who created heavens and the earth, when he humbled himself and became a man, he became obedient, obedient unto the death of the cross. He clothed himself in absolute humanity, and he says, I'm going to reveal to the world what it forfeited in sin.

And all of a sudden, for three and a half years, the disciples, they got to see through eyes in a world that nobody else could see. And they could hear. They could see.

What do you see? What do you see? And you look into people, you see their heart, you see their life. You see their needs. You understand them.

You can reach out and touch them. Oh, we touch. We kind of feel, but we're completely desensitized to the world in which you live in.

Whatever it is, it guides your feet, your toes, your hands, your feet. When your lips speak, oh, we all utter noises, but life comes from your lips. Who are you? I'm you.

I'm what you were made to be. I'll put it back in you if you want it, if you would desire it, and it utterly ruined them all, all of them. They were willing to go through any suffering, any death, drag us through the streets, pour tar upon us, inflame us, behead us, crucify us upside down, throw us in prison, beat us with rods, rip our back open, do whatever it is that you want to us.

What we have seen, we're utterly spoiled for, we're ruined for it, because we want that sensitivity. We want that life. We want to see what he sees.

We want to hear what he hears, and we want to handle what he handles. We want to live again. He's ruined us for this life.

We've seen what we were created to be, and we never want to be that without our eyes and our lips and our ears and our nose and our hands and our feet again. He's promised he will come and live in us and put it all back. That's what happened to them, and that's why the Christian rejoices.

That's why he says, I'll take the surgeries. Put me through the surgery. I'll glory in it.

He says, tell me, when can we do the next one? When am I up for it? When am I ready for it? That somehow or another I can see what I haven't seen again. I can hardly wait until they wrap the darkness out of my eyes when they put it over and they've done this surgery and they block everything out for a time. But then when they unwrap it, I can see better.

Then when they put in the new cartilage and they put the skin around, they begin to open up the inside. Oh, wrap me up, shut off all my ears, blind me, and make me deaf for this process of the surgery. But when it's done, I want to see, I want to hear, I want to taste like I've never tasted before.

And this is what happens. That's why Paul, when he says, Oh, that I may know him, the power of his resurrection, the fellowship of his sufferings, if that by any means I might be made attainable unto his death. Any means that I can see and hear and handle and touch like him.

In whatever it is, oh, I want to know the power of his resurrection, the fellowship. I want to be made into his image. He's promised it can happen.

He's promised it will do it for me. I must have it, anything to be like him. That's what happened to them.

And that's what happened to many before and many after and many during in the world still yet God is no respecter of person. Any that looks and realizes who they were and wants it again. Any that would long for it, it's never changed.

Whether it's a Job there on one hand, there he was a righteous man, a good man, and God loved him. But God let him suffer terribly and his suffering was as excruciating as a man could imagine. But at the end of it, Job himself, he says, I have heard of God with the hearing of mine ear, but now I have seen him with the seeing of mine eye.

I pour myself. I can't believe what I've been missing all of my life. Now what suffering and the surgery has brought through for me.

You look at Job or Joseph who longed to see, longed to see. He'd been spoiled by God. He had a plan.

God had a plan for him and he wanted it and he wouldn't have anything to deter it. And he says, well, if you want to see the future, Joseph, if you want to hear me, you want to interpret the world, I've got to take your ears away. Those won't work anymore.

I'll hold your sight away. I'll blind you for a time. And the things you'll hear will absolutely devastate you.

But you want to Joseph? Yes. And there he heard his brothers turn against him and sell him. The Ishmaelites take him down to Potiphar and Potiphar's wife chases after him and everything shuts down.

God, what's happening? Rahat's in prison for years. But then through all the suffering, but it says the Lord was with him. The Lord was with Joseph.

And one day Joseph was brought out, the bandages were taken off. And he saw a world that even Pharaoh couldn't see. The world couldn't see.

And he could guide the world through its famines. Bring it into fullness. Restore his family from up north.

Bring them down and give them Goshen. You look at Moses there on one hand. He actually at 440 years old, he chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than enjoy the treasures and the pleasures of sin for a season.

And God said, Moses, will you suffer? Do you want this surgery? I ain't had enough of Egypt. As Josephus says, commander in chief of the Egyptian armed forces. And in line to become Pharaoh himself, but he'd lost interest.

Is this all it's cracked up to be? There's another world. He was spoiled by it. But off he went.

I'll suffer. God throws him in the backside of the desert for 40 years. There as he bind his ears and his eyes and his hands and his senses there as they all seem to die off that one day Moses would rise out of the desert and walk into the Pharaoh and say, let my people go.

And there was an authority in those lips. There was a sight in his eyes. There was a grip in his hand that you realize a man from another world has emerged.

That's what had happened. That's what had occurred. Whether you look at a David, if somebody had a heart after God, he longed for anything, for his glory.

In thy presence is the fullness of joy. So I'll be satisfied when I awaken his likeness, David could say. And God says, truly, David? Yes.

That's when I'll be happy. We've got some surgeries to do, David. And there God shoved him off in corners and nooks and dales and crannies and valleys and caves and let him be hunted like an animal where he couldn't hear anything.

God, where are you? And even at times there in the struggle as his ears are operated on, sensitized, and there is a bound up in his side he can't see and he can't hear. And all of his natural human senses were shut down that heavenly ones might see. He would cry out.

I said, in my haste there is no God one time. Another time he says, God, how long wilt thou forgive me? Forever. Yet there when the time when then God unwrapped the surgeries and opened his eyes and let him see in her arose the greatest king who ever sat on the throne.

He saw heaven. He could see another world. Elijah saw the world.

Elisha saw the world. Hannah, Esther, Mary, Martha. But they all were ones that they suffered.

They were like Paul who said, I've seen him, I've seen his glory, and it's changed me. I don't mind any suffering. I don't mind any surgery.

Just sign me up for it. I'll have it. I don't mind any deformity that can be corrected.

And brought me I want to see and hear and handle. And sometimes as we go through these things we find our heart and our life today as we suffer. And we struggle and maybe we're just trying to displease God

and do what is right.

And God, I want you to lead and guide my life. I want your hand upon my life. And it seems like he sends us out and sometimes we're in a heartless marriage in a home and the struggles are, and yet God there reveals to us our heartlessness.

The hardness and the stoniness of our own heart where we've got to break and something within us where finally he says I'll take out that stony heart and put in a harder flesh. You've got to be tired of your heart. Or our wisdom and guidance, we will go out with all of our effort and all of our genius.

We're going to plow a field. I'm going to build a business. I'm going to do this.

I'm going to do that. And we plow it and we plant and we irrigate and we do everything. And it brings nothing, nothing.

Parched and it's dry. God, why? Look at the fellow over there. I didn't even think about you the next field over.

He's got a harvest to beat the band. And the Lord says, you want that harvest? You may have it. Go over to that side of the field.

Live for his values. Forget the surgeries. But if you want to see and hear and handle and that's really what you want to make you tick, that's really your destination.

Heaven is what it's all about. Then, sorry, you will have some pain. But you'll awaken my likeness.

I'll do the surgeries. I'll never give you more than you're able to bear with every trial, every surgery, every temptation. I promise I'll give you a way of escape right at the right hour.

I may take you right up to the end where you say no more. But then we'll unwrap it. And you'll see.

You know, I think the Lord loves it when somebody comes to Jesus and wants him more than anything else. How wonderful to me it is that when somebody is utterly ruined by him in this life and they realize truly it is vanity and vexation of spirit. There is no more than this.

I want no more than this. God, I truly want you. I don't just want to go to church.

I want you reigning in me. I want you ruling in me. I want to see what you see and hear what you hear.

I want my feet to be swift to move for you. I want my lips to move for you. I want you to open my eyes that I may see what wonderful things ask for me.

That's what I want. There when somebody wants to be in his likeness, there's something inside of them on one hand maybe like the mother of James and John that comes and says, Oh Jesus, can my two boys, can one sit on the one side and the one on the other side in heaven with you? Oh, what more could a mother want for a child or anybody for themselves? I'm sure Jesus smiled. He loves that.

When somebody wants that more than anything. But he also turns, he said, well, that'll be determined later. But I do have a question.

Are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? Are you willing to go through the surgeries? Oh yes, Lord. Good. Because you will.

And they did. And today I know they rejoice for where they sit. Are you willing? Am I willing to suffer? What a question.

But that's what it comes down to, isn't it? James says in James 1 to my brethren, count it all joy. When you fall into diverse temptations and trials, count it all joy. A new surgery is coming.

A new operation. Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have a perfect work, that you may be perfect and entire and wanting nothing.

James says you want that? Everybody can have it. Everybody. It's just that today maybe some of us, we have a stony heart that knows to live of love.

And we're struggling, we're looking at this life and it's not what it's cracked up to be. And we're so depressed. But Jesus says, if you let me do some operating, I can take out that stony heart.

Give you heart and flesh. And you look at this life and it has no sight in it. It has no hope in it.

It is a deteriorating world you're living in. We're watching everything go down. But when somebody looks there, God, I know there's another world beyond this.

I want to see it. Do you really? I want to show it to you. We have a surgery and you'll lose your sight for this world.

It'll be very painful perhaps in the process. So you think, but when we unwrap you, your eyes will light up like they've never lit up before. You'll hear another world.

You'll touch another world. You'll look at everybody different. You'll be able to reach out and touch them and smile and help them to see what you've seen and hear what you're hearing.

That's what the disciples said. That which we have seen and heard and handled in the Word of Life, we declare, we share with you that you may have it too. So today we suffer.

We all suffer. One way or another, right now the obvious one is for our friend, our pastor. And one, by the way, where suffering did a wonderful work.

I've known Steve for many, many years, way back to the house ministries. Some 33 years ago now, I've been reminded the date of it. I received a couple of emails.

The people were actually in the meeting, but there was a fellowship here and had gone through a trial and the pastor had to step down. And Chuck Smith had asked me to work it through and see what needed to be done. And I came and met and did a little ministry here.

And there as I looked around at somebody there, I knew Steve and I knew we had become great friends. I knew his love for the Lord, his love for the Word. He was a little rough cut.

That's what Chuck thought of him. He headed the house ministries. And when you're house ministry, you're strong, you're deliberate, you're pretty forceful.

And he was that way. But I said, I think Steve Mays could do this. And he says, really? I don't know.

He was actually quite concerned. And to tell you the truth, I knew his love for the Lord, his love for people, his love for the Word. We were great friends.

And I brought him down here and he preached there and he fell in love with it that night. The people fell in love with him. I ran into a man, he says, I was there that night.

I've been there ever since. And nobody dreamed. Look around at what is happening, what came out of it.

But the suffering this man went through. From one end of his body to the other it seemed. I used to tell Steve, I said, you know, most people wait to die before they donate their body to research.

You seem to cut it backwards. You just say, go ahead, cut something out, rip it out, do it, whatever. He suffered.

And yet, out of it came a gentle, mature, loving Master who suffered. And would no doubt this very moment say it was worth it all. Every cut, every stitch, every operation, every nerve that cried out in pain, don't cut me.

He lives. And so today, perhaps some of us, God help me. I want to see what he sees.

Jesus, I want eyes and ears. I want to smell. I want to speak.

I want something more than me to come out of my lips. I want heaven. Amen.

Father, how we thank you for your love. You are the great shepherd of the sheep, and you have been shepherding, and you are shepherding, and you will shepherd. And Lord, you've done such a wonderful job here.

And he that hath begun a good work in it, you will complete it. May this fellowship rest in it. But right now, as the whole body goes through some degree of surgery, of confusion, of question, of heartache, of grief, as many of them, it's the only pastor they've ever known.

They introduced you to him and to them. He fed them, and he nurtured them, and he comforted them. And he's helped them, and today there's a great loss.

But Lord, I pray that you would comfort each one of them, and you'd say, well, actually, I fed you. Actually, I comforted you. Actually, I nurtured you, and I brought you to myself through my spirit.

Oh, Steve was a wonderful vessel, but it was me that did the doing, and it will be me that continues it. So, Lord, I pray that there'll be a sense of releasing into you and resting in you. And then, Lord, for all of our other sufferings, the surgeries that we're going through, and the struggles of our own personal lives and other ways now, Jesus, may we look there and say, Lord, if you want to shut down my senses and deafen them, and where I cry out, my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Because I can't see or hear.

Lord, do your surgery that one day when you unwrap it, I see like I've never seen. I hear a world of angels singing and rejoicing. So, Lord, bless and encourage and strengthen each and every one today.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/kESsdA0K2mE.mp4>
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