

SERMON GUIDE

Hopeful Sufferers: Purpose in the Pain

Psalm 139:13-16



4.14.2024

SERMON NOTES:

After my son (Kaleb) had his good kidney removed in a surgical mistake, everything changed for us. We lived in the hospital for months, had many surgeries, and did dialysis in hopes of getting a kidney transplant. It was during this time of severe stress that I had my first panic attack. I didn't know what was happening to me. I thought I was having a heart attack. Our lives were thrown into chaos with the news of his surgery gone wrong. The immediate fear that permeated our thoughts at all times was, "We're going to lose our son."

The anxiety and panic attacks would be an unwanted companion of mine for the next 7 years. They were brutal. They happened at night when I tried to sleep. They happened at restaurants, movie theatres, or hanging out with friends. I felt wound up like a swing set that keeps getting tighter and harder to twist, but I couldn't unwind. But eventually, by the grace and help of God, I found victory and deliverance over them.

How? **I came to a realization from the Scriptures that our lives were not spinning chaotically out of control but were a part of the plans and purposes of God, including ours and Kaleb's suffering.**

Last week we began this series called "Hopeful Sufferers." We are examining from the Scriptures how we can live with hope despite what trials, tribulations, or hardships we endure. Our first message was on the reality that no one is exempt from suffering. Afflictions mark the life of everyone at some point. We showed from Scripture how this is explained, but we also talked about why most people, even Christians, act shocked when it comes. Living with a me-centric view of the world sets us up to believe God exists to prevent our discomfort. And not knowing the Scriptures leads us to adopt our own ideas, hoping God will adopt them, or even more accurately: expecting God to adopt them. So we established that everyone, even Christians, is going to face challenges in life. **The question we are seeking to answer today is this: Why?**

Why do we experience pain and suffering? Why are afflictions a mainstay of life in this world...even for Christians?

Scripture Exegesis: Psalm 139:13-16

***13 For you formed my inward parts;
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.***

***14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
Wonderful are your works;***

my soul knows it very well.

***15 My frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.***

***16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.***

This passage was one of the first passages the Lord pointed me to that started the process of finding hope and peace amidst our fears and pain.

David, the psalmist, speaks of God's intricate work in creating him (and all of us). We are not formed in the womb by simple mechanical processes. God is in the work. God is within every part of nature and the works of natural law and processes. The Scriptures show God's continual involvement in the natural world, as the one who holds together and sustains all things in every moment. Though we do not see Him with an ultrasound machine in the womb, we know God is present and essential. He is in the weather, photosynthesis, and the knitting of a child in the womb.

David praises God for His works in creation, particularly, in making him. But in verse 16, David says something that blew me away. I never caught it, heard it, or had it taught to me prior to this time in my life. David says God saw his (David's) unformed substance. This means before his body was even developed in the womb. What does he say then? He says God wrote his days in His book (your book), every one of them, the days God had planned for David (and all that would happen in them) before one of those days even came to be.

The Bible often refers to God's eternal decrees with the image of a book. They are recorded. They are planned. The record is laid down. This is a major contrast to things simply unfolding unplanned and God is observing and learning about them as they do. No, the testimony of Scripture is that God's decrees, his book, contains the life of David and all his days before one of them comes to pass.

Friends, this passage, if you will let your heart and mind go there, if you'll let your soul absorb its truth, will give you great joy and comfort. When I read this passage, my eyes were opened to wondrous realities I never knew before. David is not saying that he alone was formed in his mother's womb and his days were written in God's book, he's proclaiming the testimony that all have. We are fearfully and wonderfully made people. Our lives are not accidents. We are not brought into the world by unguided mechanistic processes. God forms our lives. Why? Because He already purposed and planned our lives before one day came to pass. You existed in the mind of God long before you were an embryo in your mother's womb. Your life and days were written in the book.

Now here's the implications of this...this means even your suffering and tribulations are in the plans. They are a part of the plans of God. There are two reasons why we experience trials and pains in this

life that exist together simultaneously: **A. sin and brokenness** and **B. the purposes and plans of God**. It's not one or the other. It's both. We live in a fallen world broken by sin. But that doesn't mean we are left to chance or the whims of Satan. Our God reigns. And He has purposes in our suffering. They are part of accomplishing His purposes.

You see there are only 3 options for how you can understand suffering and trials:

1. God plans it.
2. God permits it.
3. Outside of His control.

That's it. These are your only three options. Now here's the deal: Option 3 cannot at all be supported by the Bible. People who believe Option 3 do so with no biblical support. Some genuine, well-intentioned people think holding to Option 3 somehow spares God from looking bad or being to blame. But here's something helpful to remember about that: God doesn't need us to be His defense attorney. He does not need defending...and certainly not by us.

This only leaves you with Option 1 (He plans it) or Option 2 (He permits it). We either believe that suffering and trials are planned by God from the foundation of the world as part of His greater plan or we believe God allows (permits) them in our lives for whatever reason or purpose He has. Here's what you need to notice, a lot of people love to say Option 2 because it feels cleaner than saying God planned them...but pay attention: in both options, it is God's will that brings them about. Whether He planned it or permitted it, His will brings it forth. Option 1 and 2 require God to choose to let these things be a part of our lives rather than prevent us from them. Do you see that?

For a biblical Christian, for a Christian committed to following what God reveals about Himself to us in His Word, Option 3 is NOT an option. That only leaves Options 1 and 2, which both show God's will as the ultimate deciding factor as to what trials or struggles we have. Remember what David said...God wrote our days in His book before one even came to be.

Let's show a few biblical examples:

- **The story of Joseph** (betrayed by brothers, lied about by Potiphar's wife, put in prison for 2+ years...right hand of Pharaoh and preserver of His family)
- **Moses' rescue** (all the babies are being killed, Moses is pushed down the river in a little ark, he cries and is rescued by Pharaoh's daughter, protected to become the rescuer of Israel out of slavery)
- **The story of Exodus/Israel's numbers** (70 total to 600,000 men, not including women and children)
- **The story of Job** (Satan given permission, but given unpassable boundaries...to show God is worth loving for Himself, not for what He gives us)

- **Early believers scatter from Jerusalem with the gospel** (they were called to be witnesses in Acts 1, but it took persecution before they went to Samaria and the ends of the earth)
- **Jesus tells Paul he must suffer much for His name** (Paul is a persecutor of the church, but Jesus saves him and tells him in advance he will suffer)
- **Jesus tells the church in Smyrna that persecution awaits them** (They will face tribulation for 8 days and many will be thrown in prison...Jesus tells them but doesn't stop it or prevent it)

These examples show specifically how trials and tribulations were purposeful instruments in the hands of God to carry out His will. But they also point to how all trials serve the same end. Every faithful Christian has to submit to the fact that God either plans or permits our trials and struggles. This naturally leads to the question: for what reason and purpose? Because we know God has all power, and all wisdom, that He loves us, that He is faithful. R.C. Sproul said, "At times we wonder about the duration of pain and affliction and ask, 'How long, O God, must we endure these things?' We wonder why God allows evil to go on unchecked. Yet the duration of all things is in His hands, and their time span is controlled by His providence according to His wisdom and according to His holy purpose."

So what role do our pains serve? I'll give you two purposes, but both are happening in our suffering, not just one or the other.

1. To bring about His plans and purposes for His glory.

In the story of Joseph or the Exodus above, we saw how the suffering of Joseph not only led to his eventual prominent position in Egypt, but it led to his whole family and eventually an entire nation awaiting the call of Moses 400+ years later. He fulfilled His promise to Abraham to build him into a great nation. Suffering was the context and vehicle.

I can say with confidence that we have heard thousands of testimonies, if not tens of thousands of testimonies about how Kaleb's life has brought people to faith, strengthened their faith, or got them through major trials in their lives. I can say that Kaleb's life was used, and is still being used, to shape me. And so if I've had any role in anyone else knowing the Lord or growing closer to Him, that is directly tied to God's greater glory in our circumstances.

This is why I love the John Piper quote, "**God is always doing 10,000 things in your life, and you may be aware of three of them.**" The point I want to emphasize from this quote is just because we don't immediately see how our struggles are a part of God's plan doesn't mean they aren't. We go back to what we know based on what God has revealed in Scripture.

And if you question the role of suffering and afflictions in God's greater plan in history and redemption, look no further than at the cross. Jesus was betrayed, mocked, humiliated, beaten, underwent extreme pain, and died in agony. Not because of his sin. But as a part of the eternal plan of God to redeem a bride of sinners and make them white as snow. To take spiritual orphans and make them children of God.

There is no senseless suffering. The minor chords are doing something in the song of your life. The master Songwriter of our lives writes the music exactly as it needs to be.

2. To teach us to depend on Him.

Being face-to-face with things you don't control reminds you of your great need for God's help, strength, and comfort.

Jesus reminded people during the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6) not to be anxious about their lives because their Father in heaven would provide for them, just as He does the birds and lilies of the field. The remedy for anxiousness is to remember who their Father is. Jesus tells them not to worry about tomorrow because tomorrow has its own troubles. Focus on today. Lean on God for today's needs. Go to Him each day for daily bread, just as the Israelites did in the wilderness. He's not going to give you a month's worth of provision. He'll give you strength and help for this hour, for this moment. Trials teach us to go to Him for this help.

When Paul prayed three times for Jesus to remove something so awful from him that he called it a tormentor from Satan, a thorn in his flesh, Jesus didn't give him what he asked for. Paul suffered a lot. He was such a faithful man and used mightily by God. But when he prays specifically for this particular trial to be removed, Jesus says something to Him, that He also says to us: **My grace is sufficient for you (2 Corinthians 12:9)**. Jesus tells Paul that He is enough. His presence, His help, and His grace will be sufficient, whether that is endurance to make it through the trial or even if the Lord walks with him through the valley of the shadow of death. Notice, it isn't a lack of faith that prevents him from being healed. Rather it is the will of the Lord to leave him in it and let him experience the power of His sustaining grace.

This is why Paul could say in **Philippians 4:13**, *"I can do all things through him who strengthens me."* He wasn't talking about shooting a killer jump shot or scoring touchdowns...he meant whether he was well fed or hungry, comfortable or cold, healthy or sick, free or imprisoned. The grace of Christ was enough. And He's enough for us too.

My son received a kidney transplant at 2 years old, the Lord carried us through such an unbelievably hard season in our lives. His grace was sufficient. For the next 11 years, we would continue to walk through trials but would do so with lots of opportunities for joy, to make memories, take trips, laugh, and watch our son trust Christ just as we did. He loved the Lord, was baptized at a young age, and lived with a mature understanding of how his suffering was a part of God's plan. Kaleb lived a Philippians 4:13 life. He lived a 2 Corinthians 12:9 life. But in October of 2017, everything changed again in our lives. We were thrown back into the fire. Kaleb got very sick and had a stroke that changed everything for him and us.

In those dark days, back in the middle of all the questions, uncertainties, and fact that we weren't in control...we went back to the reminder that Kaleb's days were written in the book. There was nothing we could do to add a single day, and there was nothing anyone else could do to take one away. He

belonged to God. This didn't mean we didn't desire him healthy, it just anchored us when he wasn't. One of the things that sustains us in our pain and suffering and gives us hope is to remember that our suffering and afflictions are a part of God's greater plan. We were forced back to the place anew of leaning on the grace of Christ to sustain us. And He did. And He has. And He will.

Afflictions will come. Everyone will endure hardship. If He doesn't remove us from it, He must have purposes in it. Remembering this fuels us with hope no matter what we endure.

LOOK BACK

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you GROW in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you GO to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?

BUILD UP

- **REVIEW:**
 - Read **Psalm 139:13-16** and then have someone else in the group read it again, preferably from a different version.
 - What big takeaways did you have from the teaching?
 - Additional Scripture:
 - Jeremiah 1:5
 - Genesis 1:31
 - Jeremiah 29:11
 - Ephesians 2:10
 - 2 Corinthians 12:9
 - Philippians 4:13
- **REFLECT:**
 - What is significant about verse 13?
 - How does this lead to praise in verse 14?
 - What does it mean that *"In your book were written, everyone of them, the days were formed for me"*?
 - What role does our pain serve?
- **RESPOND:**
 - How does this verse give us comfort in times of suffering?
 - Which of the 3 options do you lean to in times of suffering (God plans it | God permits it | Outside of God's control)?
- **MEDITATE:**

- Psalm 139:14 -- *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

- **MEMORIZE:**

- Philippians 4:13 -- *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

SEND OUT

- **GROW:** How will you abide in Christ this week and grow in your love and understanding of Him?

- **GO:** Who in your sphere of influence needs to hear this story or the gospel?

- **PRAYER:**

- Pray over any request from your group members.
- Administrative Pastor - **Tim Lance**
- Ministry - **For the City**
- **Pray for our long-term units on the field:**
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Starks
- **Pray for our mid-term sent ones on the field:**
 - Kaesi
 - Ethan & Dustin (May 16 - June 30)
- **Pray for our short-term teams:**
 - Asian Pacific Rim Team departing on April 27
 - Southeast Asia Team #2 departing on June 15
 - London Team departing June 30
 - Central Asia Team #2 departing on September 27
- **Pray for the lost - Unreached People Group (UPG):** Tseku in China



- **Population in country:** 14,000
- **Global population:** 20,700
- **Christian Adherent:** 0.10%

- **Evangelical:** 0.10%
- **Primary Religion:** Buddhism
- **Primary Language:** Tseku
- **Summary:** The Tseku people live in the high, remote Himalayan Mountains. They live in freezing, blizzard-like weather. The Tseku either adapt to the climate or they perish. Their food is mainly meat and milk from their livestock together with barley and rice. They are an inconspicuous people group. Since their language is similar to the Kham Tibetans, they are probably mistaken for members of that larger people group.
- **Prayer Focus:** There are no believers among the Tseku people in Bhutan and a very small number in China. Pray these few will understand that Christ calls them to tell others about him. Pray for the Lord to bring about a movement to Christ in the 2020s. Pray for the Holy Spirit to give the Tseku people teachable and understanding hearts. Pray that a strong movement of the Holy Spirit would bring entire Tseku families into a rich experience of God's blessing.
- Want to keep up with other Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>