

Reconstructing Manhood

Finding Hope in the Midst of Suffering

Rough Transcript

Bett Clemmer

Brett Clemmer:

It's great to see you guys this morning. Good morning.

And we are in our series on **Reconstructing Manhood**, and I am so excited this morning to talk to you about suffering. Yeah. And this is great. So yeah. So today we're going to talk *about Finding Hope in the Midst of Suffering*. That's our topic for today. Finding Hope in the Midst of Suffering. So why don't you grab your Bibles turn to Romans 5 and let's pray as we climb into this topic this morning.

Oh, Lord, we come before you grateful for all the things that you're doing in our lives, Lord. But we also come before you with lives in a fallen world, in a broken world that often causes us to suffer, often causes us hardship and heartache. And Lord I pray that you would use your word this morning to speak into our hearts to help us find hope in our relationship with you, to find hope in your power, in your grace, in your mercy, in your love, Lord, that we would leave here feeling restored and renewed if that's what we need. We would leave here feeling solidified in our faith, Lord. We would leave here with a deeper trust than we had when we came in. And we lift this up to you in Jesus name. Amen.

SUFFERING HAPPENS

All right. So, finding hope in the midst of suffering. And why don't we start just by saying this, suffering happens. You've seen the bumper sticker that says suffering happens? Says a little bit different than that but stuff happens. And there's suffering all around us. And how do you think guys do at suffering? Do you think guys are basically good at suffering or bad at suffering? Anybody good at suffering? I didn't say you liked. Who's good at suffering, right? No. Hands up. Somebody's watching this online. Trust me their hand is not up right now. Like we don't like to suffer. Suffering is no fun.

And if you think about what do men do when they suffer? A lot of times, we get angry. If we suffer for long enough and we stay angry for long enough that anger can turn to bitterness, can turn to cynicism. Sometimes it turns to passivity. We just give up and we surrender to whatever is causing us to suffer. We just think, "Well, this is never going to get better. I'm never going to get through this." The ultimate surrender is when somebody gets so overwhelmed by their suffering that they might even take their own life. This is the ramifications of suffering. But I think what a lot, I think the common thing that men do, what do you think the most common thing is that men do in their suffering? Anyone?

Retreat. Isolate. They withdraw and they may be angry or they may be passive but we withdraw and we isolate when we suffer. And how do we overcome that? I think men don't do well sometimes at suffering, but I think also society has this view of suffering that we fall into. First of all, society doesn't like to talk about suffering especially Western culture. All we talk about is triumph, victory. That's all we want to talk about. The movie always ends and the hero usually gets the girl and goes off into the sunset after going through some big trial in the story. The story wouldn't be good if there wasn't some big trial in it.

When you're suffering and you're around worldly people, they will start looking at you like something is wrong with you. They may withdraw from you because nobody wants to be around a loser. If you're a

hurting and that's coming out of your system, let's say you're going through some kind of suffering. Maybe your marriage is falling apart. Maybe you've had a death in the family so you're grieving. Maybe you've lost your job. You put everything in non-fungible tokens and didn't know what you were doing and so now you have nothing left. Whatever that is, the society does not like to deal with us when we are going through this kind of pain. And so society pulls away from us.

They may give you a message like you're really screwed up or people that go through suffering they reject it because they want to be comfortable all the time. Comfort is a great idol in our culture. And society only wants suffering if it's for a little time with a big victory at the end. And that would be great if it happened like that. But I don't know about you, but I know lots of people that are going through suffering or have gone through suffering for a long extended period of time and they don't see a light at the end of the tunnel. And what I've noticed is, people tend to handle that in one of two ways. Either they give in to the futility or they are just caught up in hope. They just refuse to lose hope.

And I think that's the decision that we have to make as men, if we're going through suffering, are we going to just throw up our hands and say, "Meaningless, meaningless, everything is meaningless. Why am I even trying?" You're suffering through a difficult marriage and you just get over it and you just give up. You're like, "Forget this. This is too hard. Life's too short." That's the phrase. Life's too short. And so you just give up and you walk away.

And then I see other people that go through suffering and they never give up. They could have 18 different kinds of cancer sitting there in hospice you think they're like minutes away from passing and they're there talking, asking you questions about your life. You're like, "What are you doing? Why are you asking me this? You're sitting here on your death..." Why? Because they haven't lost hope. They haven't lost hope. So how do you suffer like that? So, suffering happens.

Now, I want to say this before I go any farther. I don't want this to be trite. I'm going to say this phrase one time in total derision. Let go and let God. That's ridiculous. All right. I know it's in the Bible. It's in hesitations. I know you get there. So that's not the way to approach suffering. The way to approach... Because what is that? That's really just another form of passivity. So if we're going to find hope, we have to do it a different way. So let's talk about why do we suffer then? So a lot of times we suffer because of our own actions. We suffer because we did something wrong or we did something accidentally, and so it puts us in a situation where we suffer for. Sometimes it's sin, sometimes it's just a bad decision. Sometimes it's a bad break.

We live in a fallen world, bad things happen. There is COVID, there is cancer, there are car accidents. And so you're trying to say, "Well, what could I have done differently?" And maybe you couldn't do anything differently. And so how do you work through that when you have something in your life that's gone wrong? And I think maybe the hardest thing, the hardest kind of suffering to go through maybe when somebody else did something and you're negatively affected by that. You had no control over it, you had no participation in it, but you're the one that got hit by the car. Or you're the one that got fired by a unjust boss. Or you are the one who has a spouse who has an affair and you don't know what your part of that was and you have to figure that out and you have to decide, are you going to have hope? Are you going to give into the futility?

I think of, if you want to talk about suffering in a really good way, read Russian novelists. So Fyodor Dostoevsky was a Russian novelist and he was sentenced to death in Stalinist, Russia because he was reading books that you weren't supposed to read and discussing them in groups and Stalin didn't like that. The regime didn't like that and so he was sentenced to death. And at the last minute he was given a reprieve and they sent him to a gulag in Siberia instead. Woohoo. Right? And so he was in that gulag for a period of time and then he came out of the gulag. Now, if he was a man who had lost hope, he wouldn't have written Crime and Punishment. He wouldn't have written The Idiot. He wouldn't have written these amazing works of literature.

And what got him through, he said, what had got him through, he was a Russian Orthodox. He believed in... He was in the Russian Orthodox church. Believed strongly in Christ and said, in fact, he said once, "Even if someone were to prove to me the truth lays outside of Christ, I should choose to remain with Christ." Even if someone should prove to me that the truth lay outside of Christ I would still remain with Christ because it was in Christ that he found hope and meaning and purpose and helped him survive his suffering. So here's our Big Idea. I've been sort of alluding to it, but here's our Big Idea for that. Suffering has two outcomes, futility or hope. **Suffering has two outcomes, futility or hope. The determining factor is what you believe.** Or another way of saying that is, what you have faith in. Or another way of saying that is, in what you worship. The determining factor is going to be where you place your faith. What do you worship? What do you believe?

SUFFERING'S PURPOSE

So let's look at what the Bible says about the purposes, some of suffering's purposes. So if you have Romans 5 open, I'm going to read verses 1-5. I think I have 3-5. Yeah. I have 3-5 up here. I'm going to read 1-5. "Therefore, Paul says, since we've been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord, Jesus Christ. Through Him we have also obtained access by faith into his grace in which we stand and we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings knowing that," and here's a phrase that some of you have probably heard before. "Suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces what? Hope. Suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame. Because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

What an amazing... I mean, this is packed. This is Romans so it's going to be packed. But look at the sequence that Paul gives here. We're justified by faith through Jesus Christ. And because we have obtained access by faith into the grace in which we stand, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, and what does suffering ultimately produce? Hope.

So ultimately, if you want to have endurance and character and hope, the Bible says you're going to go through suffering to get there. And I don't know, how many of you have suffered? Come on. You've all suffered. Some of you have suffered a little, some of you have suffered a lot. But if you've gotten through to the other side of suffering, you see that you've developed endurance. You see that you've developed character. When I talk to guys about maybe coming to work for Man in the Mirror, or just trying to interact with guys out there that are doing ministry, maybe other ministries, you know the guy that I don't trust? I don't trust the guy that hasn't been broken. I just don't trust him. Because at some point along the line it feels like they're going to give up or there's going to be some character issue in their life. Because there's really no way to refine your character, in my experience, there's really no way to refine your character without going through some kind of test, without going through some kind of refinement.

And so this is why I think suffering has this purpose. It has this purpose of creating endurance and character and hope in our lives and ultimately Paul says that hope is in salvation through Christ. So if you're not a believer in Jesus, you've got to figure out where you're going to find that hope from. And I don't know where you find that hope from. I've had conversations with believers who are suffering and they're like, "What's it all about? What's the purpose of this?" And all they get from their friends are platitudes. And frankly I hate to say this, but they get platitudes from a lot of Christians too. And we want to pull scripture out of context and tell them that they can do all things through Christ who strengthens them. Which is true. It's true. But it's trite if you don't tell them, "Oh no, but the suffering is going to be character in producing and it's going to require endurance. And how do you develop endurance? You have to endure things.

How do you develop character? You have to be tempted to do things that are in poor character. And suffering gives you those opportunities. All right, flip over a few pages. Let's go to 1 Peter. So keep going

to your right you'll hit Hebrews and then a little tiny book of James and then you'll hit 1 Peter. So 1 Peter, the book of 1 Peter is basically all like one of the major themes of all Bible. One of the major themes of 1 Peter is the theme of suffering. And so I think there's some other purposes of suffering that we can find in 1 Peter.

So 1 Peter 1:7 says this, I'll start in verse six. "In this you rejoice though now for a little while of necessary, you have been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it's tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

So Paul, I mean, Peter is saying here that our suffering refines us. Even gold when you put it in a fire, what does gold do? It melts? And he's saying that your faith is stronger than that. It's more valuable than that when it stands up to the test of fire. This is that endurance and that character that Paul is talking about. Go to 4:13. He says, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." So another thing that suffering does is, it connects us with Christ. How many of you are in the military? So at the end of bootcamp, you're pretty close to those guys. Right? You know why. Right?

Because you suffered. You suffered together. I played football in high school. We did this wonderful thing called two-a-days. They sucked. All right? They were terrible. We got on the field at eight o'clock in the morning and we practiced until 11:30. And then we had to be back on the field at 1:30 and we practiced until 4:30 if we didn't tick the coaches off. 5:00 if we did. An extra half hour running at the end. I remember, my first year in high school I went to a high school that started in 10th grade. My first year in high school, I go out for the football team and I lived like a mile from the school. So my mom's like, "We live a mile away. You can walk home for lunch. I'm not going to come get you." I'm like, "All right, no problem. I mean, I'm a football player."

So I remember Monday, I went through practice and I went in and I took a quick shower and I put my clothes on and I felt fine. And then I got like 10 minutes after practice, 20 minutes after practice. And by about 30 minutes after practice my knees stopped bending, because everything just tightened up. And I remember walking home like this, a mile. And I remember, I got to be back at 1:30. And I left the gym at noon, took me 45 minutes to get home. You know what I did? Turned around, had to go back as it took me 45 minutes to get back. But when I got back and I told the guys on my team about that they're like, "Oh man, me too." My mom picked me up the next day. But we had that shared experience. When we have this shared experience go over to five just the next chapter. Look at verse nine he says, "Resist him firm in your faith knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world."

So our suffering unites us with Christ. Why does it unite us with Christ? Because Christ suffered the ultimate. I mean, Christ just didn't suffer through a basic training or a football practice or whatever, Christ gave everything. So we just get, when we suffer, we just get a little taste of what Christ was willing to do for us. And it reminds us of the love that Jesus had for us that He was willing to do that for us. It reminds us of the love that the father has for us that He was willing to sacrifice His son for us. And we're united. We have that in common. Just like Jesus came and walked on the earth and was cold when it was cold out and hot when it was hot out and sad when his friends died and joyful when his friends were joyful, all that stuff that shared experience unites us together. But we're also united with believers around the world, especially when we suffer for our faith.

But that shared experience, one of the purposes of suffering is to give us that shared experience with Christ and with our brothers and sisters around the world and it unites us together. And then go back to go back to... No, hang on. So here's the deal. If you're going to get to hope, you have to determine what you're going to believe in. And you have to believe, one of the things you have to believe is that your suffering has a purpose. So if you're suffering right now, if you're going through an illness, if you're going

through a marriage problem, if you're going through a problem with your children, if you're going through a job situation, or an economic situation, or a health situation, go, look for the purpose in it. Look for the impact that you can have as people watch you suffer.

And the way that you can, I mean, maybe you'll be, I don't think you'll be Dostoevsky, but I don't know. Maybe there's a Crime and Punishment in here. Maybe there's somebody watching that's going to write the next The Brothers Karamazov. But if you can find the purpose in your suffering, that will help you get to the place of hope rather than futility. Because what is futility? It's the absence of purpose. It's the absence of meaning.

SUFFERING WELL

So the next thing is, how do we suffer well? So let's stay in 1 Peter, go back to chapter 4:19, here's how Peter says to suffer. He says, "Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good." Entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good.

Now, Peter was talking to people that some of them could conceivably lose their lives for their faith. And we in this country we don't have that, but we have brothers and sisters around the world that they can conceivably lose their lives for their faith. How do you maintain hope in the midst of that? Well, you entrust your soul with faithful creator. This is a light and momentary affliction. This is a short term gig on earth. If you believe that you have eternity to spend with God, it makes the suffering that you're going through now much better. When I was doing two-a-days, I knew it was just two weeks. When you were doing basic, you had the end date. And knowing that there's an end date for your suffering and guys I'm going to tell you, for every single one of us, there's an end date to our suffering. And you might think, "Well, I mean, I'm dying. That's a heck of an end date." Well, yeah, but to not be on earth anymore is to be alive with Christ in heaven for eternity.

And so that's the hope that we can have. Go back over to chapter five again, and look at verse 10. We read verse nine but look at verse 10. "After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." And Paul is so moved by this statement. The next sentence is a doxology. "To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." So restore confirms strengthen and establish. And a lot of times when these guys would write, like the first word was the summary and then the next things in the list describe that.

So the way you're restored then you're restored by being confirmed and strengthened and established. And if you're going through suffering, a lot of times one of the primary feelings you have is loss. But Peter says that God restores you. And He does that by confirming you in your faith, strengthening you in your walk and establishing you as what? As His son. As a co-heir to eternal life. So how do we do this then? What are the actual things that we have to do? Just to be real practical here for a second. And I would give you three things.

One, don't walk alone. Don't walk alone. If you want to sometime open up the Bible app and just put the phrase one another in. And you see all these verses all throughout the New Testament that talk about encourage one another, bear one another's burdens, lift one another up, exalt one another. These exhortations, these callings in the Bible are for us to lean into relationship with each other. If you're going through suffering, don't withdraw. Lean in, find a brother, get your brothers to go through it with you. If you're here this morning, hopefully the guys that are sitting around you are guys that you can lean into when you go through suffering. And I know that's a common story in here. Pat and I have heard many stories of guys sitting at a table and they've gone through suffering together as their brothers had cancer or a marriage issue or a job issue and the guys will collect around them. So don't walk alone.

Secondly, seek help. If you need to go see a counselor, if you need to go see a pastor, do that. The shame that you feel in sharing your burden with a professional, with a pastor or a counselor is a lie from

the devil telling you things about yourself that aren't true. That only weak men go get help. That there's some stigma attached to it. It's not true. If you need to go talk to a counselor, if you need to go talk to a pastor, please go do that. And why? Because they know more than you do probably about what you're going through. Pastors and counselors, they've seen the stuff that you're going through, they've seen countless guys go through it. They've seen guys do it well and they've seen guys do it poorly and they can walk with you through that and help you keep your hope. Keep your eyes focused on your hope in Christ.

And then the final thing I would say is, is that you need to love, trust and call on God. Why would I say that? Well, turn over to Psalm 91. This whole chapter is a wonderful chapter on trust in God. But we'll just look at verse 14 to 16. So actually I think I have it up here. This is the Lord speaking at the end of the chapter. He says, "Because holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him. I will protect him because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him. I will be with him in trouble. I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Man, if you got a pen, underline that thing. I mean, so this is why I say love and trust and call on God because He says, "Because he holds fast to me, because he trusts me, I'll deliver him. I'll protect him because he knows me. I'll answer him when he calls me. I'll be with him in trouble and rescue him and honor him and give him a long life." And when He says long life, He doesn't just mean long life here. He means long life because then He talks about salvation.

I want to end with a article that I read, a little paragraph from an article that I read. Because I think this sums up a little bit, the whole of this for the Christian life. So this writer says, "Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." That's Isaiah 53. "He lived out his days on this earth, misunderstood, maltreated, under housed, unappreciated, scorned, mocked, and eventually murdered. By anyone's standard, Jesus' life was miserable. Nonetheless, His daily sufferings had a point. They had a goal. They were for us in two ways. First He lived like this as part of His work for our salvation. Second, He lived this way to show us what to expect in union with Him. This is why one of His core teachings was cross bearing.

Luke 9:23 says, "And He said to all, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." Here is Jesus template for the Christian life. Before we are resurrected to life in glory, we suffer here below. To get our arms around this difficult prospect, we must not read our own definition of suffering into the New Testament's use of this word. As one scholar explains, the word means something broader in the New Testament. Suffering means not only martyrdom for one's faith, but also the mundane frustrations and unspectacular difficulties of our everyday lives when they are endured for Jesus' sake."

I love that description because all of us can relate to it. Could we sum up our daily lives better than a series of mundane frustrations and unspectacular difficulties? After all God seems absent so much of the time. Prayer seems fruitless, loved ones die, children go astray, spouses lose interest in one another, dreams fade like furniture left in the sunlight over the years, nothing is perfect. Everything is broken. But that brokenness points us back to the one that restores us, that establishes us, that renews us. Let's pray.

Father, we can know the words, we can know the verses, but we need it written on our heart. Lord, we need the power of your Spirit to help us to choose hope over futility. As we go through big sufferings and little ones, Lord, tragedies and mundane frustrations, Lord help us to see our lives as we go through difficulty to be lived for your sake because we believe in you, we put our faith in you, Lord, and we worship you. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.