

"Seeing It God's Way, Part 2"
(Psalm 119:121-128)
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(Psalm 119:121-128)

¹²¹ I have done what is righteous and just;
do not leave me to my oppressors.
¹²² Ensure your servant's well-being;
do not let the arrogant oppress me.
¹²³ My eyes fail, looking for your salvation,
looking for your righteous promise.
¹²⁴ Deal with your servant according to your love
and teach me your decrees.
¹²⁵ I am your servant; give me discernment
that I may understand your statutes.
¹²⁶ It is time for you to act, LORD;
your law is being broken.
¹²⁷ Because I love your commands
more than gold, more than pure gold,
¹²⁸ and because I consider all your precepts right,
I hate every wrong path.

This is a very important passage for us to understand. It's important because it shows us how to deal with suffering. Remember in an earlier sermon we said that the psalmist, the author of this chapter, is our older brother in the faith, he is our mentor. He has gone through many ups and down in his life and so he has experience on his side, but he's also been chosen by God to write God's inspired words, so that you and I, and all generations could benefit from them.

Our society and culture has its own way of dealing with suffering.

- One way is to escape. Leave the hardships behind. Take a vacation. The vacation is practically seen as a human rights issue. If I don't get my vacation it's a violation of my basic, most fundamental human rights.
- Another way we deal with hardships is to self-medicate. People turn to drink and drugs, or binging on food, or binge-watch Netflix or youtube.
- Or we isolate ourselves, become reclusive, remove ourselves from our friends, stop answering our phone calls, texts and emails. Maybe it's the embarrassment or shame. We don't know how to deal with it, so we disappear.
- Sometimes, we say, "suck it up!" to ourselves (this is my personal favorite), put our heads down and do what we have to do and plow through it.
- How about you? What's your go-to method when you're going through tough times?

Thankfully, there is a better way and this passage gives us some much-needed advice. Let's go through them one at a time.

Continue to live righteously. (121, 127-128)

I have done what is righteous and just. (121)

Because I love your commands more than gold, more than pure gold, and because I consider all your precepts right, I hate every wrong path. (127-28)

The Bible tells us that at times suffering comes as a form of God's discipline to the children that he loves. Here's the most thorough passage on this:

⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son." ⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of spirits and live! ¹⁰ They disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. (**Hebrews 12:4 – 11**)

Sometimes the discipline is punitive. Sometimes it is not, but it is always for our good and the purpose is always to make us holy.

I think the psalmist is evaluating his life. He's looking back to see if there might be a sin that he's committed that's connected to the suffering he's presently going through. And that's not a bad thing. Sometimes it takes some suffering for us to wake up and see that we have strayed from God. Remember the verses earlier in this chapter that we looked at a couple months ago?

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. (**Psalm 119:67**)

It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. (**Psalm 119:71**)

It is true that suffering at times is punitive and corrective. And God does that because we are his children and he loves us too much to do nothing.

But, sometimes we use a trial as an excuse to sin or deny Christ. We can think, “Well if living righteously results in suffering, why bother living that way? If you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em.” That’s completely the wrong attitude to have. There is never ever a justification for sin. And no good could ever come out of sin. And when we think and do such things, it is nothing less than the sin of rebellion, which the Bible says is the same as the sin of divination, which is looking for insights through mediums and fortune tellers and such, in other words it’s idolatry, because by rebelling, we are throwing off and rejecting God’s rightful place in all of our lives.

Friends, do not allow suffering to be an excuse for sinning and rebelling. Whether you are going through suffering right now or not, cultivate a faith that doesn’t waver with changing situations, but is embedded upon the solid rock of Christ.

Trust in God’s sovereignty (122a;123)

Ensure your servant’s well-being. (122a)

My eyes fail, looking for your salvation, looking for your righteous promise.
(123)

One of the things that we see in this section is the psalmist’s unwavering trust in God’s sovereignty. In fact, that’s what we see in all the great saints in the Bible and throughout history.

God’s people have gone through some of the most challenging experiences known to mankind, and over and over again, we see them leaning and leaning hard upon the sovereignty of God. Abraham was told to sacrifice his own son, and Abraham trusted in the sovereignty of God. Daniel was told to bow the knee to a foreign king, but he trusted in the sovereignty of God.

But what does that even mean? The sovereignty of God means the rule and reign of God. The Dutch theologian and former prime minister of the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper said it like this. “There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, **Mine!**”

Here's how theologian Arthur Pink describes God's sovereignty:

The sovereignty of God—what do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (**Daniel 4:35**). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (**Psalm 115:3**). To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is “the governor among the nations” (**Psalm 22:28**), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is sovereign is to declare that He is the “only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (**1Titus 6:15**). Such is the God of the Bible.

Pink, Arthur W.. *The Sovereignty of God* (Kindle Locations 239-246). Chapel Library. Kindle Edition.

And here's how Jesus teaches us about the sovereignty of God:

⁴ “I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. ⁵ But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. ⁶ Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. ⁷ Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (**Luke 12:4–7**)

For God to be sovereign means he knows all things, even the number of hairs on your head. For God to be sovereign means that he knows the movement of every bird in the sky. For God to be sovereign means that your life is in the hands of God. No one can do anything unless God permits it. And when he does permit it, it's for our good and for his glory.

When you and I go through sufferings, to whom shall we go? Shall we run away from the one who controls all things? Shall we flee from the only one who can remove the suffering we are going through? Shall we leave the one who possesses all wisdom and knows exactly why this is happening to us? No, we mustn't do that. We must continue to trust in his sovereignty. God is still in control of our lives.

Never forget that God loves you. (124a)

The psalmist writes in verse 124, “Deal with your servant according to your love,” your loving kindness, your *hesed*. He’s banking on God dealing with him in a way that is in line with and consistent with his love. That’s the only way God knows how to act. He cannot betray himself. He cannot deny his own nature. In all that God does, in all that God allows to happen to us, they are all outworkings of his lovingkindness.

When we are going through suffering, we can begin to question God’s love for us. We start asking, “If God really loved me, then why did he allow such and such thing to happen?” Instead, shouldn’t we be saying, like the author of Hebrews, “Because of this suffering, I am more convinced than ever, that God loves me.” To think that and say that may seem very wrong to you, but it is true.

Think of it like this. Whom does God love more than anyone else in the entire universe? More than anything, any angel, any person? Whom does God love the most? Okay, hold onto that for a moment. Who, in all of the existence of the universe, has suffered the most—more than any concentration camp survivor, more than anyone who has gone through the most terrible atrocities or debilitating disease? The answer to both questions is the same. The person whom God loves the most and the person to whom God allowed to suffer the most is his only Son, Jesus Christ. Never for a moment did Jesus doubt the love of God, even while going to the cross, even while experiencing the unbridled wrath and punishment of God. Listen to what Jesus says about the love between God and himself.

For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. (**John 5:20**)

The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. (**John 10:17**)

Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. (**John 17:24**)

Jesus knows that God loves him so he places his complete trust in him.

That God loves you doesn't mean that suffering won't happen to you. Some of you might have heard of Joni Eareckson Tada. When she was a healthy young teenager she severed her spine in a diving accident and became a quadriplegic. She has spoken and written many books on suffering and has a ministry for disabled people. One of her most famous quotes goes like this. “Sometimes God allows what he hates to accomplish what he loves.” That’s a hard saying to hear, and even a harder one to swallow, but I believe it to be true. Suffering is allowed to happen from a

loving, sovereign God, to accomplish things for God's glory and good. Please, never forget that God loves you.

See it as a teaching moment (124b,125)

Teach me your decrees. (124b)

I am your servant; give me discernment that I may understand your statutes.
(125)

Isn't that fascinating that the psalmist has this attitude in the midst of his pain? He still wants to learn, he wants more discernment. He wants to understand God's statutes.

Suffering and trials are incredibly valuable teaching moments. Here's how C.S. Lewis states it. "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

Often times when we are struggling, that means God is trying to get our attention. He wants to teach us something that might not have been learned any other way. What things might he want to teach us?

1. The terribleness of sin.
2. The beauty of Christ and his cross.
3. The glory of God's sovereignty.
4. The love of Christian community.
5. The forming of character, like patience and longsuffering.
6. Deeper trust in God's grace (Paul, 2 Corinthians)
7. That even in my weakness God can still use me and receive great glory.
8. A yearning for heaven.
9. A love for justice (in the experience of suffering from injustice)
10. A deeper knowledge, experience and worship of God. (Job)
11. The importance and necessity of suffering for Gospel advancement.

Now I rejoice in what I am suffering for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church. (Colossians 1:24)

12. The preciousness of God's word and the promises found within.

Are you going through suffering right now? What an exciting thing it is to know that God wants to teach you something so precious and important. Open your ears and listen.

Petition God in prayer (all verses)

The entire section is basically a prayer to God. In the midst of his sufferings, the only thing he knows to do is to go to God in prayer. I find that for me, at times when I'm going through a rough season, instead of going harder after God, instead of going deeper into prayer, I try to get through it on my own. But when the trial is over and I look back, I conclude that the trial didn't have to last so long. I probably could've handled it better, if only I had prayed more, if only I had gone to God sooner. Don't you feel the same way? I'm not sure why we would avoid God and not jump right to him. When we see a child trip and scrape his knee, when he looks up, there's only one person he hopes to see, his mommy, okay, maybe daddy too. He knows that only mommy can hold him, and tend to him, and heal him, and comfort him. Why is it then, that when we are wounded, we don't run to our Father?

Here's what Jesus did:

⁷ During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸ Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (**Hebrews 5:7-9**)

Why did Jesus pray even though he knew he was going to the cross? Why did he express so much passion, fervent cries and tears? Here's the answer, verse 8 says, "Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered." Even Jesus, the Son of God, had to learn obedience through suffering. If that is true for the Son, how much more true is it for us? So he prayed to get the strength and to get the resolve to obey to go through with the suffering on the cross.

One of the greatest preachers to ever live was the 19th century British pastor Charles Spurgeon. Spurgeon had some serious emotional and physical problems that he suffered through his entire life. He struggled with depression and he struggled with gout. Listen to what he says:

"When I was racked some months ago with pain, to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room, and leave me alone; and then I had nothing I could say to God but this —

'Thou are my Father, and I am thy child; and thou, as a Father art tender and full of mercy.

'I could not bear to see my child suffer as thou makest me suffer, and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him.

'Wilt thou hide thy face from me, my Father? Wilt thou still lay on a heavy hand, and not give me a smile from thy countenance?'

“So I pleaded, and I ventured to say, when I was quiet, and they came back who watched me: ‘I shall never have such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer.’ I bless God that ease came and the racking pain never returned.”

Spurgeon understood that only God could help him when he was going through terrible suffering. So, as he was entertaining people, he excused himself and immediately went to God in prayer.

You and I can and should do the same. There’s an old hymn that says this so well.

“What a Friend We Have in Jesus.”

What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!

Have we trials and temptations?
Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful,
Who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness;
Take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,
Cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge—
Take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee?
Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In His arms He’ll take and shield thee,
Thou wilt find a solace there.

Let’s pray.