

# Trials and Blessings in the Ministry

by Mack Tomlinson

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*Suffering in ministry is a part of the Christian calling, and it's a way for God to break us and make us more fruitful for His kingdom.*

**Duration:** 26:37

**Scripture:** 2 Corinthians 1:3

**Topics:** "Suffering In Ministry", "Christian Fellowship"

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## Description

This sermon delves into the topic of trials and suffering in ministry, emphasizing the positive perspective from God's standpoint. It explores the necessity of suffering in the Christian ministry, drawing insights from 2 Corinthians and highlighting the transparency of Paul in sharing the realities of New Covenant ministry. The sermon also discusses how suffering is not to be viewed with human sympathy but as a call to endure and rejoice in hardships, aligning our suffering with Christ's. Additionally, it touches on how trials and suffering in ministry are not only for personal growth but primarily for the benefit and consolation of others, emphasizing the importance of ministering to the flock even amidst personal struggles. Lastly, it transitions to the blessings of ministry, focusing on the joy found in the saints and the precious relationships cultivated through Christian fellowship.

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## Transcript

Our subject matter has to do with the trials and suffering in ministry and the blessings of ministry. And so, I'm going to try to take 10 or 15 minutes, and I'm really going to endeavor to limit it to that, to talk about this subject of suffering in the ministry and the blessings of ministry. And these are just disjointed thoughts really, so please forgive me if it isn't as cohesive as it should be.

But under the, I'm going to take the negative side first, but it's not a negative, it's a positive from God's standpoint, suffering and trials in the ministry and two headings under that. And then I'll close with the blessings of the ministry. I heard a man years ago preach a series of sermons, I don't know how long the series was, but it was from 2 Corinthians, and he said the theme of 2 Corinthians is the glories and trials of the Christian ministry, of the gospel ministry.

And it really is true, when you read 2 Corinthians close, it's amazing how transparent Paul is, how much he opens to us those realities of New Covenant ministry. So let's just think about trials or suffering in the ministry. Mrs. Judson Elliott wrote a little book, I think it's called *The Value of Trials*, and in there she said, Life was not meant for pleasure only, not for ease, but for discipline, not for temporal, but for eternal

values, not for a satisfying life on earth, but a godly life for heaven.

Therefore, the birthright of every Christian is suffering. And you know, it's interesting in rereading Acts recently, this sprang out in me, one of the first things God said, not to Paul, but about him, about Paul's new life in commission, the Lord said, I will show him how much he must suffer for my sake. I'm going to show him how much he's going to suffer for my sake.

Suffering for Christ's sake. Let's think about this area of trials and suffering in the ministry. Recently, this has really struck me in a fresh way.

When Christians go through suffering, usually the way other Christians relate to them is, I'm so sorry. It must be so hard. I wish you weren't going through it.

That's just unfortunate how we talk like that. But the New Testament never does. The New Testament gives no carnal human comforts about our sufferings.

The writers never in any way speak like, oh, I'm so sorry that you believers are going through this. One of the most remarkable things about the book of Job in light of this is, if you had let one of your children go through what Job went through, when the time was right, wouldn't you try to comfort them and talk to them about the suffering and console them about it and explain it a little bit? You would if you could. Isn't this amazing? When God finally shows up to Job, God never brings up His suffering as a topic of discussion.

He never explains it. That is amazing to me. The New Testament attitude and teaching for us relative to our trials and our suffering is not sympathy, just reality.

Like this. I think it's a statement, but I'll turn it into a question. Why do you think this is strange what you're going through? Don't think this is strange.

There's some strange things happening to you. You're called to this suffering. Your path is not different than your Lord's.

Rejoice. Endure hardness as a good soldier. In other words, man up.

Going through a hard time? Endure hardness as a good soldier. Endure it. Fight the good fight of faith.

There's this call to us to be men about this and face it and realize this is what is our destiny in the ministry. And even Paul in the missionary journeys, he would come back to churches and even for the Christian in general, he told them we must through much tribulation enter the Kingdom of God. So I have two headings under this.

And the first is a phrase from Amy Carmichael I read. She's almost my favorite devotional writer. And she had this phrase, there's no other way.

Now take that about suffering. In the ministry, when there's about trials and suffering, there is no other way in the ministry except that it's going to have suffering with it. Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4.10, we both labor and suffer reproach because we trust in the living God.

In the second epistle, he said, endure hardness as a good soldier. No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life in order that he may please Him who enlisted him as a soldier. So there's these images right there.

A soldier, warfare, enduring hardship. Paul was basically telling Timothy all the time, man up. You're called to this.

This is part and parcel of the Christian ministry. This comes with the territory. It's not optional equipment.

It's standard equipment in the Christian life and in the ministry. Ecclesiastes 8.8 says something interesting. I don't read the Rotherham translation very often, but sometimes these various English translations can bring a thought that's good.

Ecclesiastes 8.8 in the Rotherham. There is no furlough during war. Think about it.

In a real war, soldiers aren't going home. They don't get a weekend pass. There's no furlough.

And this is what we're engaged in in the Christian ministry. We are in a war. We're on the front line.

We're in the heat of the battle. And there is no furlough unless like Demas, you go back to what you want as far as comforts, but there's no other way except suffering. Paul said in 2 Timothy 4, be watchful in all things and endure not hardness this time.

Endure what? Afflictions. Afflictions. 1 Thessalonians 3 No man should be moved by these afflictions for you know that we are appointed to them.

There is no other way in the ministry than suffering. Amy Carmichael said this. This is good.

It's a long quote. She said the Bible is full of great words for God's warriors. They sound like trumpets sometimes.

But there are other words that speak very quietly deep within us. Perhaps there are some who are sorely tempted because of the hardness of the work entrusted to them. That may be some of you right now.

That which they had hoped for has not happened. Perhaps they feel they can't go on. At such times, we should hear the words our Lord Jesus Christ has spoken.

Well, this is the whole Bible, but He spoke it all, didn't He? So, think of this. They blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers. An alabaster box of ointment, very precious, and she broke the box.

Jesus took and blessed the bread and broke it and gave it. And Amy Carmichael then says, also my body which is broken for you. Broken pitchers and the light shone out.

Broken box and the ointment poured forth. Broken bread and the hungry were fed. And a broken body and a lost world was redeemed.

There is no fruitfulness in the ministry without God breaking us through pain, sufferings, trials, hardships, pressures, that sometimes we don't think we can take. That the fragrance that comes out might be Christ and not us. And then Amy Carmichael said, as Thou was broken, Lord, for me, let me be broken, Lord, for love of Thee.

And Paul said an amazing thing in 2 Corinthians 12 about his trials. He said, I'm contented with, another translation says, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecution, in distresses for Christ's sake. He said, I take pleasure.

You know what I usually say? This is pressure. I don't say I take pleasure in this. I say this is pressure.

Get me out of this. But Paul didn't rejoice in tribulation for its own sake or he just liked to suffer, but he was able to learn to rejoice in it for the fruit and benefits that was going to come from it. Through the Holy Spirit's trials become instruments in giving us vital power to our walk and our ministry that can come no other way.

There is no other way in the ministry except suffering and trials. And then Amy Carmichael in the same thought finished with this. She said, is there no other way, O God, except through sorrow, pain, and loss to stamp Christ's likeness on my soul? No other way except the cross? And then a voice steals all my soul and steals the waves of Galilee.

It says, can you not bear the furnace heat if in the flames I walk with Thee? I bore the cross. I know its weight. I drink the cup I hold for Thee.

Can you not follow where I lead? I'll give you strength. Lean hard on Me. So we just need to learn to stop thinking it's strange when the fiery trials come to trials.

We've got to learn to see that there's no other way. And that Leonard Ravenhill, he had a high view of God's sovereignty. He used to say, nothing gets to you except it comes through God's hand.

He said, you think your life's a football for the devil to kick around? No, it comes through God's hand. So when we suffer, when we're hurting the most, when the times are hardest, we must see our gracious Father has brought thee us because there is no other way except suffering in the ministry. Secondly, let me hurry.

Our trials and suffering in the ministry is primarily for the sake of others. Think about this. Let me turn.

You don't need to turn these. I'll read them quick. It's for the sake of others.

Amy Carmichael, when she was younger, I don't remember what age this was, she was very active in India. She was doing ministry, evangelism, rescuing girls from temple prostitution. They had started their work, Donover, and they had gone to look at a house I think to purchase it.

They were walking through it and there was boards that were weak and rotted out and she fell through the floor I guess to the basement. She messed up her back severely and her leg. She was never the same again.

And from then on, she was basically bedridden after a number of years. And it was out of that suffering she began to write her books. And so, her suffering became for the future church of Jesus Christ.

Would she have gotten those books written without the suffering? I don't know. But our trials and suffering are often for our flock and for others that God brings into our lives. 2 Corinthians 12:10 There's a person first that our suffering is for.

And I'll read you the verse. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches and needs, in persecution and distresses for Christ's sake. Your hardship and your sufferings and your tears and your trials are first for Christ's sake.

They're for Him to get out of you what He wants to get out of you. And they're for Him to put in you what He wants to put in you that through you His fragrance will flow on others. It's for Christ's sake.

And the depth of that we've never plumbed for Jesus' sake. 2 Corinthians 1.6 gives us another angle of this. Now if we are afflicted, he's writing to the Corinthians, it is for your consolation and salvation.

Our sufferings are for the saints, what we go through. It is for your consolation and salvation which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we're comforted, that's for your consolation and salvation.

Philippians 1. These are just a few references that show us Paul viewed it this way, that our sufferings are for others. Philippians 1.19-24-25 Listen, this is quite amazing. He says in verse 19, For I know... I think this is the right one.

Paul's in prison. He's suffering. He says, I know that this will turn out from my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I will be ashamed, but with all boldness as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body whether by life or by death, for to me to live is Christ and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit for my labor, yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

Nevertheless, to remain in the flesh... He's writing from a prison cell. Remaining means continuing suffering. Remaining in the flesh is more needful for you Philippians.

Being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and your joy of faith. Our suffering, though we don't see it at the moment, is for the future progress and the benefit of other Christians that we are to impact. Paul said the same thing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2.10. He says, Therefore I endure all things for the sake of who? The elect.

That they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. And see, this is not an easy thing because here you are as a pastor and when you're suffering, you can't just lay down. John Popper has a wonderful sermon on Spurgeon preaching through affliction.

And you read the Spurgeon autobiography, the two volumes, and you see this just explode out of there. When you're going through suffering and you're hurting, you can't just stop. You're hurting.

You're in pain. You're under attack. And yet, you have to keep going and preach next Sunday.

You have to muster up the grace to do that. You have to then encourage the weak and the weak-minded and the new Christian who's confused and going through hardship. You still have to minister to them words of life and comfort.

You can't stop being a pastor. So, even when we're under attack and we're discouraged and hurting and weak, the reality of this is our suffering is for others. Now, let me turn the corner on this and come toward the second heading.

I like this thought though. I think this was in another book of Amy Carmichael's. She has a little book called Our Thoughts, He Said.

It's where Christians are expressing things and then the Lord responds. It's not a Jesus calling, so don't get nervous. This was really good.

The son greatly wondered why. One so greatly blessed could ever feel poor and needy and thirsty. The father asked him three questions.

Can he who has never thirsted know the preciousness of water? Can he who has never found rivers on bare heights lead others to those rivers? Can he who has not walked in the deep valley ever help the fainting who are in the valley? Now, 2 Corinthians 1, the God of all comfort comforts us in all our tribulations. Why? That we might be able to comfort others with the comfort that we ourselves have received from God. So, suffering and trials, there's no other way.

And they're meant for others through your life. Someone wrote this, looking back it seems to me all the griefs which had to be left me when the pain was o'er richer than I was before. Haven't you found that true? You wouldn't want to go through it again, but you're thankful you went through it? What you gained? And by every hurt and blow suffered in the long ago, I can face the world today in a bigger, kinder way.

Pleasure doesn't make the man. Life requires a sterner plan. He who never knows of care never learns what he can bear.

I do not know the road or which my feet must run the race, but I do know though rough it be, though steep in many a place, that He has said sufficient is my grace as I onward go. So brothers, in your suffering, keep your hand to the plow. Realize there's no other way.

But this is for others. It's for Christ and it's for the flock. It's for the people of God.

Now, second, the positive side. We heard that. The blessings.

Both are positive sides. The blessings. There's not just trials.

There's blessings, aren't there? Rich blessings. We could stand up one by one and say this is the greatest blessing to me of the ministry, but I just had to jot down two or three that others could address much more. And that is the saints, the people of God, the Christians that the Lord has entrusted with us, they become our joy.

Paul said in Philippians 4, you Philippians, you are my joy and my crown. And a pastor finds the flock to become dear to his heart. They are our sheep.

They are our lambs. And they're in your heart to care for them. When they're hurting, you worry about them.

When they're burdened, when they're going astray, your heart goes to chase them. And your feet and your car ought to go chase them after your heart too. So, the greatest blessing for me over these 40 plus years have been the Christians that I've been privileged to minister to, to know, to love.

This is the great joy of the Kingdom. Seeing change lives. The joy of seeing someone's life changed through your care, through your ministry.

A joy that can't be expressed really, can never be conveyed to others. And we don't even see the reward. And it's good we don't.

The Lord protects us from seeing it. Because we're laying up an incorruptible crown. And so, the blessings to me are the saints.

And not only that within those you preach to, but the blessings of God's people that you come to know in your life as a Christian. Think about it. If you were not a Christian today, and you weren't in the ministry, think of what you would have missed out on.

And think of the Christians that you've come to know and love since you've been a Christian and since you've been in the ministry that are so widespread. The dear relationships that you treasure. That you don't always stay in touch with them, but you treasure those friendships.

You treasure those relationships. You cultivate them. You appreciate them.

You know, I look back on about 1979-1980. We were here in Denton. And I had heard the name, and I need to be quiet on this.

I'll be quiet now. I had heard the name of Conrad Murrell. I'd heard some tapes.

But I'd never met him. But then he came to preach near Denton. And our church, most of us, went every night to hear him.

And our relationship was birthed. I already knew Leonard Ravenhill. And so these men warmed my heart and became mentors and began to bring such influence and shaping when I was so young and immature.

And so the preciousness of those relationships was birthed. And then, we went to Conrad Murrell's camp in Louisiana over a 35-36 year period. And there we met John Green and Charles Leiter and Bob Jennings.

And I could take 15 more minutes, name and name. God gives these precious, dear relationships. And we ought to treasure them.

We ought to enjoy one another. We ought to encourage one another. That's the great blessing in the ministry to me by far.

So, I think that's all I've got to say. We can just transition now.

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