

The Christian Man

Overtime:

Suffering: Does He Know? Does He Care? Can He Do Anything About It?

Edited Transcript

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Good morning, men. Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter four verse 12. Notice that the screen says The Christian Man Overtime. We have finished the series, but thought I'd put us in overtime today. Before we begin, let's do a shout out to the DS Group. It's a group of men. They've been meeting for one week on Tuesdays at the leader's home. The leader is Drew Shapiro in Nashville, Tennessee. I'm guessing the DS stands for Drew Shapiro. They're meeting at his home, doing the Bible study. I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm, rousing welcome to the DS Group from us guys right here in this room. One, two, three, hoorah. Welcome, men. We are really honored to have you join us as part of the Bible study.

This message is entitled **Suffering. Does he know? Does he care? Can he do anything about it?** There are so many kinds of pain and suffering, physical, emotional, financial, family, friendships, stress, worry, self-inflicted, emotional, but enough about me. Why today talk about suffering? Well, we haven't talked about it for a while, number one, and then recently I just sort of felt myself overwhelmed by the sufferings of other people. That doesn't mean that there's an ebb and flow of suffering in the world. There's a constant flow, but you get connected to people's sufferings during seasons, some seasons more than others. Then, a lot of you guys are bruised reeds. A lot of you guys are really bruised reeds. I know a lot of you men online are bruised reeds too. In Isaiah 42:3 when Isaiah says, "A bruised reed he will not crush. A smoldering wick he will not snuff out." Is that really true? In the NIV a more literal word for word version, "A battered reed he will not break off." Sometimes the bruising is so much it just seems like there's too much. How about you? Where are you today in your index of suffering as it were?

The problem here is that there really not many places you can talk about what you're going through from a perspective of suffering. When you're out in the world, I mean, if you want to make any progress at all, you need to put on a positive face and leave your sufferings at home or leave them in a closet or something because people don't want to hear about that. Besides that, not only do people want to not be around somebody who is always struggling with a problem, you won't get the sale if you're like that either. You do have to ... It would be good, wouldn't it, to have a safe place where you could go and talk about the things that are really bringing you down from the perspective of suffering and pain.

Well, there are many questions raised by suffering. Does he know? Does he care? Can he do anything about it? These are the three great questions raised by suffering. How do we suffer? Why do we suffer? Then, if it's true that he did know, care, and could do something about it, why do I still have so much pain? These are the six or so questions that I think are really the biggest ones. We'll get around to all these questions. First, I want to give you the Big Idea. I want to go ahead and lay out the Big Idea for the

day, talk a little bit about it, and then we'll get into the principle. The Big Idea for today, it's a pretty long one: **I love suffering in one sense because it brings me into a fellowship with Jesus at a level or a depth that I can find no other way.**

Now, I don't like suffering, but I will confess openly that suffering has allowed me to plumb the bottom half of my soul, that part of my soul which seems to be closed off when things are going really well. I have water. You don't need to bring me water. I'm not sure what got me all choked up. Maybe it's you guys. Everybody's a lifelong sufferer. You know, you look at someone and you say, "Oh, they don't have any problems." Yeah, they do. I mean, I've gotten the look before, "Oh, wow. He must be the luckiest guy in the world." You don't know anything about me. I was watching a movie the other day, *The Accountant*. Actually, I own the movie. I was watching it for the third or fourth time. I love that movie. The director's sitting down with the woman that works for him. She's telling him about all of her difficult time growing up. He's empathizing like he can appreciate what she's going through.

She looks at him. She says, "With all due respect, director, what do you know?" I'll leave out the adjective word. What do you know about suffering? Well, it turns out he knows quite a bit about suffering, and we all know a lot about suffering. My first life verse, Philippians I guess it was 3:10, I can't remember now for sure, anyway, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his," what? In his sufferings. I'm a high school dropout with migraine headaches. I mean, that's my start to life. You can imagine all of the problems that a child would be going through that would bring that child to the point where they would quit high school in the middle of their senior year, and then my dad made me join the army, which, of course, I mentioned here before. That was a great thing. These migraine headaches, they were just following me all around.

I remember actually one day sitting down and reading a book that somebody had written about migraine headaches. I think it was some kooky book with some kooky solution to the migraine problem. After you have tried all the traditional things for any disease, then you start looking at the kooky things too. I was looking at some kind of a kooky solution for migraines. I remember it was like an epinephrine moment. You know what an epinephrine moments are, right? Those are those moments where adrenaline is released because the moment is so sensory and so real and so special that the epinephrine burns that memory onto your mind. You can remember things from 20 years ago that maybe something you don't even remember from two weeks ago that might be similar, but there was just something about that. Well, I was sitting in our family room reading this book with a headache and I remember I just started weeping. I just sat there and I wept. I just wept like a baby because finally somebody actually understood what I was going through. I was reading the description that this author was giving of migraine headaches. I just sat there and wept like a baby because I thought, "Somebody does know what I'm going through." Somebody does know what you're going through too.

WHY SHOULD WE NOT BE SURPRISED?

The first thing I want us to look at this morning is 1 Peter chapter four verse 12. "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happening to you." First, let's talk about the question. Why should we not be surprised? The text says, "Don't be surprised at the painful trial that you are suffering." Well, there's some reasons for that. Acts 14:12 says, "It is through many hardships that we must enter the kingdom of heaven." John 16:33, Jesus says, "In this world, you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world." He does say though in this world, you will have trouble. It's not that you should go looking for suffering. It's not that you should avoid doing everything you can to stay away from suffering. It's not that you shouldn't do everything in

your power to recover from suffering, take all the medicine that you can get, but neither can you outrun or avoid it either.

You know, why is there suffering? Well, I've given you, on your tables, a sheet of paper. At the top, it says Suffering in the Bible. We will not be going through this whole thing because it's taken me decades to put this single sheet of paper together. Now, it wouldn't take you decades to put this sheet together, but I bet it would take you two weeks nonstop to put this together. I'm putting my pearls before you. I hope that you're worth it. This is not a comprehensive list of everything that's in the Bible about suffering, but I do believe that this is a representative list of everything that's in the Bible and covers it pretty well. I would just encourage you to take a look.

In terms of why is there suffering, you know, Romans eight, down under the purposes in the middle, it says purposes and benefits for suffering mentioned in the Bible. You know, one reason, number one there, for God's inscrutable reasons. You look at the suffering of Job. You can read Job. You can hold it up to the light. You can read it upside down. You can read it backwards. You can read it in Greek, the Septuagint, or you can read it in Hebrew. There's no way you're going to figure out what God had in mind there other than to put on display the fact that Job he thought was a man of integrity. Then, number two, David said, "Before I was afflicted, I went astray. Now I obey your word. It was good." David said, "It was good for me to be afflicted, that I might learn your decrees." Some of you have experienced that one.

Number three, so that all the work of God may display. You know, there's a man born blind and they asked Jesus, "Who sinned that this man was born blind? Did he sin or was it his parents?" What did Jesus say? He said, "Nobody sinned here. This man was born blind that the glory of God might be revealed in him." Down to number six, down to number seven I think. Seven, the whole creation, you and me, has been subjected to futility not by its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, who was God. Why? In hope that the whole creation, you and me, that we might be liberated from our bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of light. That's getting close to inscrutable, but God himself has allowed futility, frustration, meaninglessness, suffering, pain because it is one of the means by which he liberates us from our bondage to decay and brings us to salvation.

I've said this before and this might be a better, easier way of saying it. Suffering compels us to seek the God that success makes us think we don't need. Sometimes suffering helps us work out our salvation because the pride of success keeps us from wanting it. Then, maybe one more. Down to number 12, when we suffer, sin loses power. This is my life verse now. Philippians 3:10 used to be. This is my life verse now. I mention it here regularly, "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude." In other words, because Jesus suffered, arm yourselves with the same attitude towards suffering that he had. "Father, not my will but your will be done." But also, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Please take away this cup of suffering." This is so hard. God, this disease that has been stalking me for a year, it is so hard. God, it takes me four hours before I feel normal. Well, I never feel normal, but it takes me four hours to get to a point where I can even function. God, if you're willing. Father, take away this cup, but not as I will, as you will.

"Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourself with that same attitude." Why? Because when the body suffers, sin loses power. Did you want to hear that? I don't know. Yeah, I'm not sure either, but without respect to the rationality of it, when the body suffers, sin loses power. You know this is true because you've experienced it. "Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude," because when the body suffer sin loses power. As a result, you will not spend the

rest of your earthly life chasing around after those evil human desires. Why is there suffering? Well, there are a lot and plenty more reasons. They're all good. The Big Idea today: **I love suffering in one sense because it brings me into fellowship with Jesus at a depth that I've just never been able to get there any other way.** I mean, I actually operate best when things are going well. I don't abandon God when things are going well. I draw closer to God when things are going ...

This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice in be glad in it. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything, give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. When things are going well, I don't turn that into an idol. I praise God. I worship God. That's the way I'm wired, but I have to say that said, I still have had more of the experience of the fellowship of Jesus in the sufferings than in my successes. That's the way it is. Any of you who are suffering right now ... Suffering makes you bitter or better. You've heard me say this, right? For some of you, suffering makes you lose hope and you get bitter. For some of you though, it drives you right into the bottom half of your soul. You find this fellowship of his shared sufferings. Let's read on in our text.

WHY SHOULD WE REJOICE?

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you're suffering as though something strange were happening to you, but rejoice." Wow. "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ." First, why not be surprised? We talked about that. Well, why should we rejoice? That's what it says. Romans chapter five verses three to five, "Therefore, we rejoice in our sufferings because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character, hope, and hope does not disappoint because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit." All of these downstream things that are happening in our lives that are good things come from sufferings. Jesus tells us rejoice. In this case, Peter's telling us on Jesus's behalf. Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings.

CS Lewis, my favorite book of all time. This is my single favorite book, The Problem of Pain. I don't know if I've told you all this before, but I was in Texas in some little town in Texas like Tyler or Waco. I'm not even sure where. I'd been speaking. I don't travel well. I travel and I get ill and I get headaches. I get ill. Well, I really got ill, but I'm a professional so I go on. You have no idea how many times I've spoken to you feeling like crap. Well, I didn't say looking like crap. I said feeling like crap. You have no idea how many times I've ... But I'm a professional. I was a professional and I did my thing there. I don't know if it was a prayer breakfast or whatever it was. Then, the guy that hosted me, he drove me over to the airport. I got on one of those little prop planes to make my connection out at Dallas or wherever or Houston or wherever.

I had this book and I had just gotten this book, The Problem of Pain. I started on page one and I had this headache. I had a migraine headache and I'd taken enough pills that if I took one more pill, I was going to be in the hospital from overdosing. I started reading this book, The Problem of Pain. This is a theology, a theological understanding of pain. I tell you, at 157 pages it looks like, and I read it all the way home. For the next five or six hours, this is all I did was read this book. I read this book cover to cover on the way home in pain, The Problem of Pain in pain. It's the best book for me. It's my number one favorite book. Lewis starts the book in the introduction, he says, "Not many years ago when I was an atheist, if anyone had asked me, 'Why do you not believe in God?' my reply would have run something like this: Look at the universe." Then he goes on, "Completely dark, unimaginably cold, improbable that any planet except earth can sustain life. Earth existed without life for millions of years," blah, blah, blah, "will exist for millions of years after we're all gone," blah, blah, blah.

"It's arranged so that all the forms of life can only live by preying on each other. The history is largely a record of crime, war, disease, and terror with just sufficient happiness interposed to give them, while it lasts, an agonized apprehension of losing it, and, when it is lost, the poignant misery of remembering." Then he goes on. Then he says this. "There was one question I never dreamed of raising. I never noticed that the very strength and facility of the pessimist's case at once poses us a problem. If the universe is so bad or even half so bad, how on earth did human beings ever come to attribute it to the activity of a wise and good creator?" That was one of the major points that started Lewis on the softening that brought him to his own faith in God. Why should we rejoice? For it has been granted to you the privilege of not only trusting in Christ Jesus as Lord but also suffering for him. We do attribute the sufferings that we have to a good and wise creator.

My comfort, it took everything within me not to make this the Big Idea. This is my Big Idea, but it probably isn't yours. This is my Big Idea because it's my single biggest idea of my whole life. My comfort is in the sovereignty of God. That is the single most important thought I've ever had, is that I find my comfort in the sovereignty of God. If God be not sovereign, I'm sleeping in tomorrow. If the things that are happening around us are all random and can be explained by chance, I give up because it's just not worth fighting the fight, but that's not what the scriptures teach us. We'll get there. The Big Idea: **I love suffering in one sense because it brings me into fellowship with Jesus at a depth that I can find in no other way, just no other way.**

WHY SHOULD WE TRUST HIM?

Final piece here, why should we trust him? Let's keep reading in our passage for today. Don't be surprised, rejoice. Verse 14, "If you're insulted because of the name of Christ, you're blessed for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it shouldn't be for the wrong reasons," verse 16, "However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name." Verse 19, "So then those who suffer according to God's will," this is the sovereignty of God piece. God is sovereignly orchestrating all human events, even the seemingly random circumstances of your life to bring people, to bring you into right relationship with him and right relationship with others.

I talked about how God is the one who introduced futility in order to bring us to salvation, which perfectly synthesizes the problem of God is sovereign and man has freewill. There is no problem understanding sovereignty and freewill. It's very simple. God uses futility as his chief tool to sovereignly draw you to himself of your own freewill. In other words, God makes our life. He arranges creation. He allows it to be a fallen place. There are such futilities and so much pain and suffering in the world that those futilities, many of them seem meaningless, without purpose, without point, and they're overwhelming to us. Of our own freewill, we despair and we turn to God. He is sovereignly orchestrating all human events to bring us into right relationship with each other and with him.

Why should we trust him? "Then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful creator and continue to do good." Watch this. Chapter five verse six, "Humble yourselves therefore under God's mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." Does he know what's going on? It's his will. Does he care? "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. Be self-controlled and alert. For your enemy, the devil, prowls around like a lion looking for a group to devour." No, he's looking for someone to devour. He's looking for one person at a time. He's looking for one person who's not part of a somebody. If you're a someone today, one of the important takeaways here is be part of a somebody, be part of a group.

"Resist him. Stand firm in the faith because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." Everyone is suffering. The guy on your left, the guy on your right, the guy behind you, the guy in front of you, everyone is suffering. Some people are more resilient than others. Yes. Some people hide it better than others. Yes, but everyone suffers. Watch this. Why should we trust him? "And the God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory in Christ after you have suffered a little while," his definition of a little while, not yours, "will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast." Oh my goodness. Yes, he knows what you're going through.

"Two sparrows are bought and sold for a penny, yet not one of them falls to the ground apart from the Father's care. You are worth more than many sparrows." He knows every word that you speak before it forms on the tip of your tongue. He knows your thoughts from afar. He knows when you sit. He knows when you stand. He cares for you. "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to pass. My times are in your hands. A bruised reed he will not crush. A smoldering wick he will not snuff out. Rather, he himself will restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast in a little while." I can't help but wonder if that's where U2 got that title for that song from. And he will do something about it. He says, "I know the plans that I have for you, plans to prosper you and give you hope."

I remember on many, many occasions when Ken Moore, the man that I met with for lunch once a week for 32 years until he passed away, many times, many were the times we would get together and we would talk about the sufferings that we were going through, one or the other or both of us. Often, we would say or I would say, "You know, honestly, if there was a better way, I would take it, but there is no better way to face life than in the fellowship of the shared sufferings of Jesus Christ." How do you respond? Well, I would encourage you to exercise the Job reflex. That would have been another cool circle up here, the Job reflex. Do you remember what the Job reflex was? His children were killed in a tragic accident. His businesses were nationalized by terrorists. His health failed. He said, "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." That's the Job reflex.

How do we respond to this? Well, we should trust him. Then, would you all talk to each other, please, and get real? Would you turn this, make sure, I already is. I know. Just make sure that this is a safe place to talk about suffering because I can assure you that for most of the guys at your table, they don't have any other place except maybe with their spouse, hopefully. They don't have any other place. Would you help them take off their grave clothes? Jesus will resurrect them, but he then gives us the privilege of taking off the grave clothes. Then, third thing, Job reflex, would you be a safe place for these other men to talk? Then, third thing, would you pray for each other? Would you just pray for each other?

I love suffering, I do, in one sense. It brings me into a fellowship with Jesus that I just can't find any other way. How about you? Let's pray. Heavenly Father, our dearest Father, we come humbly today to you. Lord, since the fall, there has been a great cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil that results in human suffering. We find ourselves right in the middle of it, but we do believe, Lord, that you know, that you care, that you can do something about it, and that, after a little while, you yourself will come and restore us and make us strong, firm, and steadfast. In this, we find our hope. We pray this, Lord Jesus, in your precious and wonderful name. Amen.