

A Proper View of Life

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[0:00] Now, I have a note written to myself, self, remember the blood drive, okay?

! So, how many of you out there are, I shouldn't ask that question, I won't. I was going to ask it, so I won't ask it, but I'll let you know what it was. I was going to ask how many of you are over 80 pounds, because I think that's under that you can't give blood.

I think a lot of us are eligible. And so, if you are eligible to give blood, here's the happy news. We have an opportunity for you to do that. And Linda, our secretary, advised me that we still have a number of vacancies in the opportunities.

And lest I go out into the lobby and have to personally encourage you on one knee, you can make my job easier. Get out there and sign up so that we have plenty of people that are giving blood.

It's one of those things we do to minister to people around us, and it's our blessing to do that. Turn in your Bibles, if you would, to Ephesians chapter 2. I'm sorry, Ephesians chapter 3.

[1:05] Some of you are thinking there was a return to something previous. Chapter 3, verse 1 through 5, let me read it to you. For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, on behalf of you Gentiles, assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you, how the mystery was made known to me by revelation as I have written briefly.

When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations, as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.

Let's pray. Our Father God, prayer for us is never just an exercise of obedience, but it is a glad declaration of our dependence and our confidence in you.

We know that you are our God and our Father and the provider of all good things because the Scriptures tell us that every good and every perfect thing comes from above, from the Father in whom is no variableness.

And so we come to you and we say, listen, there are things we need. And this morning, we need the enabling of the Spirit of God that we who are your children may understand more of the truth and as a result of that growing understanding may grow to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2:27] We pray, Father, also as we who are believers pray, we ask that you would work in the lives of those that are here today that do not know Christ, that even as the teaching of the Scriptures, which is primarily focused on benefit and blessing for believers, would nevertheless be used by your Spirit to draw those who need Christ to the cross, that they would find complete forgiveness for all of their sins, deliverance from the curse of being under the wrath of God and the blessing of everlasting life.

And Lord, we pray these things because we know Jesus is our Savior and we trust Him and we look forward to the day that we're going to see Him. Amen. Ephesians chapter 1 and 2 have been a wonderful unpacking or opening of the reality of our salvation.

And I think it is important for us to have those two chapters kind of in view as we look at chapter 3 because chapter 3 actually from verse 1 over to 13 where there is a break and Paul then moves back in to the discussion that he had engaged in previously, chapter 3 in some senses is a little bit of a diversion.

How many of you have ever been involved in conversation with someone and they got on a rabbit trail and you ended up not knowing where they were? How many of you have done that? In fact, where was I?

I have to confess on occasion that when I am telling a little anecdotal story or something like that, I have to remind myself, why did I start that? How important is that to the passage, etc.?

[4 : 04] We've all done that. And so when you hit this little phrase or this little portion, you may find yourself wondering, so how does this bear with the discussion that's been going on in Ephesians so far?

Ephesians chapter 1 tells us, and I use broad terms, hey listen, God does a wonderful thing in saving us. It's unbelievable that he planned our salvation before the foundation of the world and he has called us to be holy and to be his family.

And not because of anything we've done, right? I mean, that's what the book of Ephesians is all about, is the incredible blessing of God's salvation. And is salvation a good thing? What's the answer?

Woo! It's great. Unbelievable, isn't it? How many of you would rather be saved than not saved? You ought to live with a daily thankfulness for the blessing.

Every day should be a day in which you are saying, I can't believe he did this for me. Chapter 1 and chapter 2 are all about the good thing of God's salvation.

[5 : 17] And then in chapter 3, Paul turns around and answers a very telling question that's kind of niggling in the back of the minds of those who are listening. I mean, the people who were reading Paul's letter knew what was going on in Paul's life.

And where was Paul? Where was he? He was kind of kicking it back in the Caribbean, kind of penning this little note as someone was bringing him coconut milk.

I mean, things were good for Paul, am I right? Where's Paul? He was in prison. And you can understand the mind of the reader saying, hey, listen, if being part of God's family is so good, what is going on with the apostle?

And is this any indication of the kind of life that I can expect? Years ago, when I was much younger, there was a little track going around called the Four Spiritual Laws.

Now, I know you're going to age yourself, but does anybody here remember the Four Spiritual Laws? Get your hand up high so you who are younger can identify us oldies. Do you know what the first spiritual law or little statement was?

[6 : 29] Here's how it goes. God has a wonderful plan for your life. Now, that's entirely true. But you can understand how someone would be kind of scratching their head saying, if God has a wonderful plan for your life, Paul, how come you're in prison?

Someone said to me this morning, I'm sure they didn't know what I was going to be preaching on, because they said, what are you going to be preaching on? And then before I actually answered it, I said, probably something about health and wealth, right? And I said, well, not actually.

And what we're looking at here is Paul's discussion of suffering. Paul's discussion of the heartache and the difficulties that come with being a believer.

And it is appropriate and it's valuable because one of the underlying and niggling questions that goes through the mind of all of us on occasion is, what is happening to me?

Why am I having all these problems? You know, life is tough. Why? If salvation is really so wonderful and the believer is transformed from being the incredibly miserable slave of Satan into the child of God, why do Christians suffer so much heartache and difficulty?

[7 : 51] Why is it that Pastor Saeed is in prison in Iran? Why is it that this last week there were three pastors that were murdered in Tanzania?

Why is it that there are thousands of believers in jail in China for nothing other than their faith? Why is it that in India, believers are regularly persecuted and suffer all kinds of public shame and difficulty and the complication of life as a believer is profound?

Why does the media here in America have the gall to insult and mock Christians when it has nothing to say about Allah and Muhammad?

Have you ever stopped and thought about that? I mean, what was that? Saturday Night Live did this great... I didn't watch it. I want you to know that. But I understood that they were going to do this mockery of Christ.

They had... They planned it. They thought it was a great idea. Now, let's just pretend that you're one of these people that doesn't think the least of either Muhammad or Christ.

[9 : 04] Why is it that you pick on Christ and don't mess with Muhammad? Why is it that Christians endure what they endure? Paul looks at the question that lingered in people's minds.

And one of the things you have to understand is that a good teacher is listening for the questions and uses the questions as a means of teaching and responding in a teachable moment.

That's exactly what the apostle does. He's spent two chapters telling us, Hey, listen, it is wonderful to be saved. And then there's this little niggling thought going through. And so, if that's so wonderful, why are you having such a tough time, Paul?

And he says, Oh, let's take advantage of that moment and explain what is going on. And I want you to know that Paul's view of his life and suffering tell us a great, great deal about some very practical truths in the believer's life.

And so, let's kind of get down to this and deal with it practically as we work our way through. Let's consider, first of all, what Paul's status was. There in chapter 3, verse 1, it says this, For this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus.

[10:17] Paul's status, recognizably, he says this, He was a prisoner for his faithfulness to Christ and for the gospel. And I'm kind of blown away when I stop and think about what Paul is actually saying.

He was in prison because of his relationship with Christ. I want you to know that he could have distanced himself adequately from Christ to avoid being in prison.

And there are some of you sitting out here this morning that perhaps on occasion have distanced yourself from Christ so that the work environment that you're in doesn't cause undue tension.

I mean, you've all been in situations where it's kind of politically correct to mock Christians and mock those who believe in Christ. And I'm sad to have to admit that on occasion, some of us who are professing believers don't act very much like Jesus.

And I can understand why sometimes believers are mocked. I see some of the things happening on Facebook, and I'm thinking, Where do you come off with that kind of junk?

[11:19] I mean, how does that make Jesus look good when you post that kind of stuff?

Everybody would say amen to that, wouldn't they? Well, I was blown away. My hair went back. But here's the deal.

I understand that sometimes people misbehave, but the truth of the matter is, is a lot of times some of us kind of just duck being Christian because we don't want to deal with the flag. And here's Peter who says, Listen, I want you to understand that I'm in prison because of Jesus, and I'm in prison because of my commitment to the gospel and my faithfulness to proclaim what is true.

He could have watered down the gospel. I want you to understand that Paul had a profoundly sharp intellect, and he could have wowed the crowds. He could have had people buying all of his books.

He could have had people lining up for his seminars, and he could have hired, you know, the largest auditorium and stadium and packed people in with the health and wealth gospel.

But he didn't do it. He was not there for entertainment. And all you have to do if you have a question about that is kind of go in your Bible over to 1 Corinthians 2, chapter 1, 2, and 3, actually, and you get a picture of what Paul's understanding of character and fidelity to the ministry meant.

[12:34] He preached the word, and he was not about entertainment. I want you to understand also that Paul was actually in prison because he preached the gospel for the Gentiles and to the Gentiles.

Who was it that got Paul in trouble, really? It was Jews. And you'll remember, if you work your way through the book of Acts, that one of the things that characterized early ministry in the foundation of the New Testament church was that when an apostle or one of the preachers of the gospel would go into a community, the place that he would go was generally the what?

What? The synagogue. And the reason for that is that in the synagogue, what did they believe in? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who had made a promise of a coming Messiah.

And Paul would announce, hey, listen, I've got incredible news. The Messiah has come, and there is salvation through his finished work. Now, at first, that sounded pretty good.

And it was well-received for a little bit. And then Paul would explain, hey, and here's the blessing of it. Salvation is all of grace. There is nothing you get to do to earn it, and you can't keep it by virtue of being a good guy.

[13:56] Why? Because Christ has satisfied the debt of sin, and he has paid the full measure upon the cross. And he made the gospel undeniably clear, and the truth of the gospel was profoundly offensive to guess which category of people?

The Jews. Did they like Paul? No. In fact, they wanted to kill him. And their desire to kill him was such that they brought false charges against him. He ended up in prison because of that.

And eventually, you'll remember, if you work your way through the book of Acts, he says, listen, I appeal my case unto Caesar. He was a Roman citizen. And they said, you've appealed? You're going to go. You're going to go to see Caesar.

Paul was in prison because of his commitment to the gospel's benefit to Gentiles in particular. So you look there, and he says, for this reason, I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles.

I've got to tell you, somewhere along the line, we've been seduced by the success syndrome to think that if we're walking in faith, that things ought to be good all the time.

[15:06] Don't you wish it were that way, though? I mean, honestly? Here, do it this way. I did my devotions. I showed up in church. I gave 6%.

I mean, you know, that's a lot more than some people give. And I said my prayer list. There are about five things on it. Lord, help me. Help people that I love. Help me in my work. Help me to get a safe journey back and forth and have no traffic tickets.

You know, we pray about the very, very basic things, and everything else is, you know. But, hey, because I've done those things, how should it go for me? I should have a good day.

I have people walk into my office periodically, and they're entirely flummoxed. And the word flummoxed means they're kind of confused. There you go. Pastor, I don't understand.

I'm doing everything right, and look what's happening to me. And I think, really? Well, talk to me about what everything right is. But then, secondly, when I really piece the pieces together, I find out here are people who have this high expectation that kind of doing the to-do list of being righteous earns us the privilege of having a no-fault, no-pain existence.

[16:18] And Paul says, guess what? Ain't that way. Living as a Christian, living as a believer, is going to involve some suffering and challenge in this life.

Let me point out a couple different passages that kind of emphasize this. Now, I'm not suggesting that you go into work this coming Monday and act like an absolute boor and get the stapler thrown at you and say, well, that was for Jesus.

There's got to be a little common sense goes along with this. Do you understand that? Being a grumpy, frowny, unhappy, bristly person, and then going around saying, and people don't like me because I'm a Christian, doesn't cut it.

Let's look at 2 Timothy 3, verse 12. Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

All who desire to live a godly life. What does a godly life look like? Everybody look up. It is not so much, and I want to say this in order so you understand me.

[17:28] It is not, first of all, a list of to-dos or don't-dos. It is, first of all, a heart attitude of humility and a sincere passion for the glory of Christ that then eventually brings us to a list of behaviors.

We get the order reversed, and we end up in trouble. So, in simple terms, one of the big giveaways that you're a believer should be, first of all, the spirit and countenance that you have on a daily basis.

Am I right or wrong? When you walk into work on Monday, people ought to look at you and say, wow, you must have had a rested and enjoyable weekend because your countenance is pretty good.

How do the rest of the people come in on Monday? They come in dragging, complaining about what Monday is all about, right? I mean, there's a reason that we have a phrase in our culture that has kind of metastasized over into a restaurant name, T-G-I-F.

What's that stand for? However, I'll use the theologically accurate statement, thank goodness it's Friday. Monday is that day where, oh, I've got to go back to work.

[18:41] And why are you going to work? Does anybody know why you're going to work? You're going to work to make Jesus look good, right? And when you go in, you're like one of those little dwarfs. Hi-ho, hi-ho, and off to work I go.

You know, I mean, try that. People are going to look at you and say, what is wrong with him? Well, I'm here. I'm here to make Jesus look good.

And you know what? It's going to happen. 2 Timothy, I think I said, verse 12, it says, hey, listen, you're going to live for God.

You're going to live for Christ. You're going to have a hard time. Turn over, if you would, also to 1 Peter 4, verse 13. 1 Peter 4, verse 13. And when suffering does come to us as believers, when

things are difficult, how should we respond?

But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's suffering, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. Do you do that?

[19 : 50] Do you respect the privilege and blessing you have of receiving some of the tension and some of the heartache that comes for being a Christian?

Do you say, wow, I am blessed and privileged to receive that for Christ's sake? Before we walk away from this point, let me remind you again of where we once were.

I think it's important for us to remember that. If you kind of work your way back into Ephesians chapter 2 in particular, Paul reminds us that there was a time when we were dead in our sins. We were slaves to sin.

We were under the wrath of God. We were without hope. And all we were doing was kind of trudging our way mercilessly towards the day of judgment. judgment. Hugo Chavez died this last week, and his funeral was an absolute farce from the standpoint of a theological reality.

Now, don't misunderstand me. He was a public figure and an international figure and all that. But do you know what his last words were? Here they are. They're common for an unbeliever.

[21 : 02] He mouthed the words. He was so challenged and struggling with pain and suffering in his last moments, 57 years old, I think, when he died. And here's what he said.

I don't want to die. Please don't let me die. I have watched, in over 30-some years of ministry, I've watched many, many people die.

I grew up in a doctor's home. And I saw death indirectly, often. Later, I worked my way through college by working third shift in a, or second shift in a hospital, and I saw many people die.

And in 30 years of being a pastor, I have been at the bedside of believers and unbelievers. And let me tell you something.

Believers die differently than unbelievers. Believers. I want to tell you something.

[22 : 10] Paul says, hey, don't be thrown by the circumstances I am in. I am glad to tell you that I am in prison for your sakes and for Jesus.

There's something else he says. Let's go back to Ephesians chapter 3 and mark the fact that he sees his life as a servant and a channel for the good of others.

We see here in this first verse, he says, For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner for Christ Jesus, on behalf. It's about you.

There was a time in which every one of us lived our lives entirely exclusively for ourselves. Do you remember those days? Some of you, some of you got saved at a later date in life, and you remember the just incredible baggage that goes along with being an unregenerate unbeliever.

It's all about who? It's about you. And everything revolves around how it's working out for you. A good day is when things are going your way, right?

[23 : 21] Zippity-doo-dah and all that kind of stuff. And a bad day is when what? When it's not going our way. Paul says, hey, listen. I'm not put out by this at all.

He says, number one, I'm a prisoner for Jesus Christ. And number two, it's all about you. I'm interested in how you're doing. And when he says, in behalf of you Gentiles, he is marking that the reason he is doing what he's doing is for the sake and the blessing of others.

You look back there in verse one, for this reason. He's talking about the gospel that's been explained. And then he says, and it's attached directly to you guys. As he looked at his existence and the suffering that he was undergoing, he says, listen, it's because of you that I've received this grace.

There in verse two. Assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you. Question. Why were you saved?

It wasn't just about you. Do you understand that? Everybody nod your head so that at least in abstract theological terms, you understand that you're not the center of the circle.

[24 : 36] Nod, nod, nod, nod, nod. Could we ask the deacons to buy bobbleheads? We'll send them on the first two rows here just to make me feel better, okay? Okay. It's not about you.

Paul says, hey, this business of being an instrument of God's righteousness and blessing is for your sakes. He goes on and says there in verse three that the revelation with which he has been blessed was for the sake of others.

Verse three, how the mystery was made to me by revelation, as I've written briefly. Why did I get this blessing? How many of you would like to be? I mean, now we've got a couple people here in

the church that are working on writing books.

I'm going to embarrass Tom because he's doing it. Mandy, I don't know if you're working on it too, but, you know, hey, I'm writing a book and it's the gospel. I mean, would that make you feel good, Tom, honestly?

Yeah, and it's not going to happen. I want you to understand that. Even if he is married to our church secretary, it's just not going to be there. Okay, but just think about the privilege of, I am getting gospel revelation.

[25 : 44] And it's for the sake of other people. I don't get to put on my bio vitae gospel revelation specialist. You know, it's like, hey, this is all happening for you.

And so when was the last time, when was the last time that you thought about your salvation and you thought about the particular gifts that God has given to you, the particular skill set, the particular experiences that God has brought into your life, and you've recognized that all of those things were not about you but were for the sake of other people?

Well, I, over the years, and many of you know that Tim Kenoyer was born an incredibly wicked and ungodly person who was profoundly self-centered and arrogant and stubborn, and God in His mercy beat me senseless numerous times.

Still doesn't. And one of the particular areas that God had to teach me some very hard lessons was in the area of marriage. As a result, I get calls from people around the nation that are going through some of the challenges of marriage.

And they'll call me at all times. And every time they call me, every time they call me, one of the things that comes out is they'll say, oh, I'm sorry to bother you again.

[27 : 16] I mean, you know, like a 17th time in the week or something like that. And here's my standard answer. I am a lifetime debtor to Jesus. I owe it all to Jesus. And I am thankful that He has rescued me from the pit, and He has taken me and changed my life, and He lets me talk about Him.

Amen. Amen. I was honored Friday night to get a call from some of our youth workers.

One of the young men that was here. By the way, it's a good thing that we won the dodgeball competition on Friday. I'm blessed by that. I understand it was a good competition. We probably need to give a little thought to how we put armored padding on some of the girls.

But, you know, other than that, it was a good time. Now, I get a call from one of our youth workers who's in the hospital. Instead of going home, they went to the hospital to be with his family, visitor's family.

Hey, do you think they wanted to be in bed and sleep? What's the answer? Well, at the time they finally got home, I guarantee you they probably were thinking, I wish I'd come here a little earlier.

[28 : 34] That's the kind of people I like to partner with. Do you follow me? People that are willing to be spent for something other than themselves. I think about how many of you do that with our young people, with our music ministry.

I come in on Sunday morning and my heart is keyed in on the privilege of handling the Word of God before you. And I see people who are here before I am and they're putting their heart into this and I'm blessed.

They're here on Wednesday night practicing. And, I mean, it all looks like it just happens pretty smoothly, doesn't it? There's a little secret behind it. There's people that pray and pray and practice. And they actually work to get along together. And they have a little spits. You know, it just happens. And they work it out for Jesus' sake. I think about our Sunday school teachers.

I'll tell you what. The heroes in this fellowship often serve behind the scenes. And if you want to see who the real heroes of this ministry are, you walk down in those hallways on Sunday school and you'll see some people that have been here longer than the buildings.

[29 : 49] Now, you're thinking, can that really be true? No. That's known as hyperbole for you who are curious. In other words, they've been here a long time. And they're in there just as chipper and as happy.

And they're putting their hearts into these little kids. And they're probably taking care of your kids. And they took care of you before when you were here. You know what?

God saves us to be servants for other people, doesn't He? Doesn't He do that? You want to be a sour and unhappy person? Just kind of suck up around you. And if you want to be a person who knows the joy and the power of Christ, invest your life in ministry to other people.

Well, let's take Paul's perspective just for a minute and mark the fact that here he is in prison, suffering. And I'm kind of struck by the fact that he's not the least bit put off by his humiliation or what others may have thought about him.

Instead of ducking his circumstances. I mean, I want you to imagine that you are a preacher of the gospel that's saying, listen, the gospel is the best possible news that anybody could ever hear, and I'm in prison.

[31 : 07] I mean, hey, what's the logical thought you would have if you heard that Pastor Knoyer was in Franklin County Jail? I would venture to say that you would wonder, what did he do?

There's got to be something that we didn't know about. There's Paul. He says, hey, I'm in prison. By the way, prison was a place reserved for criminals.

It was a place for those who were dishonest, dishonorable men. And Paul says, hey, here's where I'm at. And he saw it as a blessing. Let me give you a couple instances to stand out in relationship to this.

Go back, if you would, just for a second to 2 Corinthians chapter 12 when he thought about some of the challenges that he faced. And he wasn't the least put off by those things. And he saw them actually as a means of blessing in his life.

Have you received some hardship and challenge? It's for the testimony of Christ and for his glory and for your good and growth. 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 9 through 11.

[32 : 15] Paul talks about the fact they ended up with a thorn in his flesh. And he said that in this whole process, he discovered the reality that he was weak. But when he was weak, guess what?

What's it say? Then, then Christ is strong. I want you to also look at 2 Timothy chapter 4, just for a second. Mark 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 16 and 17.

In fact, I'll just kind of reference it for you. In 2 Timothy, Paul talks about the fact that in his last days, in his very last days, all those people that he had ministered to, the ones that he'd been at their bedside, the ones that he'd helped with different projects, the ones that he had encouraged when their marriages were coming about, when he was in jail, they didn't show up and be there with him. You know what Paul says? He says, hey, I want God not to hold this against their charge. He understood how the story ended for him.

He says, I'm ready now to be offered up. He says, I've run my race. He says, I've kept the faith. I'm ready to have it closed off and finished.

[33 : 25] And Paul, here he is, looking at the reality of his circumstances, and instead of being overwhelmed and discouraged by the fact that he's in prison, he writes with a joy and a note of thankfulness.

I love what you see later on in verse 13. And skipping to 13 doesn't mean that I won't preach the remaining verses, but just kind of reference. So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is for your what?

Glory. Hey, guys, pick it up. It's good. And what God is doing in allowing me, Paul, to suffer, it's for you.

So let's apply the truth to our own lives. And there are three little closing thoughts that I want to leave with you here as we kind of work our way through. I want you to understand that for some, our suffering and challenge may well be for God's glory and our good, and we ought to hold it as a prize.

In other words, some of the heartaches and difficulties that you are going through is not something to be ashamed and overwhelmed with, but to recognize that God's in the detail and he's doing something good.

[34 : 32] Are you listening to me? Most of you here have not come to grips with the reality of it, but everybody look up so you don't miss it.

Getting old will probably be the hardest lap you run. And if you're not learning how to run for Jesus now, getting old will be the hardest one you run.

I would suggest that in the midst of the hardship and difficulties that you're enduring in this present day, you stop and realize that God is doing a good thing in your life and that you are privileged to suffer for the sake of growth and the sake of testimony.

Secondly, I want you to understand that suffering brings spiritual growth so that you can serve others and they go together.

They go together. 2 Corinthians 1, verse 4 says this. Interesting little connection. He says, hey, listen. He says that we are to comfort one another with the same comfort we've received.

[35 : 50] When do we need comfort? When do we need comfort? Hey, we do not need comfort when everything's going zippity-doo-dah, zippity-way. You know, you follow that?

We need comfort when the wheels are coming off and we're not sure what's happening and then we find that God is sufficient. You know what I want to do?

I want to talk with people who know God's sufficient that are veterans of the chase. I don't want some rookie telling me it's going to be okay. I want someone who has been knee-deep in alligators and understood that God's brought them through and they understand hardship and they understand heartache and they know that God is sufficient in those things and I'm not put off when I listen to that kind of guy.

So, beloved, in the midst of your suffering, God's teaching you something and secondly, God's in the process of preparing you to bless somebody else. Can we, in the midst of suffering, decide that we're going to take the world's way out?

I see it all the time. And when you take the world's way out, here's what happens. You'll end up 50.

[37 : 05] You'll end up 60. You'll end up 70. And you're going to keep on wondering, why am I taking basic Christianity 101? Because here's the nice thing about the Father.

He will keep on bringing you back to introductory courses until you decide, all right, all right, all right, I'll do it. Now, you have to suck it up and kind of move up the food chain.

Do you understand that? And so, if we're going to end up being like Paul, we have to be willing to kind of take the hardship to get there and begin saying, listen, Lord, I understand you're doing something in my life and I'm going to be yielded to it.

I said three. There's a third thing. And this morning as we listen to Paul talking about suffering, I want you to understand that for the believer, suffering is the path of growth and maturity.

On the other side, suffering is the means whereby God gets the attention of those who do not know Christ to bring them to the point of seeing their despair and their need for Jesus.

[38 : 13] I'll never forget, I'm trying to think of who it was, but that helps you for me to say that. I'm trying to remember who it was, but here's the point. I'll never forget, he said this. He says, everybody's one heart attack away from being open to the gospel.

I've found that to be true. Hospitals are my favorite places. Truthfully, do you know why? Because when a person's life is coming unwrapped and they're not sure whether the next moment is going to be death, they're listening.

A couple weeks ago, Larry DeBate, that's Denise Harless' dad, came to know Christ. I think he's 78. No, he's 80 years old. He had a heart attack three, four weeks ago, and he said it became a wake-up call.

It kind of opened his eyes to realize that he was afraid to die. And the gospel began to make sense to him. And then he sat there and he wrestled in his own heart.

He developed into a very bitter person. How many of you understand what bitterness looks like? He was struggling with bitterness. And he had to sit there and wrestle in his own mind, do I want to trust in Christ as my personal Savior or do I want to remain bitter and angry to all those who've hurt me in the past?

[39 : 35] And here's what he did. He said, I want Jesus. I want Jesus. And so I've got to tell you something. You may be sitting here this morning and you're a believer and you're wondering, what's going on?

Well, God's in the process of helping you grow. You may be sitting here and you don't know Christ and here's what's going on. God is using circumstances to break down the hardness of your life and bring you to the point of seeing that apart from Jesus, there is no remedy and there is no salvation. Let's close in prayer. As we're praying this morning, I want to remind you that the purpose of preaching is to bring you to the point of saying yes or no to God.

And I have no doubt that there are some of you here this morning as believers that as you stop and think about the life that you've been living, you mark it, but there's some challenge, there's some heartache. And my question to you is, how have you been responding to that heartache?

Fussing and fuming, kicking with God, or are you saying, Lord, I want to grow, bring it on, because I want to be more like Jesus. And if you're sitting here and you've had a battle with Christ over the suffering that he has placed on your plate, today might be the day for you to humble yourself and

say, Lord, I've got to stop acting and thinking like this, and I want you to be in control.

[41 : 04] If you're willing to do that and say that, I just ask that you slip your hand up and go ahead and share that with me. Lord, I want you to be in control. Yes. I am done messing with this.

Yes. Yes. I want you to work. Yes. Anybody else? Yes. There may be some of you here today that the truth of the matter is, is you have never come to the place that you have trusted Christ as the Savior of your life.

Your pride is interfered. And this morning you want to humble yourself and say, I don't have all the answers, but I know I need Jesus. And if that's the need of your heart, I want you to humble yourself and just slip your hand up and say, that's me.

I need Jesus. Father, work among us that you produce the peaceable fruit of righteousness in the lives of believers, and you draw those who need Christ to the cross.

We ask this in your precious name. Amen. I'm going to ask that we stand as we sing together, and if God's laid a matter on your heart that you need to care for publicly, would you come forward as we close our time this morning?

[42 : 22] Let's stand and sing. Jesus, draw me ever nearer As I labor through the storm You have called me to this passage And I'll follow Though I'm warm May this journey Bring a blessing May I rise On wings of pain And at the end of my heart's testing

With your life rest Let me live Jesus, guide me Through the tempest Keep my spirit Keep my spirit Stayed and sure When the midnight When the midnight Bees the morning Let me love you Even more May this journey May this journey Bring a blessing May I rise May I rise On wings of pain May I rise

My heart's testing With your likeness Let me wait Let the treasures Of the trial Form within me As I know And at the end of This long passage Let me leave them At your throne May this journey Bring a blessing May I rise On wings of red

And at the end of My heart's testing With your likeness Let me wait May this journey Bring a blessing May I rise On wings of red And at the end of My heart's testing With your likeness That you wait To wait piano plays softly piano plays softly piano plays softly piano plays softly piano plays softly piano plays softly piano plays softly