

Suffering for the Sake of the Body - Lesson 4

by John Piper

All suffering that comes in the path of obedience is suffering with Christ and for Christ, whether it is cancer or conflict.

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Scripture: Psalm 107:13, Psalm 107:17

Topics: "Christian Suffering", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the purpose of suffering for Christians. He emphasizes that suffering is not just a preceding event, but it produces a weight of glory. One of the reasons for suffering is to awaken others out of indifference and make them more radical and bold for Christ. The speaker shares stories of missionaries and individuals who faced persecution and suffering but remained faithful to spread the Gospel. He also highlights the importance of imitating Christ and presenting sacrificial love to unbelievers through our suffering. The sermon references Bible verses such as Hebrews 12:7 and 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6 to support these points.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org Okay, we're moving now from necessity to the nature of Christian suffering. Is there a difference between plague and persecution, cancer and conflict? And I raise it because of this frequent question I'm asked, about whether I can take texts that apply to persecution in the New Testament and use them for the kinds of comforts you might receive when you're sick.

Is that legitimate? Here's my thinking on this. In choosing to follow Christ in the way He directs, we choose all that this path includes under His sovereign providence. Thus, all suffering that comes in the path of obedience is suffering with Christ and for Christ, whether it is cancer or conflict.

Now that's my thesis. If God has called you to be a computer programmer, work for some firm, rather than say, go to be a missionary in Sudan, where you might endure privation physically and run risks that you don't experience here. And yet, while you're obediently following God as a loving, faithful testimony in computer programming, you have an accident on the way to work, and you're paralyzed from the waist down.

Is that suffering with and for Christ? And I'm arguing, it is, if you're walking in the path of obedience. If that's where He wanted you, and He called you to work there, and you should drive the work in obedience to Jesus, and on the way to work, it costs you your legs. In principle, it's the same thing.

Now that's just the thesis here. Let's see if there's some warrant for it. All experiences of suffering in the path of Christian obedience, whether from persecution or sickness or accident, have this in common.

They all threaten our faith in the goodness of God. And, they all tempt us to leave the path of obedience. Therefore, every triumph of faith and all perseverance in obedience are testimonies to the goodness of God and the preciousness of Christ, whether the enemy is sickness, Satan, sin, or sabotage.

Now that's my first argument. The common thing between having a car accident on the way to Medtronic, and having somebody shoot you in Indonesia because you're a missionary, both of them resulting in paralysis from the waist down, the common element there is that Satan has a design for that, and God has a design for that. Satan's design is that you'll get mad at God and reject Him.

And God's design is that you'll choose God as a superior value above walking, and thus bear witness to His glorious self-sufficiency and all sufficiency in your life. And since the point is the same in both, and you've experienced both in the path of obedience, why should we say you can talk about one of them as having precious rewards, and one of them as having precious assurances, and the other one not? I don't think so. I chose these four S's just to tip you off how I pray.

That comes out of my prayer life for my family. When Noel and I get on our knees at night beside the bed and pray regularly, I take on my lips my prayer for my sons that are not at home and the ones that are at home in Tallithon, and then my dad who lives in South Carolina, and I broaden it out. And I pray, Lord, protect them from sin.

Here's the order I take them in. I'm not sure why I did it in this order. Sin, Satan, sickness, and sabotage.

Because I think that's the order of seriousness. Sin is the most serious threat to my children. Satan is the second most serious threat to my children.

Sickness is the next most serious threat, I think. And then sabotage, only because it's less often, is the fourth most serious sabotage or threat to my children's faith. And I want them to believe.

That's my main goal. I've told my boys, and I haven't told Talitha. She doesn't understand yet.

I said, I would rather have a believing dead son than an unbelieving live son any day. It's the loss of faith that I fear more than anything. So I pray earnestly that they be protected from unbelief and sin, Satan's temptations to abandon the Lord, and then sickness and its temptations to give up on the Lord and then sabotage.

Therefore, next paragraph, all suffering of every kind that Christians endure in the path of our Christian calling is a suffering with Christ and for Christ. How so? With Him in the sense that the suffering comes to us as we are walking with Him by faith. Dangerous missionary circumstances is not the only place where you walk with Jesus, nor the only dangerous place.

And in the sense that it is endured in the strength that He supplies through His sympathizing high priestly ministry. So we are with Him now, here, this morning, and on your way home. You'll be with Jesus,

walking with Jesus.

And it is suffering for Him in this sense, that the suffering tests and proves our allegiance to His goodness and power, and in the sense that it reveals His worth as an all-sufficient compensation and prize when you have a loss in your life. Now, my second argument, as argument number one for why I think cancer and conflict or plague and persecution can be thought of as overlapping realities that have the same spiritual dynamics in how we relate to God in them. Here's a second observation.

Not only that, the suffering of sickness and the suffering of persecution have this in common. They are both intended by Satan for the destruction of our faith, 1 Thessalonians 3, 4, we read that last night, and governed by God for the purifying of our faith. We'll look at Hebrews 12 later, and 2 Corinthians 12, we already looked at.

We can back up and take this as an underlining of something I said in regard to the fact that Christians die, and Christians have futility, and Christians struggle with sin, all of which were intended by God as judgments upon the world, and yet we say, Christ bore my judgment, and Christ bore my condemnation, and so why do I have to come into the experience of death, and the experience of suffering and futility, and in the experience of battling sin? And the answer is that Satan has a design for those, which is the destruction of our faith, and God now, because we are in Christ, no longer designs these things as our condemnation, but as our sanctification, as our purification. If I had quoted more of that passage from 1 Peter 4, 13-17, we would have gotten to the verse where it says, suffering is coming, and it is necessary that it begin with the household of God. Begin with the household of God.

But it is experienced at the household of God as a refiner's fire. Remember that part from the Handel's Messiah? He will be a refiner's fire. And Handel has his great way of relating the very music to the trembling of walking through a refiner's fire.

Well, that's the same fire that will consume unbelievers as judgment. It's the same fire. Christians perished in Honduras just like unbelievers.

Christians are suffering in Kosovo and Serbia now. There are Serbian Christians and Kosovar Christians, Yugoslav Christians. There are Christians on both sides of every conflict all over the world, and they're dying, both of them.

Unbelievers die, Christians die when bombs drop. But God's design is different, and Satan's design is the same. Satan desires that they be destroyed in their faith, and God's design is to refine and purify one, namely His children, and to bring judgment deserved upon the other.

Can you handle that? Does that make sense? So, we are not delivered from the flood of judgment that is coming upon the world necessarily. Sometimes we are, and we pray, Oh God, deliver! And He often does. Here's my third observation that relates plague and persecution, conflict and cancer, suffering from sickness and suffering from persecution.

Suffering from persecution and sickness are often indistinguishable. Suppose that the Apostle Paul got pneumonia from all this work and exposure. Now, this came from a context in Desiring God where I had just listed where he said we're in danger on the streets, danger from rivers, danger from enemies.

We were in the sea for a day and a half. I've been shipwrecked three times. So, he's listing that as part of his apostolic sufferings.

That he's in danger. He's on a boat, and it breaks up in a storm. Three times this happened to Paul.

He's thrown into the sea. He's grabbing on to wood because he's on his way to do missionary work. He gets rescued somehow, evidently, but he gets sick.

Pneumonia. Now, is the pneumonia part of the suffering for Christ? And I think Paul put it in the list along with persecutions because it is. Sleepless nights, he said.

He put it right alongside, I was beaten with lashes five times. Thirty-nine lashes five times in his life. I was beaten with rods three times.

And then he puts things like, thrown into the sea. Or take this picture of Paul's back after he's been beaten all these times. His back must have looked horrific.

I think that's what he meant when he said, I bear in my body the marks of Jesus. Surely, since they didn't know anything about antibiotics or had any back then, surely one of those times when they had lacerated his back and thrown him on the ground, and it was all covered with dust, surely it got infected. And there was a fever.

Is the fever part of the persecution? Can you distinguish these things? And suppose something happened in his back so that characteristically now he has to walk with a slump. And walking with a slump, he favors his left leg. And favoring his left leg, he gets arthritis.

Is that part of his suffering for Christ? You can't distinguish these things. That's my argument here. So one night you're faithful and visiting a friend and you miss a night's sleep.

And you get sick. And it gets complicated. And something happens to your voice box.

Life is not neatly dividable into persecution and sickness. You can't do it. It won't work.

If you are a faithful, obedient servant of Christ, then I argue whatever suffering you endure in that path is the same in principle as if you had endured it through persecution. Suppose that the Apostle Paul got pneumonia from all his work and exposure. Would that pneumonia have been persecution? Paul did not make a distinction between being beaten by rods and having a boating accident, or being cold while traveling between towns.

For him, any suffering that befell him while serving Christ was part of the cost of discipleship. When a missionary child gets diarrhea, we think of this as part of the price of faithfulness, because they happen to be way off there in Uzbekistan where the medical care is so bad. But if any parent is walking in the path of obedience to God's calling, it is the same price, is it not? What turns out, what turns sufferings into sufferings with and for Christ is not how intentional our enemies are, but how faithful we are.

If we are Christ's, then what befalls us is for His glory and for our good, whether it is caused by enzymes or enemies. I watch how we pray for our missionaries, and we often pray for our missionaries. Little Greta, almost lost her, right? Almost lost her in Guinea.

Unconscious for several days with mental or spinal malaria, or whatever they call it. And the prayers here were always in terms of, God, Satan is waging war against this missionary family. Fight for your cause, fight for your name, and sustain Greta, give her life, show your glory, show your power.

Well, same thing is true if you have a little child who gets sick here. Same issues. You lose a child here, I remember walking into the hospital over at United in St. Paul, and there was Patti Larson, who is now with Jesus because she died of cancer last year.

And there she was holding Eric, one year old, and ivory colored because he was dead. Sudden infant crib death. Had that happened on the mission field, we would have all thought of it in terms of, what a price to pay to go overseas where there is not good medical care.

There is no difference. This is an obedient, loving, godly, biblical, Bible-saturated family, and their child died. Conclusion.

When we speak of the purposes of suffering in the following section, we mean both persecution and accidents and sickness that befall us in any path of faith. Question about that? My question is on wisdom then, like when you have a circumstance. The question is, where do you find wisdom to know what kinds of risks to take, both at the level of heading into a hostile city where all likelihood is you are going to be persecuted and may be killed, whether to go or not.

And Paul said, why are you crying and breaking my heart? I am ready not only to testify to the name of Christ, but to die for His name. So that is Paul's gutsy answer to their concern. A very in-your-face kind of example.

Or, how late do you stay up to help a friend when you know you are on the brink of strep and you characteristically get terrible sore throats if you don't get six or seven hours of sleep a night? Where do you get it? And I don't have an answer. I mean, I know where to get it, but I don't have any answer for a formula to know when you've got it. You pray.

You seek the mind of the Lord. You saturate yourself with biblical principles. You look at your limits.

You try to assess wisdom of your long-term usefulness versus your short-term usefulness. And sometimes you'll make decisions that look prudent. And sometimes you'll make decisions that look absolutely ridiculous.

Paul did both. Paul escaped in a basket from Damascus. And Paul refused to escape from other places and was stoned.

So sometimes he ran and sometimes he stayed. And all I know to say is, try to discern the mind of the Lord. Sometimes you speak and sometimes you don't.

Sometimes you take the risk and sometimes you don't. That doesn't help very much, does it? Sorry. But now you're cast upon prayer and the Bible and not me.

I don't have a formula for you. I don't know. But seek it from the Lord.

There's another hand somewhere. Yes, there is a difference, but probably in the end, the solution is the same. The question was, is there a difference between the kind of suffering you may experience when you're walking in obedience and faith and the suffering you bring upon yourself because you walk outside temporarily the path of obedience and faith.

Take on excessive loans, say, and get yourself in big financial trouble. I just got an email from Jonathan Reasoner in Japan, for example, where he said that the pastor has resigned at the church where he's

servicing because he took out too many loans to keep their kindergarten afloat. And he's weighing over his head and it's now gotten him and the church into big financial trouble and he feels unworthy.

And now the elders have to decide whether or not to let him go or keep him, whether to say this is not serious enough. And he brought that upon himself. And all of us do that from time to time.

Many of our sufferings are owing to stupid and bad and sinful decisions that we make. And that was what happened in Psalm 107. So let me use Psalm 107 to answer that.

If you want to take your Bible and turn to Psalm 107, maybe the Lord had me in this for my devotions this morning because this question was going to come up here. Psalm 107 has a refrain over and over again that his people got into straits and they cried to the Lord and He heard them and answered them. Look at verse 6. They were hungry and thirsty.

They cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress. Then look at verse 13. They cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress.

Now look at verse 17. Some were sick or foolish. Another version.

Through their sinful ways. Ah, now He's not going to deliver them, right? And because of their iniquities, suffered affliction. They loathed any kind of food and they drew near to the gates of death.

Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble and He delivered them from their distress. He sent forth His word and healed them and delivered them from destruction. So this psalm has people in trouble sometimes because of external choices that they didn't make and sometimes they're in trouble and sickness because of their own rebellion and because of their own iniquities and sinful ways.

And in both cases, the prescription is the same. You cry out, oh God help me. Because my guess is most of us, even when we have gotten into trouble because of somebody else's sin rather than our own, we know that we're not perfect.

We know that we haven't lived the life we might have lived and so we're going to be repenting anyway. And so we cry out and we doubly repent and say, oh God, I have made such a fool. I've made such a wreck of my life.

I've made such awful mistakes. Have mercy upon me. And we have such strong assurances that if we will confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and then He will begin to deal with us as His children, as He always does, and He'll begin to reclaim us and help you find a way out of debt.

If you're really a resolved and a walk in the way of life, He'll show you a path to steadfastly get yourself out of that or He'll deal with you and your sickness, either healing it or giving you grace to glorify Him in it or whatever it is. Donna. Same question.

Good. I think so. In fact, let me move ahead into the purposes of suffering and I think that very thing will come out.

We have 45 minutes. And I think this is probably the most important unit here. I don't know.

Different ones of you will, I hope, find help in different places. But the purposes of Christian suffering, why does God permit and order the sufferings of His people? These are the kinds of questions you get in the

church. Why? Why? Why? When things happen to God's people.

So, I'm going to lead you through six answers to the question why. Number one. To promote deeper faith and hope and holiness of life.

Alright. A text to put under this purpose. Deeper faith and hope and holiness.

2 Corinthians 1, 8 and 9. We do not want you to be unaware, Paul says, brethren, of our affliction, which came to us in Asia, and we were burdened excessively, so think of some time when this was true of you, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life. Indeed, we had the sentence of death. So this, whatever it was, it brought Paul right up to the brink of thinking, it's over, I'm dead, I'm history.

Within ourselves. And then notice this purpose clause. So that.

Now this is not, whose purpose is this? This isn't the devil's design. The devil may have been doing this, but it wasn't the devil's design. It was somebody else's design.

So that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead. So, clearly God had a purpose or a design in this affliction, which brought him right up to the brink of death, so that if you're on the brink of death, and you're going to maintain hope, there's only one possible ground of hope. And it isn't, I'll get through this and have a vacation.

Or I'll get through this and have a happy marriage. Or I'll get through this and be healthy the rest of my life. You're not going to get through this.

The next thing is death. Will you hope? And the answer is, yes. Well, in what? Answer, the God who raises the dead.

So Christians should have hope right up to the brink of where the world says, there's no hope left. No more vacations for you. No more playing with your children on the floor for you.

No more beautiful walks around Lake of the Isles for you. You're going into blackness, fella. And Christians say, I am not going into darkness.

I'm going into the arms of a God who will raise me from the dead. And God wants us to believe that. That's the kind of faith He wants us to have, so He will even ordain the death of Lazarus.

Or you walking right up to the brink of your grave, or even through it. Another text in this regard, Hebrews 12, 3-11, Consider him who has endured such hostility by sinners against himself, Jesus namely, so that you will not grow weary, don't grow weary and lose heart. You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood.

So the situation here is persecution of some kind. In your striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons.

Now notice, this is persecution, but this still applies. God says, My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, so we can even conceive of the ugly words spoken to us by a mean-spirited colleague at work as the discipline of our loving Heavenly Father. That's why I began with the sovereignty of God.

If you don't have a concept of the sovereignty of God over mean-spirited, sin-filled, brutal, persecuting people, you can't make any sense out of this passage. Because this passage says you are now resisting, and you might have to resist to the point of shedding blood. You haven't gotten there yet, but it's coming.

But don't forget this. God says, My son, don't regard lightly the discipline of the Lord. That's what it is.

The shedding of blood is the discipline of the Lord. Nor faint when you are reproved by Him for those whom the Lord loves, loves, loves, He disciplines like that shedding of blood. Now, there's a category that needs to be created.

There's a category that needs to be created in our moral framework of world view. My pain and blood shedding in this excruciating moment is love. Love.

And of course, there are going to be moments when you're going to scream out, this doesn't feel like love. I don't love my children this way. Which is why intuitions are bad guides for theology building.

John, what do you do when you get that thought in your head? The thought process for me is first a very firm renunciation in the face of the lie and the devil. Just right in his face. No! Out of my head and out of my life.

And then, just as important is the turning of the mind away from the negation to the affirmation of truth. If you don't have a Bible nearby, you plumb the depths of your memory and you call up from this seminar or from your Bible reading truths about God's love for you. Through many afflictions we must enter the kingdom.

Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers Him out of them all. I count the sufferings of this age not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed. And you fix your mind on the glory.

This is the use of the sword. That's what it means when it says, take the sword of the Spirit. That's what it means when it says in Romans 8.13, those who live according to the flesh will die, but those who by the Spirit put to death the deeds of the body, they will live.

And so, Satan is tempting you and saying, just cave in, just give up, just reject God. Go off and medicate your pain with alcohol or drugs or just a pack of vanilla wafers. And you need to get in His face with the sword of the Spirit and say, no! No! I put you to death by truth.

The truth will make you free. Which is why I'm teaching these texts. You need to just pack these texts into your mind.

Or, I carried for years and years a little printout. I found font number 8 on my computer and I printed out Romans 8 in a little, about that much. I folded it up and tucked it in my wallet here and carried it.

And every stoplight and every doctor's waiting line and every place where I was delayed, I got out and meditated. I memorized Romans 8 over those years. I recited it to the church here one Christmas as a Christmas gift ages ago, probably 17 years ago.

I quoted Romans 8. So, that's my strategy. A negation, an in-your-face renunciation of Satan and his lies, and more importantly, an affirmation and a focus upon biblical truth with fixing your mind on things that are above. I do that most often with sexual temptation.

Because that's the most common temptation. That and money, I suppose, and pride and fame. Those are the three biggies I think I would say in our lives, at least in my life.

And so, in-your-face with every lewd thought that comes in your mind. You don't give it more than about three seconds before you're on the offensive with this kind of thing that comes into your mind. You give it five seconds, you might be a goner that afternoon.

But if you attack immediately and then put in its place positive, glorious, beautiful truth, you can experience this. So, let's see what the Father is up to here. He scourges every son whom He receives.

Verse 7, It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as sons for what son is there whom His Father does not discipline. But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children, not sons.

Furthermore, we have had earthly fathers. They disciplined us to discipline us. And we respected them.

We should have anyway. Shall we not much more rather be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them. And many of them blew it.

Some of you now have memories of fathers who just did it all wrong. Maybe no discipline at all. Maybe he just vanished out of your life.

Or maybe he was brutal and cruel and abusive. Maybe he just dissed you all the time in his language. Maybe there was no affirmation, no hugging and no playing on the floor.

No balanced spankings, but only ugly, mean hittings. And so, you don't have any of this, which means this text should be so precious for you. We had an elder one time in this church.

He's not at the church anymore. But his father was like that. And he told me how he was converted at university and how he began to rebuild his categories of fatherhood through the Bible.

And the fatherhood of God became very precious to him. Do not use your father's sin as an excuse for the inability to know God as your Father. That's just an excuse.

You can rebuild the categories of fatherhood by the Bible. And this is one of the most precious. In fact, it's the point of it here.

The point is, they did it as they seemed best. And that could be terrible. But God disciplines us for our good.

Relearn fatherhood. Relearn discipline so that we may share His holiness. There's the purpose.

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful. That's an understatement. But sorrowful.

Yet to those who have been trained by it... Now there's a challenge for us. If you're embittered by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. So that's a very classic text on why Christians suffer.

Here's some more texts on that same point. I think I'll pass over them because if I belabor this first point too long we won't get to the others, but you see them there and they're on your sheet. Let's go to number two.

When Christians suffer, it increases the joy of our experience of our reward in heaven. It increases our reward and the experience of it in heaven. Here's the text I began with today.

Therefore, we do not lose heart though our outer man is decaying. So here's a word, especially for the older among us. Pretty soon, you can't read anymore and then you can't hear anymore and then you can't walk anymore and then you can't see anymore.

Then you cry out, take me. Please take me. I'm ready.

Please take me. And sometimes, He does wonderful deliverances and other times, the greatest saints linger through the hardest closing years. And I have no explanation for how God divvies up this.

But, we have this word that in the wasting away, this momentary, light affliction. Now don't think Paul's naive there. When he said light and momentary, he did not mean that it only happened in a moment of his life and that it was light compared to other people's.

It was heavy compared to other people's and it was long. He means a lifetime of heavy affliction is light and momentary. A lifetime of heavy affliction is light and momentary.

That's what he means. And it's light in comparison to the weight of glory and it's short in relation to the length of eternity. Momentary, light affliction producing for us an eternal weight.

You see the contrast of the two words? Eternal, momentary, weight, light. An eternal weight of glory. Far beyond all comparison.

While we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen... Now I can tell by looking at the clock over there that I'm probably not going to get to the unit, or at least very far in it. How shall we joyfully endure? So I'm going to teach this lesson while I'm teaching this lesson.

Because all I have on this sheet is this lesson right here. The way to endure joyfully is to do what Paul did here. Look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

So while you are healthy, and while you have life, and while your eyes are good, and your ears are good, discipline yourself to set your mind and your affection on things that are unseen because someday that's all you'll have to think about. There'll be no time left. There'll be nothing left to see.

No fingers left to feel. You will have outlived all your children. Some of you.

And your spouse, or never had a spouse. And all your friends, and you'll be over there on the fourth floor of Augustana Home and either bitter or peaceful as to whether or not you have set a trajectory in your life of doing this. Romans 8. We've been here.

Let's not read that again except to say our experience of our reward is enlarged and intensified as we contemplate them and lean on them for our support in suffering. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed. Or, here's the way it functions for Jesus as He warned us about persecutions coming.

Blessed are you when people insult you. Matthew 5.11 Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice! That's an odd

response.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven. So you must think about that. I mean, isn't that implied here that the joy as you come home from work and at work they scorned you today? They ignored you.

They walked by you. They clucked their tongues at you. They curled up their lip at you.

They twittered over in the corner as they were talking about Christianity. They slurred churches today. It was a heavy day.

Can you rejoice on your way home? Only if you're thinking about the reward. That's the way Jesus did it. Rejoice for your reward in heaven is great.

I would argue this, even though it's not explicit in this text, I think it is in this one. That experience that you just walked through enlarges your joy in heaven. I think that's found in this word producing in 2 Corinthians 4.17. This light affliction is producing.

It's not just preceding. It's producing a weight of glory. Here's the third reason we suffer as Christians or purpose of God in it.

To awaken others out of indifference and make them more radical and bold for Christ. Philippians 1.12 Now, I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel. He's in prison in Rome.

My circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel. Oh, how many stories! If you go to the section in Let the Nations Be Glad, I tell, I don't know how many stories to illustrate this. I tell the story of the five missionaries killed among the Alca.

I tell the story of Chet Bitterman. When Chet Bitterman was killed, shot through the chest as a Wycliffe missionary, a young man, the next year, the Wycliffe applicants doubled. That's what I mean by... That's what Paul means by my circumstances have turned out.

Is not Elizabeth Elliot's loss of her husband the means by which millions of people have been fired for missions and radical obedience through her writings? High price. She would have never chosen it. But I believe she would teach that.

She's going to be over at North Heights Lutheran. Omnipotent love. It's a women's conference.

Go there. All of you women should go there. She is one of the greatest women alive, I believe.

How you can have an opportunity to hear Elizabeth Elliot and not take it is beyond me. I think we should get her here someday. And I think she'd be willing to come.

Fourth. Oh, I didn't finish reading that text. We can get to the most important verse.

So that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else. And that most of the brethren trusting the Lord because of my imprisonment have far more courage far more courage to speak the word of God without fear. So one of the reasons Paul suffers is so that his boldness would be multiplied in the life of others.

Now this is part of the drama. You could say, you could say and this is the way a cynic would talk. This is the way a person would talk who is unwilling to change the categories of his brain.

The cynic would say, God could produce that boldness any way He wanted to. He doesn't have to have an imprisoned apostle to do it. But God chose to do it this way.

Now who is God? You or God? Who will pass judgment on whether God's somehow producing this boldness in these other preachers another way or doing it this way? Who's to say which will get God the most glory when all of history is said and done? Who's to say whether off the church we will read the wisdom of God better the way He's running the world today than the way you would tell Him to run the world? Well, I say, I have been won over by the apostle Paul to take his word above your word. That's my choice. You can make another choice.

You can go find a philosopher somewhere in a university who clucks his tongue at this kind of thing by saying, well, that's ridiculous to justify suffering that way because God could have produced boldness without imprisonment. So, dispense with number three. You can go to that person and be impressed with that logic and say, they know better than Paul and they know better than God.

But frankly, I don't see any reason to make that choice. I find in the writings of the apostles such profound and persuasive and insightful analyses of the human condition and the nature of God and where we're going and where we've come from. I've never even seen the beginning of a life of a philosopher that surpasses the Bible in insight.

Why would I leave the Bible? Because they can cluck their tongues and mock at a few of its arguments and offer nothing superior. They can't construct a world like God's world. Number four.

To present to unbelievers tangibly in our suffering the kind of compelling sacrificial love that Christ extends to them from the cross. This is the reason I gave the course the title it has. Namely, Suffering for the Sake of the Body.

The Pursuit of People Through Pain. To present people the Gospel. Look at this.

1 Thessalonians 1.5 Our Gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction, just as you know what kind of men we prove to be among you. So something is important there about the kind of men they prove to be among you for your sake. So they became a certain kind of people for the sake of spreading the Gospel to the Thessalonians.

What kind? Verse 6 You became imitators. Now we can see what kind they were. You became imitators of us and of the Lord.

How? In what way? Having received the Word in much tribulation with joy. So, the kind of men that we prove to be among you was we were willing to endure persecution and tribulation in your midst, and we did it joyfully to extend to you, for your sake, the Gospel. And you began to imitate us.

So the point I draw out of there is one of the functions of tribulation in the life of a pastor or a missionary or an apostle is that people might see the Gospel embodied in the loving, sacrificial love of the minister. Now that's even more clear in this text, Colossians 1.24. Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake. There it is again.

For your sake. My sufferings for your sake. And in my flesh I do my share in behalf of His body, which is the church, filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ.

So Paul viewed his apostolic sufferings as a filling up of what was lacking in Christ's afflictions. That's risky. You can't improve upon Christ's afflictions as an atoning work.

Jesus said on the cross, It is finished. There's nothing to fill up here. It is finished.

The atoning, expiatory, sin-bearing, wrath-removing, condemnation-removing work is done. Paul's sufferings add nothing to it. Well, what then is he filling up? What he's filling up is the intention of God for those afflictions to be personally presented to everyone for whom He died.

God means for all the people groups of the world and for all the peoples of the world to be presented in tangible bodily form Christ's sacrificial love for them. Namely, in the sufferings of missionaries. Sufferings of missionaries are the design of God, not necessary interruptions by Satan.

They are the design by which Paul completes what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ. Now, I base that understanding of this on Philippians 2.29 where this phrase occurs. Let me read the analogy text.

Epaphroditus had risked his life to bring gifts from Philippi to Rome and to Paul. So Paul writes back and he says, Receive Epaphroditus then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard, because he came close to death. He risked his life for the work of Christ.

Risking his life to... Now, here's the same phrase. Filling up what is lacking. To complete what was lacking in your service to me.

It's a rare phrase. And he says, He completed what was lacking in your service to me. Well, how did he do that? He didn't add to their love.

He transported their love from Philippi to Rome. And so he completed what was lacking. What was lacking? What was lacking was the personal presentation which the church, hundreds of miles away, couldn't do what they wanted to do.

Present their love gifts to him. So here's Christ. He dies on the cross for the world.

He rises. He goes back to heaven. He's not on the earth.

And he means for that loving sacrifice to get to the world. How's it going to get there? It's going to get there not simply through videos, tapes, radio, and preaching. It's going to get there through the suffering of missionaries.

So that the people see in the loving self-sacrifice of missionaries the picture of Christ. I carry in my body the bloody marks of Jesus. I die every day.

We will not finish the Great Commission without more martyrs. Muslims are a huge group. The Buddhists are a huge group.

The Hindus are a huge group. And when you walk in to the very center of those mighty places of demonic darkness, it will be a lamb in the midst of wolves. And when some are slain, the blood of the martyrs will be the seed of the church.

So I call you to join God in the finishing of the Great Commission. Almost everywhere I go today in my speaking, I say something like I am on a recruitment for martyrs. And I mean it.

Because Revelation 6.11 says when the martyrs cry out from under the altar, how long, O Lord, until You vindicate our blood? And He says, until the full number of Your brethren who are to be killed for My name comes in. What? Can you want to be a martyr? A lot of missionaries have wanted to be martyrs. Raymond Law sure wanted to be a martyr.

So here he was in his 80s teaching Oriental languages in a posh university in Italy. He had been a missionary to Muslims in Tunisia. He had planted a little church.

And then he'd come back and he had settled in to the last 20 years of his life at ease teaching in the university. And he thought to himself, which would be better? To go there and risk my life and probably be killed preaching the Gospel in the center of Muslim North Africa or to stay here and waste away until I die of old age? And he made the decision that he would go. For a year he preached underground, strengthened the saints, and then he simply made the choice to go public.

And he took his stand on the streets, lifted up his voice and preached, and they killed him. So, I think it's probably on the verge of pathological to go off base on that. But when I read Foxe's Book of Martyrs and when I read the stories of the death of the apostles, Peter wanted to be crucified upside down lest he appear too much like his master when they arrested him and took him away.

So, I've got to be careful here. I don't want to produce an unhealthy fascination with death. It's an enemy.

Death is an enemy. The last enemy to be destroyed is death, Paul said. And Paul himself said, I'm torn.

I want to depart and be with Christ and yet I know it is more needful for your sake. So, it might become very selfish to want to be a martyr in the sense of copping out on the ministry you should have here before you go. But I don't want to say no too quickly.

Is there a hand back there somewhere? Okay. I don't have an answer to that if we're not sharing the Gospel. I think tent making missions is probably only going to be fruitful if they begin to take some risks at least with a small cluster of people and share the Gospel and then at least they will know.

Maybe big numbers won't know. So, the measure of risk that you can take, it may be that one of the ways God revives the church in these latter days in order to finish the Great Commission is that 200,000 young people don't even think in terms of those risks anymore. They simply go and preach.

And there's so many of them being killed that the world can't ignore it anymore. They're being killed by the thousands as they preach in Saudi Arabia and as they preach in Oman and Afghanistan and North India and China. They're just being slaughtered.

They're being mown down. Romans 8.35 is coming true. We are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.

We are being killed all day long. Where's that coming true? Maybe that will start coming true somewhere when the church is so revived and so radical that young people rise up and say, I'm not going to plan for a little short-term 10-year thing and then get a good job and go to the suburbs for the next 40 years of my life. I'm in this to die, whether short or long.

We need a whole new generation of lifetime missionaries instead of experimental missionaries. I'll go check it out and see if it fits my personality. From now on, let no one cause trouble for me for I bear on my body the brand marks of Jesus.

They could see it. I'm always caring about in the body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. Now that really does relate to your question because I'm sure that as Paul went to a new city, they couldn't see the lacerations of his back.

They didn't know what he'd been through there. So it had to happen over and over again. The Holy Spirit bears witness to me that bonds and suffering await me in every city.

I suffer hardship, 2 Timothy 2.9, even to imprisonment as a criminal, but the Word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason, I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen so that they may obtain salvation which is in Christ. I do everything for the sake of the elect so that they may obtain salvation including my suffering.

Number six, the last one. We suffer as Christians to magnify the power of Christ in our weakness and the sufficiency and surpassing value of Christ over all worldly comforts and pleasures. 2 Corinthians 12.9-10 He said to me when I cried out that He would take away my suffering, bring my thorn in the flesh, whatever it was, we don't know.

My grace is sufficient for you and my power is perfected in weakness. So God ordains this weakness even though it's a messenger of Satan. God ordains it in order that His power might be manifest.

Most gladly, therefore, will I rather boast about my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. So that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties.

Look how broad this is. For Christ's sake, for when I am weak, then am I strong. This is why 1 Peter 3.15 would come true.

1 Peter 3.15 says, Be always ready to give an answer to those who ask a reason for the what that is in you. Why is it hope? Why do they ask about your hope? Because people that live like this joyfully must have their treasure somewhere else than in the world. And so they would look at you and your life bears witness to the fact that your treasure is not on earth.

It is in heaven. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven and not on the earth where moth and rust deal. So people kind of look at you and they say, hmm, your motivational structure and your choices in life and what you're willing to endure are out of sync with ordinary American dreams.

What are you hoping in? What sustains you? I want this and this and this and this and you seem to choose not to have this and this and this and this in order to get yourself into trouble and do that and that and that and that. What are you hoping in? And the answer is the reward. Or, here's the way Paul says it in Philippians 1, I know that this will turn out for my deliverance, this imprisonment, through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Christ.

According to my earnest expectation and hope that I will not be ashamed in anything but that with all boldness Christ will now as always be exalted. That's his great hope. That should be your driving motive for Christ to be exalted in your body whether by life or by death for, he says to me, to live is Christ and to

die is gain.

So Christ is exalted in His life if His death is gain to Him. He's exalted in His death if death is gain to Him. So that's what is the secret of causing people to see the exaltation of Christ.

Living in such a way that you show that when you lose everything but Christ, you don't lose the best thing. Therefore, you don't weep as those who have no hope. Questions or comments about that unit? I don't have anything new to say to you there about how shall we joyfully endure the measure of suffering appointed for us.

If you read through these texts, Hebrews 10, 32-34, Hebrews 11, 24-26, Hebrews 12, 1-3, and Hebrews 13-14, you find the same structure of thought in each one. Namely, let us go... This is 13-13. Let us go out to Him outside the camp.

That means leave your comfort zone, leave your securities, whatever they are. Bearing His reproach. Now, how do you have peace in that? What sustains you in that? For here we do not have a lasting city, but we seek a city which is to come.

Every one of those texts in Hebrews says that. Are you seeking a city which is to come? Or are you seeking to get married? If I can just get married, I'll be happy. Or a job, a new job.

If I can just have a job, I'll be happy. Or if I can just get rid of this ache inside, this ulcer or cancer or arthritis, then I'll be happy. Then I would go outside the camp, maybe.

And His argument is very different. Let us go outside the camp and embrace all these sufferings. Embrace reproach.

Because our minds are not thinking in terms of how to maximize pleasures on earth. They're thinking about a city which is to come, and how forever and ever and ever and ever our joys there will be multiplied so that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed to us. So my plea as we end is that you would all devote your energies to dwelling on the surpassing value of Christ.

The surpassing value of what's coming. And that you would develop a lifestyle that would make you vulnerable to suffering and would embrace whatever hardships God may call you to embrace. Not because you're not a Christian hedonist, but because you've really learned where lasting joy is to be found.

I think we'll end. And then as we dismiss, as we were talking last night just how we might end this. If you want to linger here and pray, I was thinking that the prayers might go in several directions.

One, Lord, help me, I'm confused. Clarify biblical thought for me. Secondly, I think if I were you, I would pray, Lord, if there's been anything amiss here, if John has not gotten it right, if he's been too selective in his choice of text, or he's said something imbalanced or out of sync, protect me from error and correct that in my own thinking.

And then third, I think I would pray, would you apply this to me so that in my own suffering I will endure and I will not despair and I will be able to be a joyful Christian and thus model your superior value to me over all things. And then fourthly, I would pray, use me now for the rest of my life so that whatever I walk through, I would display your surpassing beauty and worth and saving power to the world. Make me an

instrument of salvation in the world, an instrument of comfort in the world.

I think I'd pray those things. So whether you pray them in your car on your way home, or whether some of you linger here in quietness and spend some minutes in prayer, I think that would be a wonderful way to end it. Oh Father in Heaven, I pray now that we would all be sustained by these biblical truths we've looked at, that you would create the categories and the thought framework and the spiritual dynamic of our souls so that we are deeply rooted men and women of God and grace.

Spirit of glory and of God, rest upon us in our hour of trial and would you, oh God, cause us to so love the unseen and so love the weight of glory, the glory that is to come, that we would be the freest, most radical, most risk-taking, most sacrificial, most dangerous, most inexplicable people in the world in the way we love, in the hard places and hard times of the world. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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