

The Lord is My Shepherd, pt.12

This evening we will continue examining the important theological subject of suffering or what David calls, “a valley of the shadow of death” or “valley of deep darkness.”

In v. 4, David, speaking as sheep, says that He will not fear these valleys because the Lord is with Him.

Now, what the Lord has been pleased to do with us is allow us to examine **what we are to believe** and **how we are to live** when the Lord leads us into a deep valley!

Please notice that I said the LORD leads us into these valleys.

You and I need to hear on repeat that suffering and trials is never random or accidental....trials never just “happen”...

Instead, they are sovereignly *appointed, commissioned*, and here are two new words we can add to this is: **Assigned and Administered** !

Trials are sovereignly assigned and administered to you by God!

By assigned, I mean, that God earmarks suffering for you!

He is the one who engineers trials for you to endure!

And there is no shame for God in this!

God never tries to hide this fact...

God never backs away from your suffering with His hands up, so as I to say, “I have nothing to do with this!”

God assigns and administers your trials!

If you get this point, you are well on your way to being able to thrive in the valley.

We must get this because failure to get this leads to a host of confusion that only compounds your suffering!

Because what happens when you misunderstand this is that you will be looking for God and asking where He is at, without realizing He has **administered** the trial!

You will miss God because you will be looking for Him in relief outside the trial instead of seeing Him in the trial!

You will be looking for Him to change the situation while failing to realize that He is the one who brought it!

When you get to a place where you understand His sovereignty you will find yourself asking the Lord to change YOU, and not necessarily the circumstance.

You will begin to look beyond the storm to the God who brought the storm!

You will begin to be more preoccupied with God and His intended results from the trial than the trial itself!

You will be the bear who is more interested in the honey than the bees that sting him!

And when you do this, God becomes bigger than your trial!

The problem is we all too often magnify our trials and minimize our God!

HOWEVER, when we force ourselves to feast on the sovereign administration of God in our trials the more we magnify His goodness and greatness!

And it is here where your peace, hope, joy and comfort is found!

The reason you don't experience peace, hope, joy and comfort is because your view of God is too small!

So, it is very important that you rightly understand that God sovereignly appoints, assigns and administers trials!

He employs, directs and supervises your trial!

He commissions, ordains and orchestrates your trials!

Now, I must give a quick word on what I mean when I use the word trial.

When I mention "**trials**", you must understand that I am not only referring to stage 4 cancer diagnosis or an unexpected death in your family...

I am also referring to trials like relationship struggles between husbands, issues you have at work or struggles you may have with finances.

In other words, I am referring to a *variety* of trials, not just those we may deem *severe*.

In 1 Peter 1:6 and James 1:2 we are told about "various trials"...

1 Peter 1:6

6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by **various trials**...

James 1:2

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet **trials of various kinds**... The word “various” means, “ colored, variegated, checkered, diverse, manifold...” It carries with it the idea of trials coming in **different forms, shapes and sizes**.

Trials that are **multifaceted** and **multi-dimensional**.

This means that trials come with different amounts of weight and pressure.

Now, although the *effects* of trials are the same, not all trials are the same!

All trials are meant to accomplish the same thing

(Remember trials accomplish things like **conformity to Christ** (Rom. 8:28), **refined faith** (1 Peter 1:7), **endurance, character and hope** (Rom. 5:3)...

Again, although all trials are meant to accomplish this in our lives, the trials that God uses are very different!

The reason this is important to observe is because you may be tempted to trials that are not as severe lightly.

And what happens when you treat non-severe trials lightly, you intentionally stunt your maturity and spiritual growth.

Because many of the trials we experience are of the mundane type.

In comparison, many of the trials we face do not rise to the level of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane.

However, that does not mean that the lesser trial is insignificant!

The point is this: **We must understand that trials come in various shades and hues, shapes and forms.**

We must further understand that ALL trials are to be treated with the utmost seriousness...because if you do not glorify God when a grocery cart hits and scratches your car...it is less likely that you will glorify Him when you get the cancer diagnosis!

When we get this, we will seek to apply what we are learning about how to walk through trials.

Transition: Now, as we have sought to learn and gain a deeper understanding of suffering and how to suffer, we have been helped by looking at the suffering of our Lord Jesus.

We are told in 2 Peter 2:21 that Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we might follow in his steps.

So, get this: **One of the purposes for which Christ came was to be an example of how to suffer under the sovereign hand of our Father.**

Jesus models for us how to suffer unto the glory of God!

And here's the thing: ***Since Christ endured the greatest trial in all of human history, the way He suffered and endured that trial is the best and greatest example we have of how to suffer and endure trials!***

So, the example of Christ IS the example; His example IS the standard that we are to follow!

The more we examine and learn from the example of Christ and seek to follow His example, the more we will glorify God in our suffering!

So, what we are doing is entering into the sacred classroom to learn of Him.

To do this we have been looking at the suffering of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane (if you have your copy of God's word, turn with me to Matthew 26:36.)

Contextually, this is the night when Jesus is betrayed.

His time with the disciples is coming to an end.

He instituted what we call communion or the Lord's supper.

And after the meal they go to a Garden...how fitting!

The serpent entered the garden long ago...and now we witness the serpent-like, Judas enter this garden!

And here is Jesus, the second Adam, the man of sorrow, about to enter into His greatest suffering. (Read)

As we have considered this passage we have learned several insights that help us to suffer well when we enter into valleys of deep darkness.

By way of review, we have already considered Four Insights:

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

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

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

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

Insight #1: You must Give an Honest Assessment of Your Emotional State.

This insight helped us to learn that knowing and giving voice to our emotions is critical when we enter into a trial.

Our emotions are the starting place for how we navigate the trial that we are in.

We said last week that our emotions are like the dot on a map that lets us know where we are!

We are only able to calibrate and align our emotions when we know what they are and lift them to God!

I would remind you that suppression of your emotional state is neither **helpful** or **godly**.

In fact, what we discovered last week is that suppressing your emotions is actually pride and disobedience.

We get this from 1 Peter 5:6, which commands us to humble ourselves by casting our cares (which includes our emotions) on God!

So, when we suppress our emotions we are neither being humble nor are we casting them upon God!

So, what we see in Jesus, the man of sorrows, is a full acknowledgement of His emotional state.

So, we must Give an Honest Assessment of Your Emotional State.

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

Insight #2 helped us to consider the fact that God has not called us to suffer in isolation!

Yes, it is true, that God fashions each trial like a garment for us to wear personally, but that garment is meant to be worn publicly, so to speak.

We are called to suffer within the *context* and *confines* of the community of faith!

Isolation cuts against the grain of our humanity.

When you suffer in isolation you are *literally* fighting against the way God designed you!

You were created with a deep seated need for community; to have relationships and correspondence with other people!

It is little wonder then why isolation is a form of torture!

You know this from history...

When tyrants want to inflict psychological, mental or even spiritual torture they separate people from the families and other people!

So, when you decide to isolate yourself you are literally torturing and tormenting your soul to your own peril!

So, you must not isolate yourself.

At this point I must remind you of our picture that illustrated the significance of these two insights.

Remember I told you that trials come in three parts:

1. The Trial

2. Your Feelings
3. How You Handle it

As the trial comes, we have the responsibility to accurately assess our emotion and meaningful lean into the Lord and the community of faith!

Suppression of emotions and isolation only adds weight to the trial!

What we must do is not make the trial more difficult by not dealing with your emotions and deciding to isolate yourself.

The third insight: **You must Direct your Suffering to God (v. 39), helped us to learn that we must suffer “Coram Deo.”**

Which means that we must determine to suffer in the presence of God.

Psalm 16:11

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You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Joy and pleasure is found in the presence of the Lord period! Whether the sun is shining or its a torrential down pour!

The seasons of life changes, not the presence of the Lord and what we get when we are there!

So then, we must be eager to suffer in His presence!

We must be resolved suffer with our face toward Him, not with our backs toward Him.

Think of it this way: Sometimes in the mail you get mail that requests that you send something back to the sender.

When the mail of suffering comes we must return our suffering back to the sender.

We must cast our cares on the one who gave us the circumstance that brought about the cares!

We must direct our suffering to God!

The fourth insight: **You Must Make Your Requests Known to God (v. 39, 42, 44)**, helped pressing us further into directing our suffering to God!

Here we saw our Lord asking specifically for what He desired!

There was no sugar coating, there was no hesitation, there was no beating around the bush!

Beloved, go to the throne of grace and ask God for what you desire!

To ask is not sin.

Another aspect that the Lord revealed to us last week was the fact that Jesus directed His suffering and made His request known to God without being anxious.

Yes, He was in *anguish*, but He was not *anxious*!

Yes, He was *weary*, but He was not *worried*!

To see this in our Lord should give us the freedom to **REALLY and FULLY** cry out to God in our time of need!

There is a way to express deep grief without it being coupled with being anxious!

Now, we will end with this final note and pick up here add more next week!

Jesus does something that is crucial for us to get:

He was persistent in prayer!

By persistent, I mean, Jesus was determined and resolved in His prayer and felt the need to ask repeatedly for what He desired.

The point is easily proven by the fact He prayed the same prayer three times! (vv. 39, 42, 44.)

What Jesus demonstrates is what He taught in Matthew 7, where He says, “7 “Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you...”

Here Jesus is teaching us to **ask** and keep on asking....**seek** and keep on seeking...**knock** and keep on knocking...”

The point is that the type of prayers that are pleasing to God are prayers that are persistent!

You can never wear God out with your constant and consistent asking!

He gives us permission to ask repeatedly for what we desire (we will talk maybe next week on how to handle prayers that God says no to.)

Another example we have of this is Paul in 2 Cor 12, where He writes about the thorn in the flesh the Lord gave Him.

He says, in v. 8, “8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me.”

So, what we see in Jesus and Paul is persistent pray in the midst of their suffering!
And by their example we are encouraged to constantly, continually and
consistently make our specific request made known to God!

Now, of course, persistence in prayer does not manipulate God; it does not force
God's hand (as we see with Jesus and Paul.)

But being persistent in prayer does reveal the heart that is directing its suffering to
God and making its request known to God!

Let's pray!