

The Lord is My Shepherd, pt.10

We continue in our exploration of Psalm 23, which you know has turned in a Mini-series on Suffering, which has turned into a Mini-Series within Mini-Series, where are looking at the example of Jesus and how He suffer to be a guide to us on how to suffer for the glory of God!

We entered this study because of Ps. 23:4, where David says, “even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

David makes it clear that there are times when we, as sheep in God’s flock, are in valleys of deep darkness (or valleys of the shadow of death.)

And if we are to give glory to God in our times of suffering, then it is imperative that we immerse, plunge, baptize or marinate ourselves in the theology of suffering.

Because God has not left us in the dark considering this reality of our lives.

Now, by way of review, we when consider suffering, we must always have two, what I have called, “soul anchoring truths” in mind:

These truths are:

- 1. God is sovereign over all suffering!**
- 2. God uses our suffering to accomplish His good purposes in us!**

These two truths are soul anchoring because in being able to rightly understand these them, it makes sense of what God is doing in and through the trials we face.

These truths are the foundation upon which our hope, joy and faith our built!

And it is little wonder then that many struggle greatly during suffering because

they have no foundation!

Now, as we consider the first truth, “**God is sovereign over all suffering!**” we must understand two things:

1. That God is sovereign!

- This means that God has complete, total, absolute, comprehensive, thorough, exhaustive, undivided, full control over all things whatsoever!
- This further means that God everything—whether visible and invisible, whether in heaven, on earth or in hell are under the prerogative, authority, command and directive of God!
 - This further means that God does what He wants, how He wants, where He wants, with whom He wants because He wants!!

So, life, death and everything in between is under His auspices; His supervision or management!

This, beloved includes suffering!

So, what must soak into the marrow of bones is that suffering is not coincidental, random, accidental or a mistake!

Suffering, according to counsel of God’s will, is *ordained* and *appointed*! God plans, purposes, employs, and commissions suffering.

The way we said it last time, is that David found himself in a valley of deep darkness because he was lead there by his shepherd!

And the same is true for you!

You **NEVER** randomly drift into suffering!

If you will, God, as it were, takes you by the hand and graciously walks you into the valley He has planned for you!

And the blessing we observed in (v. 4 of Psalm 23) is that we never enter this valley alone! The Lord is with us!

But, again, what we must remember is that **God is sovereign over all suffering!**

And if you think about this truth rightly, this truth reveals the answer to the question, **“Who is God?”**

He is the God of all power, might and control!

That’s the first soul anchoring truth! **God is sovereign over all suffering!**

The second soul anchoring truth is **God uses our suffering to accomplish His good purposes in us!**

Not only is God sovereign *over* suffering, but He *uses* suffering!

This means that suffering is not needless, uncalled for, pointless, or meaningless.

Hear this: God has determined that your suffering is **necessary, meaningful, and essential and indispensable element to your growth as a Christian!**

Think of it this way: Just as you cannot make cake without flour, God has determined He will not grow you without suffering!

Flour is an essential ingredient to make cake!

Suffering is an essential ingredient to make a mature Christian!

And God has made it plain that He uses suffering to accomplish His purposes in you!

God has revealed those purposes (and just to review)

- Romans 5:3, God uses suffering to produce endurance, character and hope!
- Romans 8:28, God uses suffering to conform us to the image of Christ!

- 1 Peter 1:6–7, God uses suffering to refine our faith!
- James 1:2–4, God uses suffering to produce wholeness.
- And one passage that we did not look at is 2 Corinthians 1:3–7 (turn here with me...)

(As you turn here, please note that God is revealing yet another purpose for which He uses trials, read.)

We are going to look at this a little later but please catch the revelation: the point of this passage tells us that when we endure suffering, it is not solely for us! (2x)

To say it another way: We are not the only ones that benefit from our suffering!

The suffering we endure (and the comfort we receive in it) is meant to give comfort to those who enter into suffering!

And this comfort is solace or consolation—a giving of encouragement in time of need.

So, catch what God is doing in suffering!

Peep His wisdom:

For example, God will take Sister Palmer through a trial (and there are things for her to learn and grow in) and when she has received comfort from the trial, God intends for her to be ready and willing to extend the comfort that God gave to her to another brother or sister!

There has been a time or two when I have entered into suffering and said, “This is for someone else!”

Yes, there are lessons for me, but they are also for others.

So, God through suffering and the comfort that He gives you, is making you a vessel through whom His comfort can flow to others!

So, as you are suffering and receiving comfort from God you need to realize that God is preparing you to be a source of comfort to others!

And in all this, as we considered the fact that *God uses our suffering to accomplish His good purposes in us*, we seeing the answer to the question, “Who is God to me?” And in this case, He is the one who sanctifies you! He is your helper (and according to 2 Corinthians 1, He is your comforter; He is the God of comfort and mercy!

These are the two soul anchoring truths! *God is sovereign over all suffering* and *God uses our suffering to accomplish His good purposes in us!*

Now, as we considered suffering, God revealed to us that Jesus is the standard or example when it comes to how to suffer unto the glory of God!

Jesus is the *model sufferer* or the way we said it last time is that *Jesus is the perfect-sufferer whose suffering teaches us how to suffer. (2x)*

So, the degree to which we look at the example of Jesus as He suffered (and follow His example), will be the degree to which we will suffer well or poorly.

One of the greatest examples of Jesus suffering, excluding the cross, is the suffering He endured in the Garden of Gethsemane. (And it was here that we began to observe the example Jesus left us on how to endure suffering. Turn with me to Matt. 26, read)

Last week, there were three insights we considered as we looked at the suffering of Jesus.

Insight #1: You Must Give an Honest Assessment of Your Emotional State (v. 38)

Insight #2: You Must Recruit Brothers and Sisters to Pray for and with You (v. 38)

Insight #3: You must Direct your Suffering to God (v. 39)

Now, as we review and further examine these insights, I need to give some clarifying statements and thoughts!

The first of which comes under the first insight: You Must Give an Honest Assessment of Your Emotional State (v. 38)

As we considered this insight, I said that Luke records that Jesus' sweat turned into blood because He was under great stress.

That is not accurate: Luke says that "his sweat became *like* great drops of blood falling down to the ground." (not that it was blood.)

The word "like", is a descriptive word that is used to make reference to something or to give a generic description or comparison to.

So, the word "like" does not have the precision that the word "is" does.

All of this to say, Luke says Jesus' sweat was *like* blood, not that it *was* blood.

We want to be biblically and theologically correct, so I must admit that I misspoke on this point.

Although Jesus sweating blood has a less dramatic effect, it does not take away from the fact that Jesus was under deep agony and stress **AND** that Jesus gave an honest assessment of His emotional state!

Now, as we considered this last week, I will remind you that the God who created your emotions is not thrown off when you have them!

So, if you are in agony....and you are in deep stress, say that!

This is not a sign of faithlessness or doubt regardless of what teachers or preachers may tell you!

The God who tells you in 1 Peter 5, to cast your cares on Him, expects that this would include your emotions!

So, in the midst of your trials you must have an accurate assessment of your emotional state.

Insight #2: You Must Recruit Brothers and Sisters to Pray for and with You (v. 38)

In this insight, we consider how Jesus brought His brothers with Him as He entered this time of suffering!

The point I was seeking to communicate here was that we are not to suffer alone, apart from the community of faith!

What I said last week is that **suffering is a community project!**

Now, I must also add a clarifying word here as well, because this point can be misunderstood and misapplied.

I will start with the insight itself: I said that, “You *must* recruit Brothers and Sisters to Pray for and with You...”

Now, technically there is no command for *you* to *proactively recruit* or *seek* brothers or sisters to pray for you!

However, there are many places in the New Testament where we see example of saints praying; being commanded to pray and being commanded to pray for one another. (write these references down for your notes: Eph. 6:18; 1 Thess. 5:17, 25; 2 Thess. 1:11, 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:1; Philemon 1:22; Hebrews 13:18; James 5:14.)

So, although there is no command to *recruit* brothers and sisters, it is commanded that we pray for and with each other!

So, because we want to be biblically and theologically precise, I would reword this insight.

Instead, of this insight being, “**You Must Recruit Brothers and Sisters to Pray for and with You.**” I would reword this insight to be ‘**Do Not Suffer in Isolation.**’

And by isolation, I mean, suffering disconnected, severed, divided or dissociated from the body of Christ!

And just as your physical body suffers in fellowship with other parts of our body, so should we as saints suffer within the fellowship of the body of Christ!

Taking this in principle form Paul says, in 1 Cor. 12: 26, “**26** If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together...”

Now, to be sure that I am being understood at this point and to give some practical things to consider:

1. By suffering in fellowship, I do not mean you have to share every single detail of what you are going through with every single person in the body!
2. Nor am I suggesting that in your seasons of suffering you need people to be in your face all day, everyday—saying, “I am praying for you!”

What I am saying is:

1. Is it important to not isolate yourself to the place where no one knows your burden and you find yourself in a wilderness because you refuse to be vulnerable and let your suffering known.
 - This, of course, requires wisdom and discernment!

You cannot and (sometimes should not) share everything with everybody. You must exercise wise judgment!

Here is the bottom line of what I am seeking to say:

Like a tailor or seamstress, the Lord fashions each trial to suit us uniquely, but that trial is not meant to be experienced in isolation!

Each trial comes directly and expressly from the Lord to you! You are meant to feel all the weight, pain, agony, difficulty, challenge, hurt and whatever comes with your trial AND you are to experience that within the fellowship of your brothers and Sisters!

Does that make sense?

(We will press on to look at the third insight (this is where we left off last week.)

Insight #3: You must Direct your Suffering to God (v. 39)

Notice the Lord in v. 39. He directs His suffering to God! (read v. 39, emphasis on the fact that He prayed.)

I told you this last week, but *suffering is never neutral!*

You never suffer without your muscle of faith either strengthening or weakening!

Either you move forward in faith or move backward into despair!

And what we notice about the Lord Jesus is that He took His sorrow, agony and despair to God, the Father!

We see the Lord exemplifying 1 Peter 5:7, which says, “**7** casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”

Our elder brother Jesus is casting His cares on the Father, fully persuaded that the Father cares for Him!

And I would have you note, that this drawing near to God is the exact opposite of questioning God!

Because here is what you need to know: **you cannot draw near and cross examine God at the time!**

The promise you must cling to into times of suffering is this, James 4:8, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

That word translated as “draw near” means to turn your thoughts or attention to God!

So, in times of suffering, you need to be drawing near, directing your thoughts and attention to God!

And the promise is that if you do so, HE WILL DRAW NEAR, TURN HIS THOUGHTS AND ATTENTION TOWARDS YOU!!!

And this is what you need in your seasons of suffering! You need to draw near to God and be *fully persuaded* that He is drawing to you!

And this is where comfort, rest, peace, hope, joy and security is found!

And could it be that the reason we do not have comfort, rest, peace, hope, joy and security is because we are drawing near (turning our attention to everything and one else except God!)

(We will develop the following thought more when we do our series on anxiety.)

But, the comfort we get from God when we pray (or draw near to Him) has nothing to do with receiving an affirmative answer to our prayers...the comfort is found in the fact that we prayed (or are drawing near)!!

Catch this: So what this means is that our circumstance **NEVER** has to change in order for us have comfort, rest, peace, hope, joy and security.

Here's why: because comfort, rest, peace, hope, joy and security comes from what we receive, then our comfort comes from the gifts that God's give and not that we have God himself!

Prayer is comforting, because in it, we are casting our cares on the one who loves us most!

The one who has all power, might and authority!

The one who has ALL comfort, rest, peace, hope, joy and security!!

And it here is that insight #2 is expanded!

Because even though it is good and right to have brothers and sisters shoulder the burden with you, they are not a replacement for going to God!

Brothers and Sisters can be present (and should be), but they cannot be more present with you than God is! Notice that David in the Psalm does not says, "Even though...I will fear no evil for my brothers and sisters are with me..." No, he says, "For you, [God] our with me!"

Brothers and Sisters can be helpful, but they cannot be more helpful than God is!

According to 2 Corithinians 1, Brother and Sister can comfort you, but they cannot comfort you more than God can!

Pop and I were talking about this last week, when he said, what I think is helpful, "that many too quickly reach for the phone instead of the throne."

This is often the case to the detriment of your spiritual life!

Because what happens is that you become too dependent upon others...you begin to lean more on others more than you do on God!

We can say it this way:

Brothers and Sisters are called to have a place in your life, not to replace God in your life!

You have to, you must, it is imperative that you go to God!

You must direct your suffering to God!

Insight #1: You must Give an Honest Assessment of Your Emotional State (v. 38)

Insight #2: Do Not Suffer in Isolation.” (v. 38)

Insight #3: You must Direct your Suffering to God (v. 39)

I will introduce this next insight, but we will unpack it next week:

Insight #4: You Must Make Your Requests Known to God (v. 39, 42, 44)

We see the Lord plainly ask for what He desires!

The Father knows our hearts and minds, so there is no need in beating around the bush!

Make your request known to Him...

And know that not will He you, but He will answer according to His good and perfect will (WHICH IS ALWAYS THE BEST OPTION FOR YOU...EVEN IF THAT REQUIRES THAT YOU SUFFER!)

Trust Him for His is trustworthy!!

Lets pray!!

Insight #5: You must More Concerned with the Glory of God than Your Grief (v. 39, 42, 44)

enter into the

There are two clarifying statements that need to be made and I will make them when of And what we were giving consdiers God is vewas here that the Lord saw fit to open the door for us to enter into the theology of suffering.

nI think it is important to take a moment and consider how we ought to anticipate suffering in a way that brings God glory.

So, we know that He is going to use suffering to sanctify us, but how do anticipate it without being fearful or living with the kind of mentality that is waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Full disclosure this is something that I am working on, so I am not speaking as master of the subject, but as I follow pilgrim seeking to honor the Lord.

1. Mind stay on the goodness of God.
2. Overwhelming desire to do God's will (no matter what it is.)
3. Constant reminder that if He calls you to it, He will give the grace necessary to endure it.
4. Never stray too far the this teaching of suffering (people who live in Seattle are never far a way from their umbrella. They dont always have it open, but they are never far from it.