

# SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

Overwhelmed

PART

5

TITLE

Help, I'm Hurting

SCRIPTURE

2 Corinthians 12:7-10



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Well it is great to see you. It's always a joy to sing with you and to see your faces. And so for all of you who call Providence home, it's so good to see family. And if you are new with us, a guest, we are so thrilled that you have joined us. I pray this time is really encouraging to you. I want to ask you in your bible if you would turn with me to, let's see Second Corinthians, Chapter 12. If you don't have a bible there's lots of bibles in the chairs near you. And if you don't have one at home, you can take that home as gift, we would love you to have one.

We all carry burdens, and sometimes those burdens, they're so heavy that they threaten to bury us, and make us think or even say, "I just feel so overwhelmed." One of those burdens that many of us carry and are actually carrying today is one that I want to look at and that is the burden of pain. Many of you right now, you feel physical pain, you feel emotional pain, maybe spiritual pain. There's something happening in your life right now, whether it's in some friendship, within your home, it may be your own body, it may be your mind, it may be your heart. And you simply feel pain. What do we do when we feel so overwhelmed with the pain that seems to sort of build like a wave and it's about to topple down on top of our head?

So before we look at that, I want to pray for all of us. So if you would join me. Father in heaven, we come before you today thanking you that you love us so much that you sent your son to rescue us from eternity apart from you. We thank you Father that you are gracious, and kind, and Jesus, thank you that you endured the worst kinds of pain in order to draw us close. I pray now that you by your spirit, by your word, that you would teach us and instruct us. I pray that you would give those in the room right now, who are really enduring or just an overwhelming level of pain, it's even harder to focus right now, I pray that you would give them grace. I pray that you would heal their bodies, you'd heal their hearts, you'd heal their homes.

But God I do pray that as we open your word, that you would do what your word says is a miracle, and that is that you would help us to believe what we read. That you would even help us to be interested in what we read, and see that it's important to our life. Then God, would you bring our belief to the level that we would want to have enough courage to put it into practice in our life. So would you speak through weakness in myself, and in everyone who's here, we pray that you would be glorified in all these things, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I mean, we all feel pain. Every single one of us knows pain. In fact, there has been a time at some part of your physical body that you looked like this guy, right? To where something was hurting at such a level, and you held that part of your body, may have been your head, or a hand, you burned yourself, or your stomach, abdomen, something. Pain hurts. It also distracts, doesn't it? If you're in this state and you're going through significant pain, other things of importance in your life can be happening in the room or in your life, and yet at that very moment they don't feel so important.

But the other thing that pain does is it constricts. See, if you go through pain in the afternoon, that pain almost automatically by default it takes all of your dreams, all of your ideas, all of your plans that you had for that day when you woke up and you said, “This is what I’m going to [inaudible] do.” And it constricts all of those plans. It constricts all of those ideas. In fact, there are some of you right now and you’re really discouraged, and the reason it’s because chronic pain has so invaded your life that the dreams you have not just for today, but maybe even for tomorrow and the next day, and the next day in your life they feel like that they’ve all been constricted.

Yet, for most people, in fact for all of us, at some level, we go through pain, we experience that, it distracts, it constricts, we don’t like it, then it gets better. We had a migraine, and now we don’t have a migraine. So we go out, and we do what we do. We burn ourself, and then all of a sudden that skin heals itself, and there’s no pain anymore after a few days or weeks. So, pain leaves. At least, it does for many. But it’s also true, and you know about this, it’s that there are some and for some pain seems to linger on some sort of spectrum of severity, maybe some just a minor dull chronic pain of some kind, and other time it’s absolutely significant and severe. It also comes in all kinds of shapes and sizes, doesn’t it?

It looks different, and it comes from different places. Some people in this room, you battle chronic arthritis. For some people it’s asthma, for some people it’s bipolar, anorexia, maybe it’s back problems or stomach problems, your diabetes, or maybe depression, or Lyme’s disease, or maybe migraines, or maybe stress. It can also come from things like a rocky mirage, where you’re committed to and then yet it does hurt. It distracts from other priorities. It constricts. Maybe it’s a child who’s challenged. You love the child, the child loves you, and there’s grace in the child, you see gifts, you see amazing things within this child, and yet the pain maybe that that child experiences or maybe the pain that that child brings to you from time to time, it distracts, it constricts your life. You’re overwhelmed with that reality.

The fact is is that for many of us, we’ve prayed to God in heaven, we’ve sought help on the Earth, and yet pain remains. The question is, what do we do then? What I want to encourage you to do is what we’re going to do right now, and that is to turn to the word of God. And to see how God helped a hurting man with his real pain until Jesus finally eradicated that pain from his life forever. So this is what we read in Second Corinthians, Chapter 12, starting in verse seven.

It says, “So to keep from being conceited, because of the surpassing greatness of these revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this that it should leave me, but He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

Now, there's a lot of things that I just read in those few verses that if you're unfamiliar with what's happening with the context here, it may be confusing to you. We talked about visions, revelations, thorns, messengers of Satan, weaknesses and boasting in those weaknesses. You think, "Okay, what exactly is happening here?" So I always like to give you the context of what's happening. Some of you are thinking, "He's really not going to go back to Genesis 1:1 again, he's done that like every week forever." The cool thing is Genesis Chapter one, verse one it says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and those first four words are critically important to the rest of your life.

In the beginning God. This is why this is so important. You are created to be in a relationship with God and when you're not, life doesn't make sense. It can't. You cannot understand your origin, your purpose or your destiny, things that every single person wants to know about their life. You can't know. Things get incredibly dark and confusing when you're separated from a relationship with God. And the bible says that God created us in His image, so that we could have a relationship with Him. There was perfect peace in the garden, and there was absolute clarity. In spite of the clarity of instructions, humanity rebelled against God by sinning against his instructions.

The bible says that one of the consequences of that sin was pain. It says that for every single one of us, we came into this world and someone had to feel pain in order to get us here. It says there in the third chapter of Genesis that you and I, after we cause our momma to have pain to get us here, that we would go through pain while we're here, and then eventually every single one of us will die as a wage of our sin. That death, for almost every single person, is accompanied by some level of pain. Physical pain, emotional pain, pain is a part of it.

This doesn't mean that your specific pain is due to some specific sin, meaning you can't say, "I have cancer, it's because I lied last year." No, and there's been a lot of people who've been confused about that. One time in John, Chapter nine, Jesus is walking with his disciples and they see a man who is blind, and he had been born blind. He's disciples ask him something that they didn't think that it was offensive, it was a common question at the day. They say, "Jesus, who sinned, that man or his parents that he was born blind?" Who's at fault here? There's some sin, somebody did something and Jesus corrects them, he says, "No, you don't understand, that's not how this works. There's a purpose in this."

See, the fact that sin [inaudible] about pain, what it means is this, is that our collective fallenness, it actually cascades upon the Earth so that brokenness and pain finds all of us, it touches all of us in some way. What's amazing is that God was the one in that story, or in that garden, who was offended, and yet God was the one in love, He says, "I'm going to make a promise right now. I'm going to send you one day a rescuer." The bible says, in the fullness of time, that God sent forth his son, born of a woman to redeem us and reconcile us and bring us back into a relationship with God.

Jesus Christ came from heaven to Earth, he lived on this Earth and he lived without any sin. Yet, he took our collective sin upon his shoulders, went to a cross, and there he died for it to pay for that sin and to absorb the wrath of God that was directed towards us, he took it all. He was buried in a grave and then he rose from the dead. Friends, the fact that a man, a real man, rose from the dead should be stunning to you, consequential to you, and this should cause you tremendous joy. This is why, it's because you're going to die, and so am I. Yet, there is another man, who actually has enough power to conquer the grave, and this man not only utilized that power and rose from the dead, but he says that, "Everyone who looks to me, I will share my power so that you too will conquer the grave."

He rose from the dead, and he said, "If you trusted, I'll forgive you of all of your sin and I'll give you my righteousness." Like many people in this room right now, there was a man in the New Testament, his name was Saul and he didn't believe. In fact, Saul hated Jesus. He hated Christians who talked about Jesus. He persecuted them, he wanted to kill them, he wanted to imprison them. Until Acts nine tells us that Jesus Christ himself appeared to Saul on a road, he revealed his glory to him, he showed him who he was, and suddenly Paul saw the resurrected Christ and he believed, he was transformed, he was saved. Now, this man who was once a persecutor, first thing God [inaudible] he says, "I'm going to save, I'm going to forgive you, and now to commemorate, I'm going to give you a new name. We're not going to call you Saul anymore, we're going to call you Paul."

The apostle Paul. Instead of persecuting me and my followers, you're going to preach this gospel. That's exactly what he did. He cared so much about people hearing the gospel, that he would go to cities that he had never been to in order to tell them about Jesus. One day, years later, we're told in Acts chapter 18, that he ventured into a city called Corinth. Corinth. He started to preach and a lot of people believed in Jesus Christ. A church was assembled, they started to meet together to worship this Jesus who had forgiven them of their sin. Paul stayed there a year and a half, and then at that time, he was so convinced and concerned over people who'd never heard the gospel, that he leaves that church and he goes in order to tell other people to plant other churches in other places who have no access to the gospel.

Yet, he hears that the church is getting confused, and so he writes them a letter in order to correct some of their behavior. It's called First Corinthians, the first letter to the church in Corinth. They repent, everybody is happy for a while, and then some false teachers they come into the church in Corinth. They come into the city, they come into the church, and they have a different gospel, it's not a gospel at all, it's not good news at all. It requires them to work for their salvation, and not just to trust in Jesus Christ. But they knew that the church wasn't going to believe this unless they could undercut the character of the person that gave them the gospel that they were believing.

So they started making all kinds of accusations against Paul's character. His motives, what he was all about, his experiences and they started claiming that they had more superior spiritual experiences, more superior motive, superior godliness. The church begins believing these false teachers. Paul is so concerned that he can't get there himself, and so he writes them a second letter and it's called Second Corinthians. In Second Corinthians, what he does is sort of uncomfortable to read, because he's uncomfortable in writing it, he has to defend himself. Anytime we defend ourself, it sounds like boasting, doesn't it? That's what he acknowledges.

But it feels like he has to do so. Because the church is actually believing someone else, and so what he does is he says, "Look, if you're only going to believe when somebody elevates themselves for a purpose, then I'm going to act like a crazy man for a minute, and I'm going to boast about things so that you can see, so that I can show you a better way." So, if you look at Chapter 11, Chapter 11, verse 16 he says, "I repeat, let no one think me foolish but even if you do accept me as a fool so that I too may boast a little."

Then down in 21 he says, "But whatever anyone else dares to boast of, I'm speaking of a fool." He actually stops and he goes like, "I can't believe I'm doing this. This is so foolish." He says, "I also dare to boast about, are they Hebrew? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I'm a better one." Then he stops and he goes, "What am I doing? I'm talking like a mad man." He says, "But look, they say that they had these experiences. They say they've suffered, they say these things." He says, "This is what I've endured." So he goes on through the end of chapter 11, he talks about all the things that he's suffered, and then he gets to chapter 12.

In chapter 12 notice what he says. He says, "I must go on boasting, though there is nothing to be gained by it. I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord." In other words, these false teacher says, "We have a revelation from God, it's a new gospel, and this is a new thing. So you need to get rid of the old thing." This is what he says. "I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago was caught up to the third heaven, whether in the body or out of the body," that means physically or mentally, "I don't know. God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into paradise, whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know, God knows. He heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter."

"On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast except of my weaknesses. Though if I should wish to boast, I would not be a fool for I'd be speaking the truth, but I refrain from it so that no one may think more of me than he sees in me, or hears from me."

So here you're saying, "Gosh, he just went through a really long story to get to the cont-" it's because he's talking about visions and revelations and thorns, so I need to tell you why. Here's a real man and in the context of trying to protect a real church, just like Providence, he tells of an experience that he had that God, for whatever reason, let him have a sneak peek into heaven. And to protect him from becoming conceited, he experienced a thorn in his side.

Now, what doesn't relate to you and I is that you probably haven't had a sneak peek into heaven, so whatever that you're experiencing, it may not be for the same cause, and yet you can probably relate to a thorn in the side that you've prayed, "God, would you get rid of this?" And it's still there. So what do we learn? What can we learn from a man who was really suffering in a different kind of context than our context, we learned about what God does when somebody hurts, and I want to show you a few things.

The first is this is that God is sympathetic to our pain. He's sympathetic to our pain. Let it be known, Paul was hurting. In verse 10 of our text it says that he's endured insults, and hardship, and persecution, and calamity, and he's had to endure all of this with a thorn in his side. Now the thorn is a metaphor, we don't know what it was. We don't know if it's some physical ailment, if it's mental, or spiritual, or emotional, we don't know what it was.

But the word thorn can also be translated to two other words, one is splinter, it sounds right, a thorn in the side, yeah, it's irritating. If you rub up against it, it digs deeper, a splinter we get that. The other is stake, a stake, like a stake in the ground that pins us down, that makes it to where we can't move like we want, that constricts us. You see, if Paul were able, if he was physically strong enough, he would clearly remove the thorn and stop all the insults, and persecutions, and hardships, and calamities. But just like a wrestler, that's been pinned to the ground, he's unable to free himself.

His weakness is exposed. So he's left to pray. He prays three times, "God, I'm pinned underneath this thorn. I'm hurting, I can't get out from under it. I don't have the strength to pull it out on my own. Would you remove it?" God doesn't remove it. Now, let me ask, have you ever been there? Some of you are there right now, you feel pinned down. You don't have the strength, you don't have the strength to remove whatever that challenge, whatever the source of the pain is for me, you don't have the strength to get rid of it yourself, and you've prayed to God and He's left it there.

The most natural thing to do in this situation, the easiest thing is to believe in that moment, is that God lacks one of three things. He either lacks awareness, he just doesn't know. He's the God of power and love, and so the fact that He's not interceding in my life means that He's just unaware. I pray, and He doesn't hear me. Some people know it's not awareness, He's aware of everything, He just doesn't have the power. He's up in heaven He's like, "I wish I could happen, but I just don't know what to do."

Then other people say, "No, no, no, that's not true, it's not awareness, and it's not power. It's just concern." He looks down and He goes, "You have the problem, I have the power, but yeah, whatever, endure." What we find within this text is that all three of those assumptions are absolutely inaccurate. You see, we're told here that God clearly did not lack awareness, because He responded to Paul's prayer. He didn't respond how Paul thought he wanted to, or how he wanted God to, but He did respond. So, clearly there was an awareness of the thorn, and there was awareness that, "I hear you praying to me, and so I'm responding to you."

We also know that there wasn't a lack of power, because God himself promised [inaudible] his power would be displayed in weakness, it would be confirmed, it would be completed. We also know that God did not lack concern, the reason we know He didn't lack concern is because even though he didn't give him what he asked for, he did give him something. He gave him grace. He says, "What I'm about to give you is not what you're asking me to do, but I promise you it's sufficient, it's enough to meet your needs." So He did have concern for Paul.

He is sympathetic to our pain. Look at what we found within the scriptures about the Trinity is that God the Father, He says, "Blessed be the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all of our affliction." How about God's son, what about Jesus Christ? Hebrews four, 15 says that, "For we do not have a high priest who's unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." He can sympathize with your weakness. What about the Holy Spirit? It says that, "The Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness, interceding for the saints according to the will of God." Friends, I do not know why you're hurt, but I do know that God is sympathetic to the fact that you are.

The second thing I want you to see here is that God is sovereign over our pain. He's not only sympathetic to it, He's sovereign over it. Paul calls his thorn a messenger of Satan, which is a really interesting thing. A messenger of Satan. The bible tells us that there is an evil one, his name is Satan. That he attempts to harass believers through his messengers. First Peter, Chapter five, verse eight says that, "Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."

But what we find in this passage is that Satan is not the only one involved with the thorn. That God too is working with this thorn. We know that for a number of reasons. The first is because the thorn, Paul says, there is an intended purpose of preventing pride, which something Satan never intends to prevent. Satan wants you thinking all about yourself. He wants you exalting yourself over God. Because that's what he wants to do. Satan never attempts to prevent pride. So clearly God was working.

But the second reason we know God was working in his thorn, it's because that God affirms even after he heard Paul praying, he affirms his activity in this moment. He says, "Look, my power is made perfect, it's completed in this weakness." There's an art form, it's called Judo. It's a fascinating thing to me. Why it's fascinating? It's because it does the opposite of what we all do in our life. If you have somebody in your life who's really strong, and who wants to harm you, and his or her momentum is coming at you at that moment, if you know that that person is stronger, they're angry, they want to do you harm, and they have momentum, you run.



Unless you do Judo. Because what Judo does is it acknowledges momentum that's coming, and then it waits for it to get close enough, and then leverages that person's weight, inertia and momentum for their advantage. The bible tells us that God is like this Judo master over evil. Is that Satan himself, he has evil intentions, but God uses those evil intentions and that momentum against him for the good of His people. We know this in so many different parts of our life and even in church history, but there's never been a greater example than Jesus Christ.

The bible tells us that Satan entered the person of Judas Iscariot, and what happened when he did? Judas betrayed Jesus so that he would go to a cross and be crucified. He betrayed him. That's what Satan did. Satan had evil intentions. He had evil intentions and momentum with Herod, with Pilate, with the Jews, with the Roman soldiers, he had momentum. Let it be known that Jesus suffered in terrible ways on that cross. Yet, God Almighty was absolutely in control of the moment, listen to what Acts, Chapter four, verse 28 says.

The people within [inaudible], they're praying to God, this is what they say, "In this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pilate, with the Gentiles, that'd be the Romans, and the peoples of Israel, to do what your hand and your plan had predestined to take place." What is it saying? It's saying this, is that in our problems and pain, heaven and hell can both be involved but for very different purposes. What we find here in the person of Jesus Christ is this. Is that God allows people he loves very, very deeply to go through pain in order to experience and accomplish a greater end.

You see, this is the worst murder in the history of the world, and it brought about the only salvation for the whole world. This is what God does. He takes that momentum of evil, and he turns it to bring salvation and maturity to his people. Friends, I do not know why you hurt, but I promise you God is sovereign over your pain. He is sympathetic. He's sovereign. The third thing is that God is strategic with our pain. He is strategic with our pain. He has an intended purpose what He wants to accomplish, and allowing us to go through things that hurt. The interesting thing is our fallen heart has this funny way of attributing blessing to our greatness.

We go through good things, and we just naturally, it just flows from us, we just naturally assume that good things are happening because I'm just such a great guy, or a great gal. If the deal goes through is because I did a good job. We just naturally drift towards pride. One day Muhammad Ali shared this story, he was on an airplane, he said, "I don't want to fasten my seat belt." So the flight attendant comes up and says, "Sir, I'm going to need you to fasten your seat belt." He says to the girl, "Superman doesn't need a seat belt." The flight attendant responded, "Superman also doesn't need a plane, so buckle up."

We all tend to think of ourselves a little bit more higher than we should. Think about this, God gives Paul a sneak peek of heaven. Think about how important this is for you and I, as we think about the apostle Paul. He's the only person who had a sneak peek into seeing the glory of Christ and the glories of heaven, and then came back to this Earth and he lived. Now, wouldn't it be tragic to us and unmotivating to our Christian life if he came back and all of history recorded that he just basically came a selfish bum, [inaudible], "I just going to live for myself from now on." No, what do we find in Paul? The only man who ever got there, saw it, came back in order to live here, became the most streamlined, targeted, missional person that the world has ever seen.

He'd be willing to give anything. It's just this intensity of a man for the glory of Jesus Christ. And after giving Paul a sneak peek into heaven, God permitted a thorn to keep his heart from becoming conceited. Now, I want you notice what he says there. This is not punishment, it's protection. It says to keep him from becoming conceited. It doesn't say he became such and God wanted to punish him for it. It says that he loved him so much that he wanted to protect him from conceit and pride, so he allowed this thorn from Satan to afflict him. God loves humility, but friends remember humility is not God's goal. At least it's not his ultimate goal. It's the mean to his ultimate goal on our life.

God's ultimate strategy is to showcase the glory of his son, Jesus Christ. The bible tells us how he doesn't do this, and the bible tells us how he does. You see, we tend to think that what God wants to do is to find a celebrity that has this huge platform, save that person, so that that person can then use their huge platform in order to show everybody what it looks like if you follow Jesus you too will be able to make 403 pointers, and score touchdowns, and have a yacht, and everything else. But what's interesting is that's what God says he doesn't do. God doesn't glorify his son by exalting a celebrity who gives him a casual nod.

The bible says that God chooses to do something far more strange to us. That is to actually pour his power over the weaknesses of his trusting children so that they can endure and even rejoice during their pain. He does this because that platform is more credible to the hurting masses of the world, and because it leaves no doubt as to who is worthy of the glory. This is why Paul is boasting his weakness. Embracing his weaknesses that he's pinned and he can't get up, that he has no strength in order to overcome what's in front of him, has actually made room for God in his heart, and his life. I've told you guys many times about my childhood, through high school and college, and even since, about I grew up with a pretty significant stutter. I had a speech impediment.

The fact is, is that if I look at all the embarrassing things that have happened in my life, and I could put them into categories, the largest category of experiences of embarrassment would come from me speaking in public. [inaudible] public, one on one even. Just not being able to talk, to communicate with people. When I was 19 years old, I believe God called me to go into ministry, and I [inaudible], "I don't know how this is going to work."

But a few years later my wife and I, we drove from St. Louis, Missouri, out here to go to seminary, and just trusting him. I said like, “God, I don’t know how this is going to work,” because I still, it’d gotten better, but it was still really a pretty significant struggle to communicate.

When you go to seminary, you have to take a class called preaching. And it’s just so intimidating. There’s about 50 people there and when you stand up and preach in front of them, you got to do it three, four times in the semester. Everybody has a clipboard, and they’re all evaluating everything you’re doing, and everything you’re saying, all your facial expressions, everything. They evaluate everything. Then they videotape it, so that you can take it home and you can watch yourself so you can evaluate yourself. Because this is for the betterment of the kingdom, right?

And so, it was my turn. The very first one. Five minutes in, the wheels came off. I was doing so well, and all of a sudden I get distracted and I started stuttering like crazy. All I wanted to do was leave. I was absolutely embarrassed. I remember walking around the neighborhood thinking, “God, what are you doing? I came all the way to North Carolina because I thought you told me to do this. How in the world, how do you answer for this?” You know, he doesn’t answer that way, he answers with his word, he answers with passages like this. To this day, the only reason that I can imagine, the only reason that I could possibly imagine of why that thorn, Paul, he prayed three times, like that’s nothing to me, three? That’s it? Three. I prayed three times a day, “God, just help me to communicate.” Three.”

My God, why would you allow this? Why did you allow it then? Some of you still, if you look closely enough you can see when I’m looking for a word because I can’t tell another one. Still happens to me today. The only reason that I could possibly imagine why he allows this, it’s so I can stand up for you, and I can boast about my weakness, and his power can make perfect in it, so that you can see that he can work in your weaknesses as well. So that Jesus Christ can be glorified in your life. So let me encourage you with a few applications. First of all, let me just say this right, seek relief. Don’t read into all of this and say, “Okay, God gives all this pain so that we can glorify, so let me inflict pain upon myself.” That’s not the application here. Seek relief. Pray to God to take it away.

Go to counselors, go to doctors, but if you must wait and pain remains, what do you do? Here are just a few ideas. First is this, it’s let’s develop a Christ-centered view of pain. Pain is common to every single one of us, and the most common thing to do when we’re experiencing pain is to complain about it, to compare yourself to other who don’t look like they’re hurting like we are, or to blame either ourselves, someone else, or God for our pain. This is what we do. Let me just encourage you instead of doing what is natural, consider God’s deeper purposes that you have the privilege to participate in Christ’s sufferings.

Colossians chapter one, verse 24, Paul says this. He says, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I'm filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" ... I'm sorry. "For the sake of his body, that is, the church." I have to ask the question, what in the world is lacking in Christ's afflictions? Did he not suffer enough? Was his blood good for some but not for all? Is that what's lacking in his afflictions? You say nothing is lacking in his afflictions, I would say yes there are, because the bible says there are. Something is lacking in them. Let me tell you what's lacking in them.

Is that many intended recipients of those afflictions do not know about them. There are people all around the world today who are dying of their sin without knowledge that someone's suffered for them. They have to hear, and how are they going to hear? Not by celebrities' platforms. No, how they're going to hear is this, Paul says, "My own body, when I hurt, it becomes a window that other people can see through me. When they talk about my affliction and my pain, I can redirect their attention to talk about somebody else who's suffered for them and died for them and rose again." So let's develop a Christ-centered view of our pain.

Second, let's use the bible to give voice to our pain. When we hurt, words flow out of our mouth, it's just only natural. I had laryngitis last week, so they weren't flowing out of my mouth, but they were definitely flowing out of my mind. Everyone of those words, they originate in the heart. That's what Jesus said, all of our words, they originate within the heart. So let me encourage you to fill your heart with truth, so when you're squeezed what comes out of your mouth is true, it's noble, it's excellent, it's praised worthy.

Open up to Psalms, friends, and add your voice to Psalm 10, and 13, and 42, and 77, and 88. Saints just like you and I, people who were trusting at God and yet hurting. Add your voice to their voice, open up Romans and add your voice to Paul when he says, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope." Join Paul when he said, "We do not lose heart for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison." You see what that's saying?

You know, one of the things that I've struggled with for 15 years is a problem with my bowels. My gut. I got a gut problem. I have done so many tests on my stomach. It's not going to go away. I prayed more than three times that it would go away. It hasn't gone away. But this is what I'm learning over those 15 years. Where I used to say, "God, why?" I found myself more trying to echo what Paul said there, and I started saying, "This is going to make heaven all the sweeter. This is going to go away." It's a light momentary affliction. Momentary meaning it's for here, it's on the earth, but it's preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

Third thing is let's school ourselves in the hope of the resurrection. Listen, Jesus did conquer death. And he's willing to share his power over death to you who would trust him. So if you're here today and you've never trusted Jesus Christ, I beg of you today, look to him in faith, admit you can't save yourself, admit that you're a sinner, believe in Jesus Christ, confess him as the Lord.

The bible says that you'll be forgiven of all of your sin, and given his righteousness, you'll be adopted into his family. Such a privilege.

For those of us who are Christians, and yet who still feel pain, let me urge to leverage that pain, ask God to use that pain to make you long for the day when you'll stand without pain before God. One of the things that I do when I feel pain, I just have to anchor myself to the resurrection, what I do is I read the accounts of Jesus Christ rising from the dead in the four gospels. The reason I do that is because when I see the certainty of that resurrection, I'm reminded of the certainty of my own. One day I will rise with him, and I will have no pain.

Last thing is let's love one another through pain. One of my hopes in this series has been to show that it's okay not to be okay. I've told you in these sermons a lot of things, a lot of weaknesses about myself, other things that I wrestle with, and I do that for a purpose. My hope is that you see that that's okay to not be okay. We still love one another, we still care for one another. Let me say, for those of you who are hurting right now, I want to encourage you, one of the things pain tempts you to do is to place your needs above others', but even as a sufferer, Jesus second greatest commandment, it says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." It still applies to you.

You may not have the strength to make a meal for somebody who's in need, but you can lay in your bed and you can pray for them. For those of you who, at this current time, are well, you're not experiencing pain, let me encourage you to take the time to enter into somebody else's sufferings, to bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Let me encourage you to ask people how they're doing, listen to what they say, pray about what they say, and then prepare to ask again very soon. As a church family, we want to be able to come around one another to help each other get to heaven well. Jesus is the only way to get there. Those of us who have called upon him confess his name. We've been called to surround one another and help each other run, so I pray this has been encouraging to you. Let's pray together.

Father in heaven, we thank you for your grace in our life, and thank you for your mercy that you pour out to us. I pray, Father, that you would give us grace. Grace to believe. I pray for those who are hurting that you help them to see that you are sympathetic and sovereign and strategic in what you're allowing. I pray, Father, that you would help us to love one another well. And I pray for those in the room that feel like they simply do not have the strength to hold on to you, or to their faith, or to anything, because they're hurting so bad, I pray that you would remind them that you are holding them.

I pray now that as we sing to you, even as we give of our resources, Lord, in the hope that the gospel would be able to be propelled to the ends of the Earth quickly, we pray Father that you would be pleased in what we sing to you now. We thank you that you hold us fast, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



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