

Pastor Jeremy M. Thomas
Fredericksburg Bible Church

107 East Austin

Fredericksburg, Texas 78624

830-997-8834 jthomas@fbgbible.org

A1327 – July 7, 2013 – 2 Corinthians 1:8-11
Suffering Teaches Us To Depend On God

Last time we entered into one of the most involved sections of the NT on Christian suffering and the troubling question of why we suffer. In the larger scope of this doctrine we learned there are 11 reasons we suffer; six are direct suffering patterns meaning that the suffering is clearly related to a choice you or someone you are associated with made; five are indirect suffering patterns meaning that the suffering is not clearly associated with a choice you or someone you know might have made. It's important as a Christian to recognize these 11 reasons so you can use them as a tool when you suffer in order to contain the magnitude of the sufferings and cut it down to size because if we don't the pressure of the sufferings gets so intense that we get crushed and stressed out and when we are crushed and stressed it affects us spiritually, emotionally and physically; we can get stomach sores, shingles, depression, etc...all sorts of secondary consequences fall out because we're not coping with our suffering in a Scriptural manner but a sinful manner and that means we're now under divine discipline on top of the suffering so the problems only compound.

So what we need to do is train up front in these 11 reasons we suffer so that when the heat is on we can think through the reasons we might be suffering. "Is this a direct case of suffering?" "Is it indirect?" or "Are there multiple reasons combined that could be involved in my suffering?" Looking on the direct side of suffering - first, the Fall. Everything can ultimately be traced back to the Fall because before the Fall there was no sin and since sin is the cause of all suffering then before sin there was no suffering, no pain, no tears, no death. So on an ultimate level all suffering goes back to the Fall, all physical problems, all spiritual problems, all emotional problems, all psychological problems, all death, human and animal, all of it can be traced back to Adam's sin and our sin in Adam. Second, self-induced misery -

something sinful thing we did that exacerbates the Fall, it just compounds the already miserable situation because we did something and therefore we are reaping the consequences. Third, judgment patterns on families and nations. Every family has sin patterns and as a consequence we suffer, everyone in the family suffers when grandma does this. Same thing goes for the nation. Nations have sin patterns and as a consequence the whole nation suffers. Let's elaborate a bit on this one so we see how to use these as tools. Right now our nation is legislating immorality and the whole nation is suffering because of it, they don't all think they're suffering but serious suffering is coming, economic distress, security problems, etc... What can we do as Christians? What should we do if we really love our neighbor? First, we can pray, pray strategic prayers not ditzy prayers. Prayers that are well-thought through, that understand the issues and understand how the language is being manipulated and worked into the legislation so I can formulate a prayer that has some spiritual depth to it, not "Oh God, it's so bad, help our country." To formulate strategic prayers I need to understand the issues, I need to understand the language being used to formulate the legislation and I need to understand how God thinks about that legislation. Then I can put together a strong prayer. Prayers in Scripture are often very obviously and carefully thought through, specific and strategic. For example, Solomon's prayer in 2 Kgs 8, Daniel's prayer in Dan 9, Ezra's prayer in Ezra 9, Nehemiah's prayer in Neh 9 and Jesus' prayer in John 17. Those are some of the great prayers of Scripture that show you how to construct a prayer that gets God's attention. Second thing you can do is act by getting your voice heard through voting someone into office or writing your representatives or leading a peaceful protest. You have a responsibility as a citizen of this country to get involved in the government of this nation. Human government is a divine institution, it was created and given by God in Gen 9 so it's not a pagan institution, it's a divine institution. Therefore we have a responsibility to fulfill and God has very definite outlines of the purpose of human government which is to curb the sinful appetite of man so that it can provide peace and stability. That way the people that cause chaos are out of the way and law-abiding people can think, be inventive, solve problems, sell products and earn a living unbothered by government intrusion. If criminals are running around all over the place you can't do that, so if the government can execute justice on the real criminals then there can be stability and prospering. If you want to read what God thinks about politics read 1 Sam 8, the most political chapter in the Bible, read Deut 17 as a follow up. So get

involved because it's a Christian duty to have your voice heard in government. By working for righteous legislation what you are doing is loving your neighbor because you're working to curb sin in the society and everybody in the nation pays for sin. So that's just an example of what to do with this third pattern of suffering, judgment on families and nations. You can pray strategically, get a group of believers together, sort it out, strategize and formulate prayers and you can act by working for righteous legislation. That is loving people and giving you an opportunity to share the gospel with people in politics. Hey, Paul did, we know he did because we see certain people in Rom 16 that Paul shared the gospel with in Rome, people up in Caesar's administration. It's not a bad thing to have the gospel going around the White House, it's a good thing. The fourth suffering pattern is eternal judgment in the lake of fire and that's clear enough, a person rejects the gospel and rejects the gospel his whole life and then dies - eternal judgment because he has not believed in the only begotten Son of God. Choices have consequences. Fifth, judgment in time for believers. When we believe the gospel we enter the family of God and become children of God our Father. If we disobey Him He'll discipline us. He loves us so much He won't allow us to go ruin our lives. He pursues us and spans us. Spanking is a function of love. If God didn't love us He wouldn't spank us, He'd just let us ruin our lives. But he won't do that and so some of your suffering may be because you're out of fellowship and running away from Him. Sixth is the judgment seat of Christ. The issue at the judgment seat is not our sin, there is no sin at the judgment seat of Christ, we'll already be in our resurrection bodies, but there will be an analysis of our works and whether they were done in the flesh; wood, hay and straw or done in the Spirit, gold, silver and precious stones. There could be some suffering here due to loss of rewards but it's only a temporary suffering.

Over on the indirect suffering patterns side, these are less clear because they don't seem to be connected to anything you've done or anyone you know has done. Why am I suffering when I haven't done anything wrong? I can't see any reason for this. It's this kind of suffering that can really lead to depression. It just seems totally without purpose. That's when you really need this list and by thinking through this list you can at least come up with some possibilities that could be involved. The seventh one is for unbelievers only and this is an evangelistic wake-up call. God is trying to get to this person, it's not just random, there's a reason this person is sick or they had a

car wreck, it's so they will turn to Him. As a believer you can get involved right here if you have situational awareness and you can be the conduit for the gospel. People, many times when they suffer, either turn toward God or away from Him, they are tumultuous times in people's lives so use them for the gospel. Eighth, this one is for believers only and it's a nudge to advance spiritually, grow up and quit fiddling around, you were bought by Him and you belong to Him so get in the word and start living the word. Ninth one, also for believers only- suffering to evangelize unbelievers. Let's use this one as an example. You as a believer suffer and it has nothing to do with anything you did, you did everything right as far as you can tell and you honored the Lord and yet this suffering comes out of the clear blue. Why? Let's say you lose a baby, very hard thing to deal with, lots of wives face this, the husbands face it too by close association, it's different but both suffer. What are you going to do? How are you going to respond? How you respond right here can make a huge difference in the lives of the unbelievers who are watching you. Do you handle with the attitude of David when he lost his son and said, "He will not come to me but I will go to him?" That's an amazing attitude when you think of it. I miss my son now but I'm not going to miss him forever, I'm going to go be with him in the resurrection. That answer would stun an unbeliever because you don't say that unless you're pretty sure that's where the baby is, otherwise it doesn't really comfort. But if this is your attitude with conviction, that's a powerful witness. So all we're doing here is taking this category of suffering and applying it to a real live situation so that we can see how it has purpose, how it has meaning so we don't get depressed and angry and fall apart. What if God used that to bring someone to Christ? Tenth, and a very difficult one, apparently meaningless suffering. The Scriptures have given us a window into the angelic conflict and sometimes we're suffering for some reason that relates to the resolution of that conflict. Amazing, cosmic scale suffering that I'm convinced we sometimes undergo just because God's proving a point in the angelic realm. Eleventh, edification of fellow believers, that is, you, having gone through some suffering are now qualified to counsel someone else and if you hadn't been through it you wouldn't be much of a counselor.

Which one in 2 Cor 1 did Paul call up as one of the reasons he suffered? Take a look at verse 4 and tell me what you think? Look at the *purpose* clause, "so that..." "So that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." That's

category eleven over here under the indirect suffering patterns, edification of fellow believers. What Paul went through qualified him to minister to the Corinthians. Otherwise he would have lacked certain qualifications so God sent him suffering. But through the sufferings God sent a greater comfort and so verse 6, “if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.” We’ll talk about that “salvation” in a moment but first let’s make application of the simple fact that when you suffer it qualifies you to minister to others.

When you go through something in life you get equipped to help someone else when they face a similar thing. Think about military families. Think about what the wives go through being separated from their husbands for six, eight, ten months and not having a clue where in the world he is because he’s on a secret mission. How does the wife deal with that? Well, there are other wives that have gone through that and they are qualified as counselors. I’m not qualified, I don’t know what that’s like but there are people that are. Of course they need Scripture to inform their counsel. You can never leave that out of the equation because experience is never enough. But people that are going through something want to find other people who have been through it. And that makes sense doesn’t it. You don’t really know what they’re going through but if someone has then they do know and it’s amazing to watch God put people together who’ve been through the same type of thing. And when the person suffering finds out that the other person has been through what they are going through what does that person instantly have? Instant credibility. This person has been through what I’m going through and they can identify with me. Therefore I’m all ears. I believe God works in our lives such that he puts us together, he brings Christians together who have gone through similar things for the very purpose that they can minister to one another. Paul apparently believed that too so he weaved it into verse 4 and 6. Verse 4 we’ve already seen, verse 6 Paul says, “But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation.” Back off for just a second and think about that? Paul thought about it. Paul thought about his suffering and he went through something like our list and concluded that his suffering was for their comfort and salvation. You see how he saw there was a purpose? It wasn’t purposeless. Why did Paul see purpose? Because Paul knew the personal God behind the universe who had a plan. It’s knowing that infinite-personal God and that He has a plan that paves the way for seeing purpose. And once you see there’s purpose now you can leach strength out of that purpose to endure, otherwise you get worn out and defeated. If I were an unbeliever and I were

suffering what purpose is there? There's no purpose. There's no personal God out there who has a plan for history, it's just endless, meaningless suffering. What's the logical end? Suicide. Why stick around and suffer, just kill myself and get out of it. And basically not believing the gospel is soul suicide, that's what it is. What kept Paul from being worn out and defeated by his sufferings? He knew they had meaning and purpose in the plan of God. One of the purposes he detected was that it qualified him to comfort others and work for their **salvation**. You see **salvation** in verse 6? Salvation means "deliverance from a dangerous situation." Since Paul is writing to the Corinthian believers then he's talking about phase two salvation, believers being saved from the power of sin in their lives. Let's all put ourselves in a situation of suffering. We've all suffered so just think back to some time when you were suffering and let's say as you were suffering and some other believer comes along and says, what's wrong and you say, ah, you wouldn't understand, no, really what's wrong, and so you tell them the situation and they say, hey, I know what you're going through, I know what you're feeling inside, I know you're angry, I know you're tired and you say, how do you know? Because I've been through the same thing and you start to share your story and what this is doing is two things according to verse 6. First, it's comforting them because they realize they're not all alone in this, other believers have been through this and they survived and they're doing alright. That's comforting knowing that someone else can identify with you, that really knows exactly what you're going through, what you feel like, what a mess you are inside. The second thing that's happening in verse 6 is "salvation." Salvation from what? From the deadly danger of sin. What are some of the dangers we can fall into when we're suffering? Depression for one. We can get so down, every day is gloomy, there's nothing good, we get fixated on ourselves and our problem and we have a big pity party all day every day. What other dangers can we fall into? We can turn to drugs and alcohol to try and forget about the pain, to try to anesthetize what we're feeling inside. It's very easy to fall into. So when this other person comes along they can help you by delivering you from falling into depression, drugs and alcohol. So you see it's a comfort and a salvation that this person is mediating because they've been through what you're going through. They can pass on to you the comfort that Christ has passed on to you, they can pass on to you the lessons they learned when they went through the same lessons.

And notice the middle of verse 6 Paul says, “which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer.” This ability to identify with one another in suffering and comfort is “effective” Paul says. The Greek word is *energeo*, from which we get energy, it is energetic toward “patient endurance.” What do you need when you undergo suffering and it just seems like it goes on and on and on and you’re wondering if there’s any light at the end of the tunnel, the thing goes on sometimes for just days, weeks or months but in some cases it goes on for years and decades. In that kind of situation what’s the tendency? To get worn completely out and to just give up, quit trusting the Lord. What do you need not to give up, not to quit trusting? You need “patient endurance.” The Greek word is *hupomone* and means “the ability to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.” It’s steadfastness, perseverance and when we’ve gone through something and are able to minister to someone else who is going through a similar thing it helps them to have that steadfastness, that perseverance that is necessary for pleasing the Lord. That’s what verse 6 is all about, don’t give up, don’t give in.

Verse 7, “and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.” Hope means “certainty.” Paul had certainty that they would persevere because it was firmly grounded in his knowledge that his sufferings and comforts were powerful in aiding them in theirs. So Paul had confidence they would get through whatever they were facing without failing to trust the Lord.

Now in verses 8-11 and here we find another reason we may suffer, the importance of prayer in the midst of suffering and the passage that refutes the common saying, “God will never give you more than you can handle.” People say that all the time but the Bible doesn’t support it. Someone told me a few years ago, God will never give you more than you can handle so I looked it up and what the Bible actually teaches is that “God will never give you more than He can handle.”

The context is a suffering situation here in verse 8 that Paul went through, we don’t have access to the details of the situation, all we know is that it occurred **in Asia**, which was the term used for the area in western Turkey known as Asia Minor which is where the seven churches of the Book of Revelation are all located. Seeing as it was in Asia and the central city Paul ministered to in Asia was Ephesus, the 19th century commentators were

fairly unanimous in concluding that it was in Ephesus that this suffering occurred and that it was likely the riot at the theatre led by Demetrius and the silversmiths as recorded in Acts 19. But if Paul had wanted to say “in Ephesus” he could have said “in Ephesus,” but instead he said **Asia** so it seems better that this was some dire situation that occurred in the rural areas around Ephesus in Asia Minor. Some have suggested Paul was anxious over the Corinthian church, others he contracted a deadly illness, others his thorn in the flesh, still others an attempt to lynch Paul or a plot to kill Paul and so on and so forth. There are many suggestions but they are all conjectures. Probably Paul did not mention exactly what it was because the main idea was not what it was but the severity of the affliction. He says, verse 8, **For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life; indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves,** that means, we thought we were going to die, they had no reason to think they would survive, it was a certain death situation, everything pointed to death. The sentence of death was a situation as sure as the death penalty. Can you imagine sitting in the execution chair? That’s what this is. It’s not just a bad situation, you are going to die. In fact, if God had not delivered them they would have died. This is something Paul says was **beyond our strength** and herein lies the very purpose of this degree of suffering. Verse 9, what’s the purpose clause? Why did God send them this great suffering more intense than anything anyone here has probably ever faced? **So that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;** What’s the problem? What’s our entire problem? Paul sums it up in three words? **Trust in ourselves.** That’s our fundamental problem. We think we can solve our problems with our intellect, our problem-solving capacities, we think we can solve our problems with our strength, our ability to use power of force or persuasion, we think we can solve our problem with money, our ability to buy ourselves out of a situation, always another gimmick where we are trusting in ourselves to solve our problem. It’s arrogant autonomy. Here God is looking at Paul and Paul you say is a great believer, yet Paul trusted in himself, Paul had the same sinful tendency of the flesh to try and solve Paul’s problems. So sometimes God gives a believer something he can’t handle, something that is so extreme that no matter what, the believer has got to stop trusting himself and start trusting in God to solve his problem. There are some problems that have no human solution because the solution has to come from outside of the

creation; it has to be a providential, circumstantial, secret work of God upon the creation that solves the problem. That's why Paul mentions the resurrection from the dead. The Corinthian's apparently had problems with that doctrine as we learned in 1 Cor 15, but now having got that straightened out he appeals to it, why? Is the resurrection something that occurs by means of forces at work within the created order? Is there any known process that reverses biological, chemical and physical laws in the universe? Is there any quantitative, statistical analysis of a process that we know anything about that can transform a body from mortality to immortality? From perishable to imperishable? It would be really neat but we don't know of anything like that, we don't have any technology that can do that. The resurrection is an event so overwhelming and powerful that the source of it has to come from outside the created order. And Paul is saying he faced a situation so terrible, so incontrovertibly certain that the only response was to trust in God because He's the only one capable of coming into the creation from outside of it and changing the situation. There was no alternative explanation.

So here we have another one of the reasons for suffering that we looked at when we had the 11. Which one is it? Take a look at these again. Which one? A nudge to advance spiritually. You might classify this as a little more than a nudge, it sounds like God was pushing Paul over the cliff. I take it that God does this with every believer to some degree. We get comfortable, we think we have it all together, we think we have things under control, we think we can solve our problem, we think we are doing everything right and then bam, you are hit with a hammer and you don't know why, you try to reason your way through it but you can't figure it out, maybe it's a nudge to advance spiritually. Maybe God is saying, look, I can take you out of here at any moment, I'm in control of your life, you're frail, you're weak, you're nobody and I give you every breath you take so don't forget it. Stop putting your trust in yourself and put it in me. God did that to Paul and God does that to all of us to some degree.

God did that to Robin and I. After we had Emma at home and everything was fine, the baby was born fine, I delivered her, it was a great home birth, midwife got there 10 minutes late. Mom and baby are doing fine, that wasn't the problem, it was an afterbirth issue and the midwife said let's go to the hospital, everything's calm, everything's fine at this point, the baby stayed home with me, it was just me and my baby girl. An hour and a half passes

and the midwife calls, get to the hospital now, do you have the car seat in the car, you've got to have it in or they'll take your baby when you get here. I don't know what's going on, I put the car seat in, I buckle the baby in and we were off. When we get there the midwife is filling me in, not to get into the medical details but Dr Eden was assisting and he told me later it is without doubt the most fearful moment of his entire medical career. Delaney told me he was just standing there going white as a sheet. She had to plug him back in to finish the emergency procedure. Basically Robin was bleeding massively due to something they didn't know about and they did something they never would have done if they had known about. Delaney told me later she'd lost so much blood it that what was left looked like lemonade. She was going. They had a code red, whatever the code is that everyone stops what they're doing and go into an emergency procedure. This is going on before I even get there and when I do I don't really know what's going on but the midwife is filling me in in the waiting room, the other kids are there, I've got five kids now, one a newborn and my wife is dying and I'm sitting there and my whole Christian life, everything I've learned, everything I've taught has been preparing me for that moment. What am I going to do? I know exactly what to do. I call the kids in and we join hands and I still remember exactly what I prayed, "Lord, she belongs to you and if you want her you have every right to take her and if you do I will worship you, I will give you the praise and the glory because I know you know what is best, but what we want is to keep her. I've got five kids here and they need their mom." That was basically it. The willingness to just trust Him, that He knows what is best. When she was out of the woods and this terrifying, life-threatening situation was past, the consequences lasted a year and a half, but I heard medical personnel after medical personnel tell me story after story after story of what in hindsight was God's providence, providence, providence, everyone and everything was in the right place at the right time and there were something like 30 things I counted that had to happen just like they happened and if one of those things was out of place she was dead. Why does that stuff happen? So that we would not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. There was nothing I could do, there was nothing Robin could do, our hands were tied, we could not trust in ourselves, we couldn't do anything. So He was teaching us this lesson and it doesn't mean we learned it perfectly or that we never trust in ourselves anymore, but He was saying, hey, who do you think you are, you can't do anything, I pull the strings of history so get your eyes on Me! Trust Me!

That's what's going on here, that's something like what Paul went through. Paul was as good as dead and it took an act of God on par with the resurrection to deliver him. Which He did, verse 10, **who delivered us from so great a death, *peril of* not in the original, who delivered us from so great a death, and will deliver** from certain future afflictions. Paul knew that He is the one that delivers, He is the one that saves, He is the one that rescues. If He can raise the dead He can take care of our problems. That's why Paul says, **He is the one on whom we have set our hope.** He is the one on whom we set our certainty, He is reliable. Where else are you going to rest your hope? He created the heavens, the earth, the seas and all that is in them in six literal twenty four hour days. He calmed the waters of the flood and brought stability to the new world. He raised His Son from the tomb on the third day in Jerusalem. He did all this so where else are you going to set your hope? Put your hope in Him and Him alone.

End of verse 10, **And He will yet deliver us, 11 you also joining in helping us through your prayers, so that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favor bestowed on us through the prayers of many.** The doctrine of prayer and in particular intercessory prayer as a means of God's deliverance. The words of verse 11, **joining in helping** are one big long Greek word meaning "with" "under" "to work" and it means to work together underneath a big burden as if we are all working together to lift it. That's the picture of intercessory prayer. Prayer is one of the means God uses to accomplish His deliverances. Don't ever downplay the role of prayer. Some Christians err so hard on the side of sovereignty that they fall into fatalism and conclude that God is going to do whatever God is going to do so there's no use praying. Others err so hard on the side of free will that they conclude that God is not in control of history but man is. The right balance is to understand that God is sovereign and God does have a perfect plan for history but part of the necessary means of His plan being accomplished are genuine acts of human prayer. So genuine are these acts of prayer that if they were not asked then they would not occur.

Paul assumes that the Corinthians will be joining with them in the work of prayer for them **so that**, in the end and here we have an interesting Greek expression, **so that thanks may be given by many faces**, not persons but **faces**, the image is of uplifted faces peering into heaven through prayer giving thanks to God for what? **For the grace bestowed on us through**

the prayers of many. Again, prayers are one of the means God uses to accomplish these gracious deliverances.

We could spend a lot of time here but there are two primary things that 2 Cor 1:3-11 teaches. First, suffering qualifies us for ministry. If we suffer through something that gives us instant credibility with someone else who is facing a similar situation. So don't be discouraged, someone else has been through what you're going through and pray that the Lord would help you find that other person so they can help you, that is one reason we suffer, to be prepared to edify others. Second, suffering teaches us to depend upon God. God can give us a little kick in the rear to realize that we are not in control and we cannot solve our problems and He can get us in a situation where we have got to stop trusting ourselves and put our trust in Him. He is the one who is ready and willing to come from outside the creation and work upon the creation on our behalf if we will trust in Him. Finally, third, much of this work is accomplished through the created channel of prayer which God has so designated as an instrument we should tap into regularly so that having seen His answers to prayer we, with upturned faces, give thanks to Him.

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