

Philippians 3:7-11 “Suffering in Christ: That I May Know Him”

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 June 2025

Preacher: Bill Nash

[0 : 00] If you're here to see Jesus, to somehow, somehow, know Him more, to know Him better, you can't see. Let's pray. Father, we want to see Jesus. We want to see Him high and lifted up. And so, Father, by Your Spirit, by Holy Spirit, open a way, blaze a trail so that we can see Jesus, a trail to the foot of the cross to see the face of our Savior in a clear way, that will fill our souls, that will calm our hearts this day, and that Your peace will wash over us. We want to know Him. Take us to Him. In Jesus' name, amen. Sadness, loneliness, addiction, anxiety, poverty, infertility, miscarriage, injury, wayward children, abuse, slander, betrayal, persecution, prejudice, disease, disabilities, divorce, depression, terminal diagnosis, death. So begins the last chapter in our current book by Matt Smethurst. It's a chapter on pain and suffering. He goes on to say this. He said, the most tragic thing about this list is that it's not exhaustive, not even close. I will say this. The thing about that list, you and I can be sailing along, right, in our life. Maybe the name of our ship is The Blessed Life, right? We're just sailing along. We know the love of Jesus, right? We rehearse it a lot. The sermon series this summer, right, is on a union with Christ. And that may even comfort us, right? We're just sort of sailing along. He in us, we in Him. What happens to Him happens to us, right? The things we've been talking about the past few weeks. Then life gets interrupted.

I can go back and read the list again, but I think you know, right? Life gets interrupted. For followers of Jesus, these interruptions, let's call them storms of life, are to be embraced.

We're to embrace these storms. How? And let me tell you why, though, first. Because it's in the storms of life, then like no other time that you can know Jesus deeper. You can experience His peace like no other time. And in fact, suffering can become sacred waters for a follower of Jesus. Now how? How does that happen? Okay, before we dig in too much, this morning, how about just for this morning? Let's think of our union with Christ as an epic sea voyage on a sailing ship. And like every great epic voyage, your voyage has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And every great voyage has a destination. And every great voyage has turning points. Some of them are storms, right? Some of them are difficult. I can go back and read the list. We know those turning points. When storms like sea billows just sort of roll in. We know that. Life gets interrupted. Those are turning points.

And each storm, pain and suffering, will drive you in one of two directions. And the thing about the storm, the pain and suffering, the trouble, the tribulations, the list, is that you will never be the same. You'll go in one of two directions, but you'll never be the same. And every great sea epic, right?

Every great story, the ship has a name. And at the very end, we're going to give our ship a name.

[5 : 08] Our voyage and union with Christ to know him better, we're going to give that ship a name. But let's open our text this morning. It's Philippians 3.

Starting in verse 7. Hear the word of the Lord written. But whatever gain I had, I count as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake, I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith, that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible, I may attain the resurrection from the dead. This is the word of God.

Okay, so when Paul writes this, one thing you need to remember or maybe just think about, he has already known Jesus intimately for nearly 30 years, yet in verse 10 he says, that I may know him. That's at the very heart of who Paul is and that's what we want to capture.

We want to know him. He says everything else is throwaway. Everything else is rubbish. Except to know him. That's it. That's why we exist, to know Jesus. And so our union with Christ is another way of saying knowing him, right? I want us to think about it as an epic voyage. And so let's talk about what every epic voyage has. It has a beginning, middle, and end. Let's talk about the beginning. We're reformed people, right? We have lots of names and labels for everything.

The beginning of your voyage, although I'm leaving out some early steps, you know, the order of salvation, the *ordo salutis*. There's a few things, but I'm just going to pick one for simplicity.

[7 : 35] The beginning of your voyage is called justification, right? Big 50-cent word. But here's what it means. It's an act of God's free grace, right? Where by faith, we receive Christ's perfect record.

He gets our imperfect record. We get his righteousness. He gets our unrighteousness. He lived the life you and I should have lived. He died the death you and I should have died.

Jesus, the Father's wrath was completely poured out on Jesus on the cross. Jesus, the Lord. And by faith and repentance, we repent, right? Because we were born in a world where our voyage, you know the voyage you were on when you were born into this world?

It was a voyage to know yourself. To put yourself on the throne. To follow after you. Your direction was to yourself. To make yourself God. You start out in life. Your voyage is called original sin, is what we like to call it. And your voyage was to self. It was anything, the opposite direction.

You were heading towards yourself this way. And so when God reveals your sin, and sin is making anything other than God your ultimate value and worth. And we had a lifetime of it until God intervenes.

[9 : 01] And we see our sin and we turn from self and we turn to him and we want to know him. That is what your beginning was. That is the beginning of your voyage to know him.

Now, the end we call glorification in our circles and reformed circles. Presbyterian words. Glorification, your end, where you're going, it's ultimately to behold the face of God. To see Jesus. Just begin to imagine that.

What is it like to see him? To fully know him and him to fully know us. That's our destination.

Everything about us then, body and soul, will reflect the glory of Jesus.

And we will know him. And because of our union with him now, when that day comes, new heavens, new earth. You're in God's presence. You see Jesus.

[10 : 05] You're breathing him in. Everything about us, body and soul, will reflect his glory. And because of your union now, then it will be familiar.

You'll know that. You'll know his face. But forever and forever, his face and his presence, you will continue to know deeper and deeper.

And it will become more glorious and more glorious. That's our end. You know your beginning and you know your end. But we live in the middle. Now, one thing.

Take a look at this passage. This describes our glorification. What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived, the things God has prepared for those who love him.

That's our end. Now the middle. We call it sanctification. Rather than an act of God's grace, free grace, it's a work of God's free grace. So it's this idea that we live in the middle.

[11 : 06] We're on this voyage and it takes time. And the purpose of this time, the Holy Spirit uses it. All the things of your voyage, everything you go through, is designed for you to know Jesus.

Everything else is throwaway in your life other than knowing him. And see, we are made more and more into the image of Jesus. We die more and more to self.

We continue to turn away from self. We die to self. We pick up our cross and we follow Jesus. And we see the fruit of righteousness showing up in our lives. And a way to think about the time in the middle is that it's like a process of taking, if we're going to talk about union with Christ.

Union with Christ is an objective reality. Reality. Right? And then all of your life in the middle is taking that objective reality and through subjective experience, realizing that union.

Realizing the love of Jesus more and more. That's the process you and I are on. It's an adventure. It's the voyage of knowing Jesus.

[12 : 19] And so even after 30 years of knowing Jesus, you go, I want to know him. That's the voyage that you and I are on. I think a great picture of this is *Chronicles of Narnia*.

We have Chronicles of Narnia fans out here. I mean, we're Presbyterian. Everybody is, right? Yes. Excellent. So I have this book. It's called The Family Guide to Narnia.

There's a great passage at the very end of it. Sort of pulls everything together. Right? The Chronicles of Narnia, it's a picture of life.

What we go through, that voyage, that adventure of dying to self and the land that we're going to. Eventually, all of that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Chronicles of Narnia does a great job with that sort of motif.

Here we go. This is from Family Guide to Narnia. The last battle, the final book in the Chronicles of Narnia, Peter and Lucy and the others are very confused.

[13 : 20] They have just witnessed the complete destruction of Narnia. And yet they now find themselves in a land very like it, only better. Lord Diggory is the one to grasp the situation.

Listen, Peter, when Aslan, Aslan is the lion, it's the Christ figure in the story. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of.

But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia, which has always been here and always will be here.

You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures have been drawn into the real Narnia through the door.

And the door is a capital D, right? Jesus. It was the unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right foot on the ground and neighed and then cried, I have come home at last.

[14 : 25] This is my real country. I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life. Though I never knew it till now. The reason why we love the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a lot like this.

And then he said, come further up. Come further in. Your epic voyage. Our epic voyage has a destination.

Our destination is to know Jesus. That's our destination. Every day of our voyage in the middle is to know Jesus. It's a voyage further up and further into the love of Jesus.

And life in the middle is full of cross pressures. There's all kinds of things coming at us all the time. They're designed to entice us away from knowing Jesus.

Paul calls them garbage and rubbish. Right? He's trying. These are all throwaway things in our lives that are coming to take us off course. The Greek mythology. In Greek mythology they're called sirens.

[15 : 36] The siren songs are designed to sort of take us off course and go after those. Jesus warned us. He said it's the cares of the world. Deceitfulness of riches.

The desires for other things. And so that's true. Life in the middle is a battle. And so we are on this epic voyage on a sailing ship.

And it's not a cruise ship. It's a battleship. It's a battle to know Jesus better and better. A battle to go further up and further into the love of Jesus.

The love of the Trinity. Right? To go into and know Jesus greater and greater. The battle is to go further up and further in.

In our tradition it's called keeping your heart. Because this is a battle to know Jesus. This is a battle to know Jesus. We call it, you know, the Puritans called it keeping your heart. Another term is spiritual formation.

[16 : 36] But the Puritans went to Proverbs 4. Because the call during your voyage in the middle is to know him. And it's this though.

Keep your heart with all vigilance. That's what we do. We keep our heart with all vigilance. For from it flow the springs of life. So this is keeping your heart.

You might hear spiritual formation. But this is what we do to know him. You keep your heart.

There's this great analogy. I remember reading this about 20 years ago.

John Ortberg was doing an interview. And he was talking about how do you keep your heart? How do you keep your heart in a world where there's like all kinds of cross pressures. There's difficulties. There's siren songs.

There's so many things just taking our attention all the time. How do you keep your heart? And the whole article was on spiritual formation. But he said this.

[17 : 32] He said, knowing Jesus is like a voyage on the water. You need to see the difference between a motorboat, a raft, and a sailboat.

That's what he said. He said, in a motorboat, I'm in charge. I determine how fast we're going to go and in what direction. Some people approach keeping their hearts or their spiritual life that way. If you're just aggressive enough. If you just have enough quiet times. If I can read the Bible through in a year like ten times. All of that. If I can just work harder. I can make transformation happen on my own.

Usually the result in people becomes legalistic. Then pride starts to creep in. And things get all messed up. Now some people have been burned by this kind of approach.

So they go the opposite extreme and will say, I'm into grace. It's like they're floating on a raft. If you ask them to do anything to further their growth.

[18 : 35] They'll say, hey no man. I'm not into works. I'm into grace. You're getting legalistic with me. You're harshing my grace buzz. You know. So they drift.

And here's the thing. There are too many commands in the scripture for anybody to think that we're called to be passive. But he says, ah. On a sailing ship, however.

I don't move if there's not the wind. My only hope of movement is the wind. I can't control the wind. I don't manufacture the wind.

Jesus talks about Holy Spirit blowing like the wind. But there is a role for me to play. And part of it has to do with what I need to discern. A good sailor will discern where is the wind at work.

How should I set the sails? Keeping your heart. Being vigilant. Is like sailing. The way to know Jesus.

[19 : 38] The way to know Jesus. Is you trim your sails on this voyage. And what are the ways that you trim your sails? How do you go further up and further in the love of Jesus?

I'm going to say there are three things. Okay. And the first one has three things in it. The first way that we go further up and further in to knowing Jesus.

Right. Is this. We are. In our tradition. We are a word centric people. And so the way that we know God is how he has revealed to himself in God his word.

And so we slow down. And we open his word. And we approach his word prayerfully. And we read with pen and hand and paper.

Because we want to read his word and we want to contemplate. The Puritans called it meditating. But let's just stay away from that word because it means a lot of different things right now.

[20 : 47] Contemplate. We contemplate what we're reading. So read less scripture. And contemplate more. And as you read the Holy Spirit, the wind blows.

And we are led into prayer. And we end up praying God's words back to him. We end up praying and confessing sin as we see ourselves in scripture. And we find out that. And we see all that sin revealed.

And so we end up praying. So it's, some people have labeled it the Reformed Triangle. Actually, the Reformation Triangle. It's God's word, contemplation, and prayer.

And if you did sort of a Venn diagram with circles, the thing right in the middle would be called keeping your heart. Right? Where all the overlap. This is how you keep your heart vigilantly.

That's number one. Right? God's word. Contemplation and prayer. Number two is the body of Christ. Connecting to the body of Christ.

[21 : 49] There's a word that's used in chapter one of Philippians and then later in chapter three in our text. Paul says this because in verse five of chapter one.

Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. Right? All these prayers are being generated. And he talks about partnership. And then later on in chapter three, the word for sharing is the same word.

And the reason why it's helpful to think about that is that word is a business term. And if you've ever gone into business, especially if you have a partner, the whole thing about owning a business is it's your life.

You own a business and you're in it with a partner. And you're invested money and time.

Everything's invested in it. And D.A. Carson mentions this, that the heart of true fellowship is self-sacrificing conformity to a shared vision.

And so when we partner together, when we connect with each other, we share a vision. And we have self-sacrificing conformity for that vision. And that vision is to know Jesus.

[22 : 58] It's the main thing. To know Jesus. Why do we want you to be in a grace group? Because that is one of the environments. It's one of the ways that we abide.

It's one of the ways that we trim our sail. Because together we want to know Jesus. That's why we breathe. We want to know him.

To go further up and further up and further into the love of Jesus. So that's number two, right?

Number one, the Reformation Triangle.

Prayer, contemplation. And the word, you know, that whole cycle. Second, connecting to the body of Christ. Number three, suffering.

The storms of life. Suffering is how we know Jesus. Suffering can become very sacred waters, sacred seas.

[23 : 59] The trials and tribulations. The trials and tribulations. The suffering. The list, right? And storms will never leave you the same. All the difficulties, all the pain, all of it will never leave you the same.

And each storm that you experience will drive you in one of two directions. You will either go further up and further into the love of Jesus.

Or it will drive you further away. The sort pithy saying is that you will either get bitter or better as a result of the storms. But no matter if we talk about any of the three areas of how you trim your sails, how you discern the moving of the spirit in your life, whether it's through the Reformation Triangle, through community, or through suffering, you have to keep in mind your destination.

Reformation, always. It is to know Jesus. There's a great quote from Union with Christ. I think that's my favorite book that we've been reading. Rankin-Wilburn says this, the means of abiding.

I put in brackets how you trim your sails. The means of abiding, right? This is how. He says this.

And abiding, right?

[25 : 18] It's making your home in Jesus, that he becomes everything. The means of abiding will only compel you to the degree that you prize what they enable.

Communion with God. Union with Jesus. Knowing him. That's what they're designed to do. Keller says, Tim Keller, and nothing can cause you to lose heart like suffering.

I love that first line because it actually, when we talk about suffering, one of the, you know, you can either get bitter or better. Many people have sort of lowered the life raft, got in their boat, and just took off away from God.

Many of us don't do that, but we lose heart. It's painful. If you've ever experienced any pain, it's just disorienting. And we lose heart.

Nothing can cause you to lose heart like suffering, but neither can anything lead you into God's heart like suffering can. If you let it, suffering can drive you like a nail into the heart of God, right?

[26 : 23] Further up and further in. But here's the big question. How? Okay, so I want you to think now. Maybe we're rolling out a map, right?

We're on this voyage. We're on a sailing ship. You know, I'm picturing it's the 1800s and these giant sailing ships, right? We're just, and we pull out this map. And it just dawned on me this morning.

Let's think of it as a treasure map, right? We just pull out this map. And on this map, we're looking at our voyage. It had a beginning. We know it has an end. And we're sort of like the mall map.

You are here, right? In the middle. And you're looking at it. And many times, the you are here part is during suffering. And let me encourage you.

This map analogy, don't pull it out for the first time when you start to go through suffering. It'll be harder. But you want to pull out this map often. And you want to rehearse your beginning.

[27 : 23] You want to think about that. And you want to rehearse your end. Because your beginning and end inform the middle. And so what I mean by that is, here's what your beginning tells you.

It tells you God loves you. It tells you Jesus loves you with every ounce of his being. Again, Tim Keller.

Father, when things go wrong, one of the ways you lose your peace is that you think maybe you are being punished. I love how he said lose your peace, right?

Losing heart. Losing your peace. How do you have peace in the middle of pain? One of the ways you lose your heart is that you think maybe you are being punished.

But look at the cross. Think of your beginning. Look at the cross. All the punishment fell on Jesus. Or you may think maybe God doesn't care. But look at the cross.

[28 : 28] You pull out the map. It's a treasure map. You know, and the pearl of great price. It's everything. It's all wrapped up here. And you look at your beginning. And if you're experiencing pain, you know it can't be because he doesn't care.

And you know it can't be because you're being punished. And you want to take heart. You want that to sink deep into your soul. And you want to rehearse and rehearse and rehearse that. Your beginning tells you that you're loved.

Your end tells you that the best is yet to come. So when Paul is talking about suffering in Philippians 3, he's doing it with the imagery of Jesus and Isaiah 53.

He knows Jesus was a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. And Paul wants to partner with Jesus. He wants to know everything about him.

He's all in. Including, if Jesus suffered, I will suffer. And I know the purpose. So that I can go deeper, further up, and further in to the happy land of the Trinity above all worlds.

[29 : 37] To experience the love of Jesus. And so Paul would say, there's no suffering too great for the joy and the privilege of knowing Jesus.

I dare say that our suffering can become sacred waters. Maybe it's best to think about that as you enter into it. No matter what it is.

You have your own list. It's a way further up and further in. Let this passage in Psalm 63 become real to you.

Meditate on it often. Because your steadfast love is better than life. Think about that. Better than life. Everything else is throw away.

Except to know the love of Jesus. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. Your suffering becomes sacred waters as you rehearse the love of Jesus.

[30 : 44] I remember so clearly when we were going through all that we went through with our special needs son. I've brought him up many times. But this is the thing that I really remember. It was very painful.

Very difficult. Having to place him out of the home. Everything about that. God spoke about as audibly as possible to my beautiful, wonderful wife Sherry. He said to her, I love Billy more than you do.

And I love you and Bill. That our suffering and the pain became sacred waters. Because we know the love of Jesus. You know, and then thinking through the best is yet to come.

The final resurrection. The new heavens, new earth. To finally breathe in Jesus in a great way.

That's our destiny. That's the treasure. Where we're all heading. As followers of Jesus.

Jesus. Let's go back to Narnia just briefly. At the unicorn's call, the seven kings and queens and their friends began running deeper and deeper into the country. But no matter how far they go, they find that there is always more ahead.

[31 : 51] And over and over, the call is heard. Further up and further in. All their life in this world and all their adventures, all their voyages in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page.

Now at last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story which no one on earth has read. Which goes on forever in which every chapter is better than the last. Even when it's the end, the voyage will continue further up and further in to know him.

Okay, so we're wrapping things up. I told you we need a name for our sailing ship, right? We need a name. This voyage that you and I are on, further up and further in to know Jesus.

Everything else is throw away, right? So I was reading this book and in it was mentioned this memoir that was written by a woman doctor that was a missionary in Africa.

At some point, middle of last century, 1940s or 50s, something like that. She wrote this memoir. Listen to her list. You know the list at the beginning of the sermon, all the difficulties?

[33 : 03] Listen to her list, okay? A deep-seated struggle with singleness, captured by rebel soldiers, witnessing months of wickedness and unspeakable atrocities, rape, a critical illness, loneliness, fear, considerable pain and weakness associated with polymyalgia, resulting in total dependence on others.

And then the final stages in which Alzheimer's took hold of her. These were some of the many problems and hardships she experienced in her life. Of course, there were many struggles.

She sometimes rebelled against God's will for her life. Self-pity, questioning and complaining were responses she had to fight through. Yet the author, Helen Rosvear, uses the word enough as a title for her book in which she looks back on her life.

Had she had enough of suffering and deprivation? Did the word enough describe her relief that this hard life was all over and she could retire in comfort?

No, not at all. Enough actually describes the way in which in all these different experiences, however horrible, the Lord Jesus was enough for her.

[34 : 21] Despite all she had gone through, Helen wrote, he really was enough for happiness and contentment. And in many of her struggles, she entered into a deeper and more satisfying relationship with the Lord.

She went further up and further in. You and I are on an epic and noble voyage deeper up and deeper in into the love and knowledge of Jesus.

Knowing him is our destination. He's our treasure. It's a treasure map. It has a beginning, middle, and end. Our role in the middle is to discern the Holy Spirit, right?

Trim our sails, right? Word, contemplation, and prayer. Connecting with other believers and entering in the sacred waters of pain and suffering.

Because it's all about knowing him. So let's name the sailing battleship that we're on. Let's give it a name. Because when life is interrupted with pain and suffering and everything about life is engulfed by a storm, it is then that we have all we need in Jesus.

[35 : 27] He's all we need. Our ship's name? Enough. Enough. Jesus is enough. That we may know him.

The power of his resurrection. Share in his sufferings. Becoming like him in his death. Jesus is enough. And the beauty of this sacrament, where we come to the table, and Jesus left this picture. Is it our treasure map? Okay. It's our treasure map. He left us a beautiful picture. Because in the cup, we see the blood that he shed for us.

In the bread, we see his body offered for us, and that was broken. And so we come to it often. Many times in the storms of life. Many times when things are well.

But we come because we want to see Jesus. The sacraments are designed to point you to Jesus so that you see him and you know him. Amazingly and mysteriously and wonderfully, as you come and take part of this, it's how he reveals himself and how we know him.

[36 : 48] These are the words of the institution of the supper of the Lord. Paul writes them in 1 Corinthians 11. I received from the Lord that which I passed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, take and eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper, he also took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

This do whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you show forth the Lord's death until he comes. And so the truth is, this is a meal designed for those of us on this voyage.

And it becomes sustenance for us. And we ingest and we rehearse the beginning and the end. And it makes sense of the middle for us.

And so we say this, that if you have professed your faith publicly in church, any other setting, this isn't just for Presbyterians, it's for those of you that are just clinging to him for dear life.

[37 : 53] We say welcome. Now, if you're not quite yet on your voyage and you have lots of questions and, you know, rather than taking the bread or the cup, take Jesus.

Think about what he's done for you. Think about maybe where you have fallen short. Because truth is, we know that this isn't for perfect people. We've even repented of our own righteousness.

That's how deep our sin is. Let me pray. Father, meet us in this amazing, beautiful sacrament.

Meet us here. May we see your face. In Jesus' name, we give thanks for this. It's amazing. In Jesus' name, amen.

So, the Lord Jesus, in the same night in which he was betrayed, he took the bread. And when he had given thanks, as we have done in his name this morning, here, now, he took the bread and broke it.

[38 : 56] And he said, this is my body, broken for you. Take and eat all of you. In the same manner, he took the cup.

And after having given thanks, as we have done in his name, he gave it to his disciples and he said, Now, let the ushers help you.

They're going to help you sort of get up and know where to go. Let's meet Jesus in this amazing, beautiful sacrament.

Father, thank you. You're kind to meet us here. You're kind to reveal yourself. Let us come with anxious, happy, anxious to be in your presence, happy hearts.

And even if we're heavy right now, Lord, by faith, we will seek your face. In Jesus' name, amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.