

PREPARING FOR SUFFERING

A. Thus far we have addressed 2 questions:

1. Why does God allow suffering?
2. What are the possible causes of it?

B. These lessons have not answered all our questions nor addressed every issue related to suffering.

1. The wisest man in the OT told us that we cannot understand all things.

Ecc 7:14 – In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely **God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find out nothing that will come after him.**

2. We can understand, however, that suffering can bring good into our lives: **It** purifies our faith in the gospel. **It** encourages trust in the Lord. **Through** suffering we glorify Christ.

[**Today**, we will discuss how to prepare ourselves for times of suffering. **The** word “prepare” is the key word, because without preparation suffering will destroy our faith.

Let's begin with the concept of TRUST]

I. TRUSTING GOD'S WORD

A. **To trust God's word** is to put our confidence in His word to the extent that our feelings & circumstances cannot alter our belief in what He has revealed.

1. It's very possible to lose our trust in God's word when going through a severe trial.
2. So how do we learn to trust what God says to His people when we are suffering?

B. **Many of us** here have learned to trust each other. But how did that come to be?

1. It didn't happen just because we attend the same church services.

2. It is because we have interacted with each other in the Lord's work.

3. As we have listened to each other's words & considered each other's actions, if the words & actions agree – then we trust each other.

C. **How do we trust** our Heavenly Father in times of suffering? In the same way...

1. By constantly interacting with Him as we go through the ups & downs of life.

2. We listen to His words, we read His promises, & then we learned that His actions are always consistent with His word.

3. David's trust in God began when David trusted God's word in times of suffering.

119:161 – Princes *persecute* me without a cause, but *my heart stands in awe of Your word*.

4. When we are suffering, we need to trust the promises God has made in His word.

Deut 4:7 (Moses) – For what great nation is there that has *God so near* to it, as the LORD our God is to us, *for whatever reason we may call upon Him?*

THE PROMISE – THE TRUST

Psa 46:1-3 (sons of Korah) – God is our refuge & strength, a very present help in *trouble [a time of suffering]*. 2 Therefore *we will not fear*, even though the earth be removed, & though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; 3 though its waters roar & be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling.

Psa 56:3-4 (David) – Whenever I am *afraid [a time of suffering]*, I will trust in You. 4 *In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust*, I will not fear what can flesh do to me?

Isa 26:3-4 – You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, *because he trusts in You*. Trust in the LORD forever, for in Jehovah, the LORD, is everlasting strength.

Nahum 1:7 – The LORD is good, a stronghold in the day of *trouble [a time of suffering]*; & *He knows those who trust in Him*.

New Testament (Rom 8:35-39; 1 Pet 5:6-7; **Luke 6:20-23**)

[We too can build that same trust in God in preparation for suffering, but it takes a dedication to The Word.

Prayer to God is the next step we must take in preparing for suffering.]

II. TRUSTING GOD TO HEAR OUR PRAYERS

A. I venture to say that not many of us learned to pray before our suffering OR in preparation for it.

1. No, we pray in hope that God will make pleasant things happen to us (Jas 4:3).
2. Or, we pray to Him after the suffering has already occurred (Jas 5:13).
3. But rarely do we think to pray to Him in preparation for personal suffering.

a. Jesus in Gethsemane (Matt 26:36-44).

4. Even rarer would be the prayer to God in preparation for someone else's suffering.

- a. The disciples prayed for Peter before his "certain" execution (Acts 12:1-5, 12).
- b. Jesus told Peter that Satan had asked to sift him as wheat – test his faith –, but Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail (Lk 22:31-34).

B. What does prayer do for the children of God in times of suffering?

1. Through prayer God gives the "peace" we need to sustain our faith in Christ (Phil 4:6-7).
2. As we have shown, prayer proves that we can trust God, even when life is dark & dreary.

3. But the time to be praying about our trials & suffering is before we are faced with them.

a. Health, Economy, Family.

b. “We can see what’s going to eventually happen to this nation if things don’t turn around.” – That’s something we can pray about.

C. **The reason we** sometimes don’t pray as we ought to is because we’ve stopped trusting God.

1. We can get frustrated with the unfairness of life & wonder if God has lost control.

Jer 12:1-5 – Righteous are You, O LORD, when I plead with You; yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? 2 You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bear fruit. You are near in their mouth but far from their mind. 5 The LORD Answers Jeremiah: “If you have run with the footmen, & they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, in which you trusted, they wearied you, then how will you do in the floodplain of the Jordan?”

2. If Jeremiah couldn’t handle the minor frustrations of life & trust in God, then how could he cope with the major trial that was about to occur to his nation.

3. “Continue to pray Jeremiah, & do not doubt that God is hearing you & doing what is best.”

[**If we want** to be a friend of God when trials & suffering come our way, then we must trust Him to hear our prayers.

Finally, in preparing for suffering we must learn to trust each other.]

III. TRUSTING EACH OTHER

A. **Solomon wrote** of the value of friendships.

Ecc 4:9-12 – Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. 10 **For if they fall, one will lift up his companion.** But woe to him who is alone when he falls, for he has no one to help him up. 11 Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; but how can one be warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

B. The support of a friend is one purpose God had in mind for the church.

1 Cor 12:24-27 – but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, 25 that there should be no schism in the body, **but that the members should have the same care for one another.** 26 And **if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it;** or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, & members individually.

1. You may be a member of the Lord's body & not have that kind of relationship with this church. *Here's how you develop it...*

a. Consider this congregation to be your primary family.

Eph 2:19 – Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers & foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints & **members of the household of God,**

b. Treat the members here as your primary family?

c. Become involved in the work here & make your presence known in ways that will encourage every member (1 Thess 5:12-15).

[Those Christians who learn to trust each other will never lack the support they need when they are suffering.]

CLOSING

Are we preparing ourselves for the days of suffering? It is very likely that we will face a good deal of it in our lives.

Ecc 3:1-8 – **To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven:** 2 a time to be born, & a time to **die**; a time to plant, & a time to pluck what is planted; 3 a time to **kill**, & a time to heal; a time to **break down**, & a time to build up; 4 a time to **weep**, & a time to laugh; a time to **mourn**, & a time to dance; 5 a time to cast away stones, & a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, & a time to **refrain from embracing**; 6 a time to gain, & a time to lose; a time to keep, & a time to throw away; 7 a time to tear, & a time to sew; a time to keep silence, & a time to speak; 8 a time to love, & a time to **hate**; a time of **war**, & a time of peace.

Heb 4:14-16 – Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For **we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses**, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, **that we may obtain mercy & find grace to help in time of need.**