

In Suffering

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[0:00] Well, we are in a study on encouragement. And last week we talked about encouraging the suffering.!

I want to ask you to share with us the ways that you have found encouragement when you were suffering. Many of you have suffered in various ways, not just physical.

We talked about this last week. There's all kinds of forms that suffering comes in. Physical suffering, spiritual suffering, emotional suffering.

And because you've experienced these things, you have wisdom that we can learn from. And so I want to give you an opportunity.

It doesn't have to be great and momentous. You don't have to share everything about it. I'm just asking you to tell us, in what ways did you find encouragement from your brothers and sisters?

[1:17] Or in what ways did you find encouragement from God that we can learn from? When you were going through or are going through your difficulties.

Maybe it was anxiety. Maybe it was depression. Maybe it was just fear or physical pain or loneliness. Suffering comes in all sorts of shapes and forms.

And so I'm hoping that you'll share with us. How have you been encouraged? What have your brothers and sisters said to you? Or what has God taught you and showed you in your time of suffering?

Mom. With suffering, illness, and formative time, I was feeling very isolated and very alone.

And I'll never ever forget God's goodness to me in a card that was sent. And what was so encouraging is that it was just the very right word.

[2:20] Letting me know that I was not forgotten and that I was loved. And I was more encouraged by that than anything in my whole life.

We're going to pick up on a few of those ideas. But suffering isolates us. And just to come alongside someone and to show them that you're not isolated, you're not alone, can be very encouraging.

How else? Yes, dear. I have notes from people with scripture or without scripture, but just notes that there's what let us know that people were thinking.

I know one time after Sarah was assaulted, a gal I hired and knew, she came up to our door, I answered it, she just hugged me, and she said, I care, I've been there, you'll be okay.

And that just blew me away. But it's, it's, it's, it's unexpected things that God has provided that just pick you up and do.

[3:30] Can I ask, what was it about her coming to the door and hugging you and saying that, that encouraged you? I think that I hardly knew her. You know, we had a, um, an acquaintance.

And the fact that she said, she just hugged me and said, um, I care, I've been there, you'll be okay. And, and in that incident, there, there were three different women who I didn't know who contacted me and, and just reached out.

And one of them was an older woman from our church and had never shared with anybody that she had been assaulted and, um, as a child. And, you know, it was, it was just how God takes a horrible situation and turns it into a blessing because it caused healing with her.

You know, um, it's just those unexpected things where God takes something and, and, you know, it was just a, it's just one human being and, in this case, a Christian, um, reaching out of pain and in tears.

And I think sometimes when, especially somebody I don't know well, shares tears with you. Hmm. That speaks deeply to your heart. Hmm.

[4:55] Amen. Romans 12, 15. I think it, weep with those who weep. I'm not sure if I have that passage right. Anyone else?

Feel free, please. These, these are good. These are helpful. God has put us through these situations. What have you found encouragement in, in your suffering, whatever it might be, small or big?

Yeah, Dan. I was singing to, to minister to me deeply when I was going through anxiety. Once, I was driving in the car and coming up for an anxiety attack and then my wife sang, great is thy faithfulness with me.

And another time, when I was home in bed, David Straub happened to be in town that weekend when me and dad came and sang with me for the first time, I found the pearl of greatest price, my heart was sent to joy.

Just singing along with someone else, those great promises and realities, minister deeply, didn't want to. Thank you. Daniel.

[6:10] After, after my sister passed, Pastor John Neuer, he spent a lot of time and had some Bible studies with me and really showed a great sense of care and concern for my soul. And, as a new believer at that time, I found that it was, it was really encouraging that he was, he was very concerned for me and wanted to see me grow and understand what I was going through.

What did he go over with you? He read, The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. He wrote, being content with his life and God happens to bring me away.

Thank you. Anyone else? Yes, Chuck. I had difficulties as a parent and I had a few brothers that, you know, I'd call up and I'm all anxious and scared and immediately they'd start out in a prayer. And a telephone prayer. I'm going to mention this later, but I'll mention it now. Sometimes just, I don't know how to put this, but letting your brother or your sister borrow your faith for a minute and just taking them to the throne of grace and saying, okay, we're going to go.

Sometimes when you're in suffering, it is so hard just to articulate and it's so hard to even get, just to get to the place where you can pray and when your brother or sister will say, okay, you don't have to have the words, I'll say it for you.

[7:51] it's that solidarity and anything else? Well, if you think of anything later on, please feel free to break in and stop me.

Before we go on to our next subject, I do want to just give a few practical ideas or tips or something for encouraging the suffering from the Bible.

The Bible isn't silent on this and so we're talking about encouraging the suffering and we've mentioned a lot of these things in one way or another, but I kind of want to bring them together now as we close this part of encouragement.

We've talked about this repeatedly, but there is a time to be silent. Romans 12.15 tells us to weep with those who weep. Like I said last time, it doesn't mean we necessarily sit down and cry with them, although in Dare's case, that's what it meant.

But it means that we enter into their sorrow. We expose ourselves. We go into that, to their world. We go with them and experience that with them and we have to be so careful because our culture is so adverse to this.

[9:19] I've heard someone tell, someone told me, I don't do funerals. It was like this blanket statement. I'm just not going there. I'm just not doing that with other people and it's no wonder there's this shallowness to all of, most of our relationships and this loneliness that develops in our culture because if all you want to do is have fun, then you never get below the surface.

And so, you know, there isn't much fun in sitting in a hospital room. But it's a place that we need to be sometimes.

Not only for ourselves. Ecclesiastes says it's better to go there, the house of mourning, than the house of partying because you'll learn wisdom there. It's good for us to be there.

But if we're going to weep with those who weep, we need to be with them in a physical way or just calling on the telephone to let them know that they're not alone.

Sometimes it's just enough to sit there. Put your arm around them. But there is a time to speak.

[10:39] There's a time to be silent. There's a time to speak. And the Bible tells us some very important things about suffering that it's good for us to think about before we encourage them. It's good for us to bring up as we are seeking to encourage the suffering.

And the first is that God himself is no stranger to suffering. God himself is no stranger to suffering. When God saved us, it was through taking on our sin and our punishment in the person of his son. Whenever there's forgiveness in a relationship of any kind, someone has to absorb the pain in the

relationship.

Someone has to be willing to absorb the pain of the sin. And in this case, it was God and his son taking our punishment and our pain so that we could be forgiven.

And so, the depth of God's love, the Bible measures it out by how much it cost him to give us forgiveness. It cost him his own son.

[11 : 55] And the son's love is measured out by how he gives himself for us. And it was unto death. It was unto pain and death. And so, we've already said this, but suffering is such an isolating thing.

Because Satan starts to tell us, you know what, no one's ever suffered like this. No one has ever experienced things like this. And our own flesh wants to believe that.

Our own flesh wants to turn it in on ourselves and we start thinking, you know, no one understands. But the Bible is, the Bible holds out the truth that God is no stranger to suffering.

He, in a way that we will never understand, knows what it is to feel pain. and he shows it by the cross. I heard someone the other day talking about, I was talking with someone, about how more or less she was physically abused as a child.

And I asked her, how did you heal from that? How did you, how did you get to the place where you are now? And she said, well, when she came to faith, she realized that Jesus knew what it was to have his family turn on him like she did.

[13 : 21] And Jesus knew what it was like to be beat for something that he didn't do. And Jesus knew what it was like to be ashamed like she knew.

And as she thought about that, as she thought about God's solidarity with her in Jesus Christ, and that Jesus Christ has a deep, experiential understanding of what it feels like to suffer, she found healing.

It didn't make all those things not happen, but in a real way the gospel healed her from those things. It made, it gave her resources to deal with them.

Now, when we are suffering, we can encourage ourselves with the gospel, with that very truth. that Jesus is no stranger. He's been through everything that we've been through. And that is the same truth that we can bring to those who are suffering.

We can sweetly and gently talk about how Jesus knows what it's like to feel these things. And that God himself knows this pain, and so he or she isn't alone.

[14 : 34] It's also good to remember that suffering has a purpose. And we know this, but it's one of the first things that we just throw out of the wagon when we start going through suffering.

And it's one of those things that, you know, we're not sure what to do with when we're talking about suffering with other Christians. But behind all Christian suffering is this loving heart of the Father. He knows that the glory that is to be revealed is not worth comparing with the suffering. You don't even bother to put it in the scales.

You don't even bother to try to measure it up because it's not worth it. The glory to come is so great. And so he willingly subjects his children to suffering, discipline, in order that they can experience that everlasting forever glory that is to come.

And we, it's good for us to encourage our brothers and sisters. Like I said, suffering has a way of isolating it. It turns our eyes on us, but it also has a way of turning our eyes.

[15 : 44] We get so trapped in our own perspective, in our own time, and we don't ever think it's going to end. And God, the Bible gives us a grander vision, a bigger perspective.

And to help encourage those who are suffering to see that will help. A couple of other things. As you're doing this, remember that we're dealing with a bruised reed, a smoldering wick, and almost too much of anything can snuff out a wick that's almost going out.

almost anything can break the reed that's already bruised. And so, when we go into it, I mean, again, there's no for sure right or wrong answers on these things, but be careful that you just don't dump the encyclopedia of encouragement on them.

But, sweetly, gently, drop by drop, give them truth into their heart. encouragement isn't going to come by the sheer volume of verses that you put onto a person.

It comes as they have time to work through those things, as they have time to think about their pain, and about God's promises, and about God's word, as they have time to digest it. And sometimes we need to be careful that we don't do too much.

[17 : 13] But to be patient, to take time, it takes perseverance. On the other hand, this is intention, sometimes we can be so gentle, so concerned that we're going to do damage, that we don't do

anything.

We don't say anything at all. And so if you've suffered, and we all have in some way or another, you know you don't want to be patronized, you don't want to be babied in a certain sense.

Maybe our flesh wants that, but if we're a believer, we have this new man in us that does want the strong me of the word, that does want a solid promise, that kind of has a way of smacking us back into reality.

Because when we're a Christian and we're bent in on ourselves and we're consumed with ourselves, that's not the natural place for us to be. If we're a Christian, we're meant to have our eyes up and up, out, looking at Jesus.

And so we don't want to be so gentle that we leave the person where they're at, but we want to give them the strong medicine of the truth. So you don't want to be so gentle that you don't actually deal with the person.

[18:37] And then this is the last suggestion. If you can't think of anything to say, sometimes we're just thrust into these situations. And you're not prepared.

This isn't the place that you're at. Sometimes you're having a good day, right? And life seems to be full of joy. And all of a sudden you're stuck in a situation where you have a suffering person and you're not prepared.

You don't have these Bible verses. You don't have promises on the top of your head. So you don't seem to have anything to say. What can you do? Well, just simply saying, can I pray with you?

I don't know what to say right now. I need God's help. You, obviously, you need God's help too. And so let's pray.

And this is where we take our brother or our sister and we can walk with them to the throne of grace and take them by the hand and take them there and say, yes, yes, you're struggling, but come on, let's go get help and praying with them.

[19:53] Well, for the rest of our time this morning, I want to deal with an issue that might be of genuine concern for you. And it's this nagging feeling that I'm just not sufficient for these things.

I just, the reason I don't encourage is because I just don't have what it takes. Maybe the reason you don't say much to others, you don't do a lot of encouraging is, excuse me, you don't feel ready, you don't feel sufficient.

Just the thought of writing a card to someone, it makes you nervous. Just the thought of sitting down with someone and going into a situation like that, it makes you nervous and you just don't feel like you have what it takes.

We've all been there where we're like, you know, if they knew what I was, they wouldn't listen to me. Maybe you've seen the movie, The King's Speech, and I'm not recommending it to you or anything like that, but it's the true story of King George VI.

and he was second in line for the crown, but he didn't want to be king. That was the last thing he wanted to do, because he had this terrible stammer.

[21:16] He stuttered in private, and then if he had to speak in front of people, it became completely unmanageable and he couldn't even get a word out. And so he just totally avoided speaking in public.

And if you can imagine, it's kind of hard to be the king of England and to totally avoid speaking in public. Maybe that's how you feel about encouragement. You say to yourself, I don't know what to say.

Or you say to yourself, well, if they knew who I was, they wouldn't listen to me, because I'm the most wretched man ever. I'll just mess this up. I've got enough problems of my own.

Or I'm afraid that if I say something, I'll actually do more damage than good. I'll end up hurting them. I'll say something insensitive and it'll ruin the whole experience.

Or I'm not a quick thinker, I'm not articulate, and so I'm going to skip it. It's just better to do nothing than to actually say and to do something to encourage them.

[22:16] Well, King George, he needed someone to speak up for him, or to help him to speak up, and we do too. He needed a teacher, we need a teacher, and we have a great teacher in the Apostle Paul, because he actually did it.

He actually spoke the truth in love. It's always good to have a teacher that does what he says to do, and he did it. And the other thing is, Paul wasn't articulate.

He wasn't a fabulous speaker by human standards. You know, he wasn't super confident, he wasn't this dashing figure going throughout the Mediterranean, making waves with his great oratory. Listen to what he says in 1 Corinthians chapter 2. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with the demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but on God's power.

[23 : 39] So was Paul an oratorical genius? Was he great with his words? Well, not unless you think fear and trembling in weakness is oratorical genius.

We think of Paul as a brave man who fearlessly stood up for Jesus Christ, and he was, but he was not a man of bravado and, you know, just nonchalance that everything just came so easy to him. But it was with fear and trembling that he spoke, and weakness. and this is an important lesson for all of us.

Being gifted to speak impressively by human standards is almost completely irrelevant to Christian speaking.

I'll repeat that. Being gifted to speak impressively by human standards is almost completely irrelevant to Christian speaking. it's almost.

[24 : 49] It's not completely. Pastors have to be able to speak, have to be able to teach, so that's going to require some sort of giftedness on speaking. And obviously some people are better speakers than others.

But Paul said, my gospel message was effective, not despite of my weakness, but because of my weakness.

Because when I was weak, that gave room for God's spirit to show his power. But if it's wise and persuasive words, then your faith is going to rest on, well, he's a very articulate, wise, persuasive person.

It's going to rest on what Paul said. But when the words came by the spirit's demonstration of power, their faith would rest on God and not on Paul.

So, I have a question. Are you putting things in the wrong column? We call certain things strong and good and other things weak and bad.

[26 : 00] And God is putting the exact same things in the exact opposite column. Paul is weak.

God says that's good. That is good. He's trembling and with much fear and that's good. There's room now for my power.

All of Paul's life was one of weakness. All of his apostolic life was one of weakness. But out of his weakness, God showed his great power.

Remember, Paul had a thorn in his flesh. And most people think this is an eye problem. That's what I think. In Galatians, Paul said, even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn.

I can testify that if you could have done so, you would have torn out your own eyes and given them to me. And then later on, he says, look what big letters I use with my own hand.

[27 : 06] He couldn't see what he's writing, and so he's writing really big. Paul had a hard time seeing. They didn't have glasses. There was no surgery.

And so when Paul talked to people, he squinted to make it out. And when he stood in front of a crowd, it was a blur. And that is very disorienting.

It's very difficult to speak when you can't see someone. Paul was caught up into the third heaven. And he saw things and he heard things that men are not even allowed to speak.

And there was an opportunity there for Paul's heart to grow proud. And so God struck him in the very place where the temptation was. Paul, you saw great things, you're not going to see anything very well anymore.

So he gave him this thorn in the flesh. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

[28 : 12] So brothers and sisters, what did Paul need? He didn't need to see. He didn't need to be able to speak powerfully and with great flourish.

He didn't need to have all of his fears taken away. He needed grace. And God said, my grace is enough for you. So what did he do?

Well, he didn't stop speaking because he couldn't see very well and he wasn't a very good speaker. He trusted in the goodness and the power and the grace of God and he spoke. And out of that weakness, God showed himself powerful.

God isn't going to make you maybe an eloquent speaker. He is going to make you instantly articulate where you know everything about what should be said. But he says, my grace is enough for you.

It's sufficient. God puts his gospel in clay vessels, not in gold, not in silver, not in sturdy vessels, not in valuable vessels, but in clay vessels that are very fragile.

[29:16] And it doesn't allow anyone to boast. And so when I speak something that's encouraging, I don't go away saying, man, I did a good job there. That was really something.

I really came up with that great idea off the top of my head. No, it's out of weakness, fear, and trembling that Paul spoke and that we speak. So that when we do speak and our brothers and sisters are encouraged, we say, God was good.

God did what I couldn't do in my own power. Now, so let me ask you, what's keeping you back from encouraging your brothers and sisters?

What's keeping you back from speaking? Is it your weakness? Is it your fear? Is it your inabilities in a lot of areas in this area?

Well, maybe it's time to start embracing your weakness, embracing your fear, and start to put things in the right column. put your weakness in the asset column instead of in the liability column.

[30:29] Why? Because when I am weak, then I am strong. See, when we embrace our weakness, then we have God's strength. So, when I know and accept and embrace my weakness and look to Christ for help, then I am strong.

And so, there's no excuse. We've been gifted, we've been graced, we've been promised help, and so it's time to begin. Your brothers and sisters need you to speak the truth in love.

They need you to weep with them. They need you to rejoice with them. We need to have this shared life, this community life. We need to speak to one another in love. And God has given us everything we need to do that.

And so, it is time for us to start speaking up. Now, remember King George and his speech problem. Well, World War II broke out, and he had to speak.

His brother had abdicated the throne, he was now the king, and so he had to speak. He had to speak for the encouragement of his people. In the middle of a deadly war, you can't have a king that is completely silent.

[31:48] I mean, Hitler could fire up Germany with his speeches. And so, England needed her king to speak. And so, he wrote out a speech. He went down to the BBC.

He went into a room, and it was just him and his teacher. And they turned on the radio. And as he spoke, as he read his speech, he looked at his teacher the whole time.

And as he looked at his teacher, he found that he had his voice, and he found his strength, and he spoke powerfully for his people, to his people. Now, we have a teacher who is always with us.

The good teacher never leaves us, never forsakes us, rules on high for us. And as we keep our eyes focused on him, and we rely on his strength, he gives us power.

He gives us the voice that we need. And so you don't need to be a great speaker. You don't need to be a great encourager because you have a great savior.

[33:03] Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me.

That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses and insults and hardship and persecutions and difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So, brothers and sisters, go in the strength of the Lord. Encourage one another because you have a great savior that can help you. Any questions or comments before we're dismissed?

I have about a minute or two. Okay. Oh, oh, Kathy. I was thinking that perspective from the other side that someone needs encouragement might understand that somebody else might have a business trying to encourage me.

I love them back. You know, like Joe's friends, they all try to take that and know that they loved you and wanted to take me.

[34:15] Yeah. There's going to be a lot of room for grace. A lot of room for grace on both sides.
Anything else?

All right, we're dismissed. Thank you.