

All You Need and So Much More

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Preached on: Sunday, August 30, 2020

Truth Community Church

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org

Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Yesterday was a joyous day for two families in our church. Maizie Sando became Mrs. Jonathan Bryant at an outdoor wedding at the Sando home, and there's a unique aspect of officiating a wedding for a pastor because the intimacy of the moment and you're right there with the couple as they're sharing in that joy is really special. And so I was honored to officiate that wedding and the Bible tells us to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. Part of the joy and the wonder and the sweetness and the privilege of being a part of the body of Christ is to be able to share in such times like that and the joy shared just doubles it in a wonderful way.

But as often happens in life and in ministry, joy sometimes comes mingled with unexpected sorrow as well, and that's certainly been the case for our family here over the past few days. There's no way to avoid, as I thought about it, there is really no way to avoid mentioning this because it affects the coming week and people wonder what you're doing and, you know, why you're not available and all of that, and so I need to explain and let the message flow from the things that I have to share with you here this morning, and you'll forgive me for looking at the table more than at you in what I'm about to say. My full name, my full name is Donald Eugene Green. I was named after my mother's brother Eugene Walden Butters. The Butters name is unknown in this part of the country but historically it is highly honored in the area of New England. There are Butters' homes from centuries ago that are preserved and people visit them. There are historic books written about the Butters' genealogy. It's a historically significant name in New England but my mother and her brother grew up in abject poverty despite their noble genealogy. They were orphaned by the early deaths of their parents. They shuffled through some abusive foster parents before they were raised by my noble great-grandmother Mamie, their grandmother who raised them after she had raised her own family of many many children. Her husband died soon after they came and so they grew up in just miserable poverty, really, in the small town they grew up in in southern Indiana. Gene, my uncle went by the name of Gene, Gene and my mother had many shared experiences along with some other siblings, but with Gene and my mother, they became very close for life and their common bond and their common understanding and their common dignity made them very close to one another.

Gene rose above his roots of poverty. He became a civic leader in two different towns in Kentucky. He was the President of two banks in his Kentucky career and lived a very remarkable life, you could say, and the very happiest of my childhood memories, I mean

the very happiest of my childhood memories revolve around Gene's three kids, my cousins Jeffrey, Catherine and Suzanne. We had many good times together as children in each other's homes playing board games, playing in the creek by their Kentucky home, playing baseball, doing all kinds of different things that cousins do together at that young age, but you know how life goes, a divorce intervened, the four of us grew up, we went our separate ways, we raised our own families and years would go by between hearing from each other and that's just like, that's okay, but through it all Gene and my mother were the constants. Gene was a dignified man, greatly loved, greatly respected, always dressed in such a dapper way. As a particularly humorous thing that I remember, he wore nice shoes, leather soles, very slick bottoms, and Nancy and I took Gene and my mom and some of our kids out into the hills of eastern Kentucky to explore the family cemeteries that Gene had never seen before, and Gene is dressed nicely because that's what Gene did. He dressed nicely and he had on his nice shoes, and one of the graves of a distant distant ancestor, five generations back maybe, Gentleman John Riley, we had to walk through a big field of weeds that we were warned there were snakes in and you had to walk up this hill to get to this thing that you could not begin to see from the road, and I was in appropriate shoes and I had good traction. Gene courageously made it up in his dancing shoes and while he was slip-sliding around, he had no complaint, it was a very sweet memory of those times down in the area of Buckhorn, Kentucky. I took Gene to the dam that was built that flooded the family homestead. I remember very plainly watching him stand on the dam and look down 80 years later at where his homestead would have been. Wonderful sweet memories of those times.

A few weeks ago, Gene had a stroke of some kind. He was hospitalized. The doctors' reports went back and forth in different ways, but he had been released. He was at home and his three kids were lovingly planning to share in his care. We were all optimistic. We thought he was doing well because he was off of the care and he was at home, and the kids had planned out his care for the father that they loved so very much. We thought it was well. Gene, apparently, thought otherwise and in the chaos of his mind in a moment, Gene had a gun and on Thursday, three days ago, Gene reached for that gun and he used it on himself. His death was self-inflicted and one of his daughters found him when she heard the shot. I need to leave soon after the service to go to western Kentucky to be with the family. The funeral will be tomorrow and then on Tuesday, the funeral home will bring Gene's body up to Dupont, Indiana where all of Gene's family, my ancestors, are buried at Dupont Cemetery. I've been asked to do the graveside service by the family on Tuesday so I won't be here Tuesday, Tuesday night.

I debated, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, I debated whether to mention any of this to you and thought, well, maybe I'll just, you just act like nothing's happened and people will find out as they go along, and I nearly didn't because I knew that to say these things from the pulpit is a different dynamic. If you're visiting or listening over the live stream, you're new to our church, our whole church will testify to the fact that I don't speak about family or refer to myself very often at all. This is highly highly unusual. But I thought that perhaps the Lord might have something for us today if I approached it in the way that I'm going to approach it. We'll see if I was right or not and we'll trust the Lord for what happens.

There's a strange thing about ministry. I'm speaking from the pastor's perspective, not your perspective as I speak here in what I'm about to say. There's a very strange thing about ministry in that the people tend not to be transparent as a general rule, there are many exceptions to what I'm about to say, but people tend not to be transparent with you when they are going through trials and difficulties. I think I understand that, the reason for that. Christians like to put up a good front with each other, and there is a particular tendency of Christians to put up a good front with their pastor. They don't want their pastor to think badly about them if they are struggling spiritually in the midst of their times. I had a conversation recently with my dear dear friend Chris Hamilton at Grace Community Church about this very matter a few days ago. It would be, and I understand, it would be a sign of spiritual weakness to do anything else and so the tendency is to say, "Everything is great," no matter what is actually happening, you know, and we become content to live with the facades that we present to one another rather than actually rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. All of that is unnecessary. It is profoundly misguided. I'm just simply saying that that is often the reality. The truth of the matter is, and I'm speaking more broadly than just personal trials here within the body of Christ, but the truth of the matter is that the pastor is often the last person to know what's actually happening within the congregation. Isn't that funny? Isn't that odd? You're perceived as one of the elders and the elders are the leaders of the flock but the reality is that often we're the last to know what's actually happening in the hearts of those that we care for and that we pray for, that we teach, and that we love, and that we seek out. It's unnecessary. It's often the reality. I've come to accept it because you can't force people, you don't press people to be more candid and vulnerable than they are prepared to be, and so you just patiently wait for the Lord to do his work over time. And that's fine, it really is fine. That's not a complaint. I'm describing a reality of the way that things are but the consequence of that, the consequence of that reality is that often people suffer in silence because they don't feel the freedom to be able to share it in a way that they could get help from the men that God has put in their lives to provide the love of Christ to them through pastoral care.

So I'm here today, in part, to go first. I'll go first. I'll say some things here that hopefully the Lord will use. I am preaching this morning in a state of shock and disbelief. I can't believe what has just happened. I'm anticipating a meal this evening with some of the family in western Kentucky, I know that it will be a bittersweet time of memories and shared sorrow. I'm in a state of shock as I speak here this morning and I'm in a place of utter weakness because I know that I have no ability whatsoever to alleviate the pain of those that are closest to me and have been some of the closest people to me speaking broadly over the course of life and over, you know, the past 50 years or so. The weeping of my mother is in my ears as I say these things to you. This aspect of life did not turn out the way that I wanted it to at all, and it did not turn out in the way that anyone in the family expected whatsoever. A dignified man like Gene just does not do this, and yet he did.

So when I say, you know, I'm kind of in, you know, I'm in a little bit of figuring out what's going on, I guess, I know it's that way for many of you in private sorrow. I'm not

here to talk about myself, although it surely seems that way right now. I'm here to minister to you, that's my desire, that's what I want to do here today, to be a strength and a comfort and a help to you. This is all just by way of setting context so that we can be, maybe speak to each other with the walls dropped down just a little bit with each other here this morning.

What would God's word say to you in your time of weakness, your time of sorrow, your present time of difficulty, in your sorrow of having lost loved ones? There are those sitting here who have lost loved ones to the hand of suicide. I know that. It's not the first time that it's happened in my family; my father's mother committed suicide in a different manner many years ago. So there's just this great weight of why and the chaos that leads up to that and, you know, and what do you do with that? What do you do when your home life privately is much different than what the perspective seems to be by those looking out and you're suffering from the sense of betrayal and uncertainty as people change before your eyes and you don't know, you know, you just don't know how to respond to that, or when medical issues overwhelm you and all of these things. Perhaps you have a sense of past regret over ways that you've betrayed fidelity and loyalty to those that were close to you in days gone by. What would God's word say to us in times like that and times like this, and how might we grow together as a body to be a better encouragement to one another, recognizing that all of us are living in the aftermath of the fall of Adam, and that to live in a cursed world is sometimes an existence that just seems to be cursed? What shall we do with these things and what would we say?

Well, let me summarize in one sentence like I like to do, and then we'll unfold it with four principles that I trust will be an encouragement to you as we look to God's word here this morning. Let me simply say this. It may sound trite but it is not. This is the truth of the matter. This is where we all need to go. Jesus Christ is all you need and so much more. Jesus Christ is all you need and so much more. If you're taking notes today, that's the title of the message, "All You Need and So Much More." This will probably be fairly brief but I'm going to take you to four different passages of Scripture to talk about four different principles in a way that I'm just gonna trust the Lord to use.

Point #1 here this morning: there is wisdom even if you lack it now. There is wisdom even if you lack it now. Trials are the context of a very famous Bible verse on wisdom, and I'd invite you to turn to the book of James 1 with me. James 1. Contrary to the prevalent perception, you might say, in the Christian church, the Christian life was never expected to be easy. It was never expected to be a matter of constant triumph. Quite to the contrary, Scripture tells us to expect trials and difficult times to come to us so that James says in chapter 1, verse 2, he says,

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Let's stop there for just a moment. He assumes that we are going to encounter various trials, various temptations, and beloved, it wouldn't be a trial, now would it, if it was easy to go through? It wouldn't be a challenge if it was something that you were able to sustain in your own strength, and so obviously when Scripture speaks about trials coming, it's talking about that which provokes within us a sense of weakness, a sense of sorrow, a sense of difficulty, a sense of weight when they originally and when they first come. This is something that is difficult. It is even overwhelming at times, and so if we just read our Bibles together, we realize that you and I are going to go through times of trial and difficulty that seem to be beyond our strength and the question is where do we go from there, where do we pivot from there, and James gives us this remarkable call to consider it joy, joy because he understands that there are things on the other side of the trial that will produce long-term good in the end, that after we are tested by the trials, there is a confirmation and a strength and an affirmation of our faith that would not have come in any other way.

So he says there in verse 4, look at it again with me, "let endurance have its perfect result," there is an outcome that we're looking for, "so that you would be perfect," or mature, "complete, lacking in nothing." But when the trial first comes, it's heavy, it's weighty, and in the midst of that, the common question, of course, and it's understandable, is the common question that cries out of the broken heart is, "God, why? Why this? Why now? Why the past that led up to this result? God, what happens, what happened to my loved one when they died? How am I supposed to understand this? Where are they now?" And those are questions of great and ultimate consequence and yet here we are in our humanity, and here we are in our limited ability, here we are in our state of confused minds, and we don't have the answers to any of those questions and sometimes we just go for years without answers and, you know, perhaps we live through the rest of life without the answers to what we think is the primary question that we need the answer to.

What do we do when we don't have the answer? Well, there is wisdom even if you lack it now. Look at verse 5. What a precious verse this is. You see, trials expose our lack of wisdom, our lack of understanding. We don't know what to do. We don't know what to think and yet here is James speaking to brothers in Christ and he says in verse 5,

5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him.

Wisdom. In Proverbs it has the idea of practical skill for living, how to live life well. Here in this sense, maybe a slightly little different emphasis, an idea of discernment, of understanding, of insight into the situation. You don't know what to think in it all, you try to figure it out on your own and you can't, and what this blessed verse tells us is that the arms of God receive us in those times when we don't know the way ahead. The arms of God receive us when our hearts are broken when a death at the end of life, end of a long life or premature in an early stage of life when that comes and we're broken, we have this gracious statement in the word of God that says he generously and without reproaching

us receives us when we go and pray to him. He receives us when we don't know the way ahead.

My friend, what this verse is telling us, what it's telling you is this, is that you can go to your heavenly Father in your sadness, you can go to him in your broken heart, you can go to him when there are no answers to your earthly dilemma and when days turn into weeks, and weeks turn into months, and months turn into years, that throughout that whole gruesome process your Father receives you and it says he will not rebuke you, he will comfort you and he will help you, and that it is a very legitimate prayer for us to go to God in the midst of such times and simply say, "God, give me wisdom. I don't know what to do. I need help. I need insight. Give me the blessing of Your Holy Spirit to expand because I don't know what to say or do or think." And we find that there is wisdom even if you lack it now. Your weakness is not the permanent state of things and does not need so to be, the weakness of it all is simply the environment, your weakness simply becomes the occasion to draw near to God so that he would draw near to you.

Look over at James 4 with me remembering that James here is writing about, this is a letter about responding to trials and being patient under the weight of them. James 4:8 says,

8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. [Draw near to him in a sincerity of heart, of course.] Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

Set your heart, put aside the sin that so easily entangles you. Put aside the contrary competing desires of your heart and love for the world and let it reduce you to a single-hearted motivation that says, "God, I need Your wisdom no matter what else. That's all that matters to me now. God, my eyes are fixed on You. Help me and bless me and sustain me in a time like this." And the promise is, going back to James 1:5, God graciously, generously, lovingly, freely, kindly, mercifully does just that. And the truth is that while maybe we think we're praying that way in the midst of our trials, eh, I'm not so sure that it's as clear in our minds of what we're trying to do as it is, not so much, "God, fix the problem. God, give me wisdom, give me help to understand and to see it." And Scripture says he freely gives that kind of wisdom in the midst of the trials. There's wisdom even if you lack it now.

Well, secondly, there is comfort even if you are broken now. There is comfort even if you are broken now. It is sad to live in a fallen world and to think about it this way, the shadows of the fall come upon Christians and non-Christians alike. Non-Christians share in the benefit of God's grace in this fallen world. We, as Christians, are not exempt from the trials that fall on non-Christians in this fallen world. And kind of saying the, you know, kind of building on the introduction that I made earlier, we cannot wish the hardship away. We're not Christian Scientists who believe that evil is only an allusion and that trial and pain are just a figment of our imagination and that's not the way that it really is. Stand by someone at the graveside of their loved one and tell them that it's not real. Tell a grieving parent or a grieving grandparent that their loss is not real and you'll

be straightened out on your theology pretty quickly by the reality of it all. Of course there are trials and there are hardship, of course there is loss in this life and it is real and it hurts when it comes, and the tears are genuine and to be expected and they are fine and okay even for a Christian. This is life in this fallen world. It's not in this life where we have the final promise that every tear will be wiped away. That remains for glory. In this life, the waves sometimes roll over us and it seems as though sometimes we will drown under them.

Look at the book of 2 Thessalonians, if you will, 2 Thessalonians 2. If you flip back to the left going before Hebrews, before the letters to Timothy, you will come to 2 Thessalonians and in 2 Thessalonians 2:16, remembering the point here, the second point here is this: there is comfort even if you are broken now. 2 Thessalonians 2:16 says this,

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

Comfort here having the idea of consolation in a time of trouble. The idea that something comes alongside you to give you help and encouragement in a kind, gentle exhortation that gives you the strength to continue on when it seems like you have staggered and are about to fall, and there's a couple of things that I would say just about this. We just need to think about what these commands mean and what these benedictions mean, what they say to us about the nature of the condition of living the Christian life in a fallen world. We need to think about this. Beloved, what need would there be of comfort if there was not sorrow and sadness and genuine weight to life? If we were always just filled with a sense of emotional joy and a high point of existence and that was the unbroken nature of Christian life and the way that it was intended to be, what would be the point of comfort? Who needs to be comforted when you're joyful? It's those that are grieving and sorrowing and struggling that need comfort and strength for their heart in every good work and word. And what it means as we're thinking through these things is this, is that our comfort comes from a realm that is beyond earthly time and earthly space, and even earthly relationships.

Look at it there again with verse 16. Where is the comfort coming from? Our Lord Jesus Christ. God our Father. Eternal comfort and good hope by grace. All of a sudden we start to understand that the comfort that we need, the comfort that God provides is something that comes outside the realm of our earthly existence. It comes from heaven itself. It comes from our eternal God. It comes from the Christ who loved us, the Christ who died for us, the Christ who rose again for us, the Christ who is preparing a home for us, the Christ who will receive us. That's where the comfort comes from, and remembering all about who Christ is and all that he has done for us and all that he has planned for us, gives us a different perspective that gives us consolation even though the earthly answers elude us.

The question why usually does not have an earthly answer. Why did this happen? I understand asking the question, I've asked it a million times over the decades but it

usually doesn't have an earthly answer. As I've said in the past, we need to ask a different question in times of trial, not why but who? Who? Who is the author of my circumstances? Who is the one who alone can comfort me? And when you ask the who question, the Bible takes you on a beeline to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Bible takes you to the one who has loved you and given himself up for you, the one who is in you, the one who is with you until the end of the age, the one who has promised to come again and receive you to himself.

So we ask the question: who is with me here? Who can help me here? We change the nature of the interrogative from why to who and all of a sudden the doors of heaven are opened to us in our Lord Jesus Christ and there is comfort in him even if you are broken now, and the person of Christ himself becomes the one who helps your heart in time of sorrow. And in the brokenness of life, the disappointments of death and relationships and life reversals and all of that, all of a sudden these things become the doors that open us up to a different sort of realm of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is comfort even if you are broken now.

Well, thirdly, there is hope, there is hope even if it is hidden now. There is hope even if it is hidden now. And as we've said many times, in Bible language, in Bible meaning, in Bible themes, in biblical theology, hope is not a matter of wishful thinking. I hope it turns out differently but it probably won't. No, hope isn't like that. Hope in the Bible is an expression of confidence, an expectation of the ultimate blessing of God. I hope in Christ and because Christ is true, faithful, and merciful, I know that the blessing will one day be mine. There is hope in the confident expectation of God's future blessing even if for now it seems like a bomb has gone off in life and there is no promise of earthly change or restoration to be had.

Look at the book of Romans, if you will, Romans 5. Romans 5. We'll look at the first five verses here, read them more than look at them, I suppose. Romans 5:1,

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

That's speaking about an objective peace. The wrath of God has been removed from us. We stand in a position of acceptance before God. It's not there talking about the subjective inner peace of harmony, but rather an objective peace with God because our war with him is over, Christ has saved us and delivered us into union with himself. Going on in verse 2,

2 through whom [that is, through Christ] also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

Hope. Now I'm not wishing that the glory of God would come to pass but maybe it won't. No, this is a hope of confident certainty that the glory of God will be revealed to those that he has saved. Verse 3,

3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

And what you see here is there is a chain of connected growth and blessing that comes that starts with, it starts in the soil of tribulation, starts in the toil and the soil of brokenness, and the seed of faith falls into the dirt, that good soil of the tribulation that God has brought into your life and it starts to sprout, and it starts to grow, and it starts to bear fruit and there's this developing process of the sanctification of our character and our hearts that produces results over time. Verse 3,

3 ... we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance [brings about], proven character; and proven character [brings about], hope;

The testing of your faith, your Christian faith as you persevere as God keeps you in the faith and does not allow you to fall away, as God keeps you, that perseverance becomes a long-term proof that your faith is genuine, that your salvation is real, that you have genuinely been delivered from this world and you belong to Christ in a way that can never be broken. And when that starts to sink into your mind, you realize that the outcome for you will be to be with Christ in all of his glory,

5 and [that] hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

It's a Trinitarian passage as so many of these things are. God the Father, the Spirit of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, God has poured out within our hearts his love through the Holy Spirit that he gave to us.

So beloved, as a Christian what you must understand and remind yourself of repeatedly is this, is that even when the hurricane waves of sorrow have come upon you and trials have fallen upon you unexpectedly and severely with an unexpected thunderclap out of what you thought was a clear blue sky, when that happens we come back to our hope even though it seems like it has been hidden from us for a time, the thundercloud has obscured the sun, so to speak, and it seems dark, we step back and we realize, no, there's just a cloud there that will pass, the sun is still shining, there is still hope even if it has been obscured by the present trial of the present time.

Paul said there at the start of verse 1 you have been justified by faith. Justified. God has pardoned your sins and he accepts you as righteous in his sight for the sake of his Son. And to remember this, beloved, that that gift of salvation, that gift of justification is received not by what you have done, you can't earn it with your works, you receive it by faith alone. God has been gracious to you and you in your guilt received a gift that you did not deserve and God having graciously given Christ to you, graciously having pardoned all of your sins against his law, against his 10 Commandments, against loving God and loving your neighbor, all of the ways that you've sinned against him, all of that

pardoned, all of that forgiven, all of that removed from you as far as the east is from the west, and in addition to that, granting you a position of the very righteousness of Christ to cloak you and to be that upon which God accepts you, all of that received by faith alone.

Well, beloved, look, if God was that gracious to you in your sin, how much more will he be gracious to you as his son? From sin to the son. If he was gracious to you in your sin, how much more will he comfort and receive you in your hardship? How much more certainly will he be kind to you when it's all said and done? You see, there is hope even if it is hidden now. Even if there are no earthly answers, the hope has not changed and the hope is not premised in your wisdom or your works, it's premised, it's rooted in, it's guaranteed by the good love and the good kindness of God that he has poured out to us in Christ. And in the language of Romans 8:31, if God is for us, who can be against us?

So there is hope even if it's hidden now. There is comfort even if you are broken now. There is wisdom even if you lack it now. Do you start to see the pattern here? What you sense in the moment is not the final word on the intention and the provision of God overall. When it seems so silent and dark and hidden from us, we're only seeing it from the perspective of within our own limited realm. There's a whole different realm known to us, revealed to us in Christ, revealed to us in his word that gives a completely different perspective on the matter. Your earthly poverty of spirit has hardly begun to exhaust the provision of God now, has it? Earthly darkness cannot quench the heavenly light that God has given to us in Christ.

Well, fourthly and finally here: there is peace even if you do not feel it now. There is peace even if you do not feel it now. And what Scripture tells us to do, this wisdom, this comfort, this hope, the way that you and I appropriate that, the way that we take it from outside, so to speak, ourselves and to bring it inside into our conscious spiritual experience, we appropriate these gifts through believing prayer and both words are important there. Believing prayer.

Look at Philippians 4:6-7.

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Do you see how the whole language of vertical dependence, vertical expression of your need to God is at the root of everything that is said here? He uses so many different words for the idea of communication with God. In everything, which would include our trials, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. There's four different words of talking to God that are expressed there, and I think if my own failures are indicative of the failures of others, I think that too often we think we're praying when we're really not. You know, we just give kind of a hurried rushed, "God, help me out here," and then we go right back to the worrying and the agitation of mind and we haven't really stepped back and dwelt on the wisdom, the hope, the comfort, and calculated that in our minds, really meditated on that and said, "Yes, I believe that is true. That's what I know to be right. I know that's what's accurate. My feelings deceive

me. My feelings will trick me. But here's what's true and, Father, I will pray to You in light of what I know to be true. You're the God of all comfort. You're the God of all peace. You've saved me in Christ. You're good to me. I'm relying on You. I'm going to let my whole perspective on this be shaped by what I know to be true about You, not by what my feelings are trying to tell me to do and think."

This is not a one-time prayer of desperation of which Paul speaks. Look at verse 7, he says,

7 ... the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

This isn't a one-time prayer heaved out in 30 seconds in a time of desperation. Beloved, beloved, this is the pattern of prayer that Christians engage in over the course of a lifetime. This is the way that we learn to think. This is the way that we learn to speak to God, "God, give me wisdom. I'm trusting You. God, give me comfort, I'm hurting. God, give me, help me know Your peace. God, I freshen my heart with a renewed sense of Your hope in these times."

Now there might be a sense for some that said, "Well, but that sounds like work. That sounds like effort. What you're saying is you've got to put effort into this." Yeah, you do. You do. Part of being a Christian is that when these trials come, that you make a conscious effort to humble yourself before God and you work through your dependence upon him in the context of this truth, and you hammer it out, so to speak, on your knees before him. It doesn't work like a thermostat that just keeps you at one constant pressure. There's an effort to be made in seeking God in this way. That's why we're commanded to do it. The command isn't addressed to God to comfort us, the command is to us to seek God in everything by prayer and supplication with the ultimate result that he will comfort us and give us that peace. Beloved, what I'm trying to say so inarticulately is this, is that this abiding, deep peace is something that you absorb in believing prayer over the course of time. You don't simply pray it once and then it happens. This is a lifestyle that we engage in over time. Rarely if ever is the peace of Philippians 4 received quickly and permanently without some kind of struggle in the midst of it.

So what are we saying here? Well, what we're saying here is that in these times of great challenge that come to us all either individually, corporately as a church, or nationally, what you and I do as Christians is this, here's what we do, what you and I do, we shape our life by truth. We choose our perspective based on what God has said in his word that is enduring and that is eternal, not by the dominating and very real and pressing feelings of weakness and sorrow. The feelings are real, they are genuine and in a sense that I hope you'll understand, in a sense they're okay, they're okay in the sense that they are the natural byproduct of being hurt in a fallen world. I am not saying don't feel a particular way because, look, a lot of times we just don't have control over the way that we feel in any given moment. What we're talking about here today is something different, the question is how do you respond to those feelings of loss and sorrow and difficulty. What the Christian does rather than succumbing to them, giving in to them, letting that

determine his whole perspective on what life holds going forward, the Christian responds to those feelings of desperation with the truth of the word of God. "God, wisdom, I'm asking for it. God, comfort, You've provided it in Christ. God, hope, You've given it, it is certain to come to me because I belong to Your Son." And so we shape life by truth not by our feelings in any give moment.

And so, my friends, I'd summarize it this way. There is wisdom for you in Christ even if you lack it now. There is comfort for you in Christ even if you are broken now. There is hope for you in Christ even if it seems hidden now. There is peace for you in Christ even if you do not feel it now.

Let me just say this. I've been candid here. Time will tell whether that was out of wisdom or my foolish own thoughts, but whatever, I just want to say this just in a very practical way of protecting everybody as we go through life together as a body of believers in Christ and understanding something as I've talked about transparency and sharing things with one another, you know, let me just be really deeply practical here in ways that would be borne out by the book of Proverbs. My friends, I want to caution you that you should not indiscriminately share your sorrow with just anybody at Truth Community Church and just assume by the fact that we're all gathered in this room that the person to whom you're maybe talking would necessarily be the right person to share that particular burden with. We can assume the best about everybody and at the same time realize that people are at different levels of maturity, different levels of life experience, different levels of the ability to empathize and sympathize with those that are going through your trials. Be wise about who you share things with as you're doing this, bearing each other's burdens takes some maturity and you should choose your opportunities of transparency with wisdom and not simply do it with anyone who happens to be next to you. I can assure you that your elders are here for you in those times. We embrace the opportunity to speak to you in those matters of heaviness of heart. And look, how could you, you know, what can I, if you come to me with a broken heart and say, "I'm overwhelmed by this," what could I possibly say after the things that I said to you today, right? How could I possibly righteously rebuke you for feeling that way when I've said these things publicly like I have? Your elders are here if there are things that burden your heart that you would like to share.

And look, look, straying a little bit from my notes here but that's alright. You know, look, I understand that for some of the burdens, these are things that you've carried for a very long time, things that go back to, you know, to abuse that you suffered back many many decades ago, the way that people have betrayed you, and there's just this ongoing ache. You know, it doesn't have to, you don't have to bear that alone, just be wise in who you share it with. But more important than your elders, more important than each other even is this reality, it's that Christ himself is with you always even to the end of the age. You could go through Scripture and find so many times where God said, "I am with you." He said it to Joshua. He expressed it to Isaiah. He expressed it to the apostles. He said it to Paul.

And my friend, I just want to encourage you with this reality and to help you and strengthen you, I hope, everything I'm saying here is designed to minister to you. You're not a bad Christian simply because you don't understand what's happening. The fact that you feel broken by what has happened does not mean that you're unfaithful to Christ. It means that you live in this cursed world like the rest of us, and your tears maybe in private, do not make you a failure in the sight of God whatsoever. Jesus Christ himself was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, read Isaiah 53. Jesus Christ stood outside the tomb of his friend Lazarus and wept. Jesus Christ himself looked over unsaved Jerusalem and wept over their hardness of heart. Jesus Christ himself was a man of tears, a man of sorrows, and the bold cowboy approach to Christianity that doesn't have any kind of room for transparency in it, any room for that kind of tenderness even in the men, that's not what the picture Scripture gives. Paul himself when he was speaking about those who had turned against Christ, he said in Philippians 3, he said, "I tell you now even weeping that they are enemies of the cross." The fact that I can stand up here and preach week after week, month after month, year after year without tears somehow streaming down my face in compassion and sympathy, that's no recommendation to a, you know, a coldly objective approach to the Christian life whatsoever. You read the pages of Scripture and you see Christ and you see his men being those who knew something about deep sympathy for the people of God.

Look over at Hebrews 4 and with this we'll close. Hebrews 4. And the point here that we're closing with is that when life leaves you feeling without wisdom, without comfort, without hope, without peace, that there is a high priest that you have in Christ who cares for you in that weakness and that changes the whole perspective on it all. Hebrews 4:14,

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens [we have him. He is ours. He belongs to us,] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore

Because we have a high priest who does sympathize with us in our weaknesses, because He is like that, because He has shared in flesh and blood like us, He has wept tears on earth like us, because He is like that and He now represents us in heaven from a position of great sympathy and authority, because Christ is like that. Verse 16,

16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Let's bow together in prayer.

My friend, if you are an unsaved sinner, go to Christ now and ask him for forgiveness and grace on your many sins because he receives sinful men and women just like you. If you're a child of God, go to Christ now for grace in your sorrows and in your difficulties with full confidence that he will receive you well. He is a loving Shepherd. He is a gracious merciful high priest who delights in representing and ministering to the needs of

his people. What a loving, gracious, kind Savior we have in him. And my friends, his wisdom, his comfort, his hope, his peace, they do not exempt you from pain in this life, rather they are his free gifts to you in the midst of your pain as an expression of his great love for your soul. My friend, Jesus Christ is all you need and so so much more.

Our gracious Father, have mercy on sinners today. Open their hearts to believe in Christ that they might be saved eternally. O gracious Christ, comfort Your hurting people today. You are all we need. We confess and trust in Your name. You are all we need and so very much more. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.