

How to Suffer Well

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: 12 May 2019

Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 0 0] All right. Well, as Carl said and prayed earlier, we're grateful for those of you women who are mothers, whether you have given birth to children yourself biologically, or whether you've helped raise children in our family of faith, those of you who are spiritual mothers.

And one of my most pressing concerns for those of you who are mothers is this question. How do I pass on my spiritual heritage, this relationship with God to my children? How do I pass on this spiritual heritage? How do I pass on this relationship with God that I have with my children? Now, this is a question that's really important. Whether you're a biological mother of children or a spiritual mother of children, you're going to want to know how do we do this? And this past week, I was reading parts of a letter that were written by a woman named Ann Bradstreet. Ann Bradstreet was a 17th century poet. And near the end of her life, she wrote to her children a letter for that purpose, to pass on that spiritual heritage, that legacy to her children. And this letter contained a summary of the wisdom that she wanted to pass along to them. And I was reading an article that put me onto this letter in the first place. And the author of that article summarized one of the main themes of Ann Bradstreet's letter. And the author wrote that one of Ann's themes was this, spiritual mothers give their children a theology of suffering. Spiritual mothers give their children a theology of suffering. And the author explained it like this, Ann wrote to her children about her years of infertility. The death of loved ones, the loss of her home in a fire, and chronic illness that plagued her throughout her life. Whether we like it or not, our children and grandchildren will suffer in this lifetime. Ann wasn't content to let her loved ones walk through trials without a solid foundation to stand on. And that's really important. I think one huge error in parenting in our culture is that we think that mothering consists of making sure your children never suffer. Whether they're under your care or after they're out of your care. And what Ann understood is, my children are going to suffer and so are my grandchildren. And so being a mother, she knows that if you're a mother, you are in a unique position, both to model and to pass along a theology of suffering to your children.

You know they're going to face suffering because many of you are facing suffering right now. And I was thinking about the sermon, I think I'd preach this regardless of whether it's Mother's Day or not, because as a family, as a church family, we have been, from my perspective, we've been in a season of unusual suffering, of unusual weariness. I've just kind of sensed that from a lot of us.

So many of us have very fresh, very painful stories of disease, of death, of conflict, of disappointment. That's true in our church from talking with some other local pastors. It's not just us. I feel like God has us in a season right now. And so it's really important that in this season, you and I know how to suffer well. And how do we, whether we're spiritual mothers or spiritual fathers, how do we pass along to our children, how they too can suffer well? Well, we're going to discover that the way you suffer is going to depend entirely. The way that you suffer is going to depend on what kind of a relationship you have with God. What kind of a relationship you have with God. Now there are two ways that you can relate to God. And so this sermon is going to be about there are two ways that you can relate to God.

And we'll look at each in turn. And we're going to see these two ways of relating to God illustrated in Job chapters one and two. And David read those for us at the beginning of the service.

[4 : 2 6] So Job chapters one and two, turn there with me. If you're using one of the blue Bibles our ushers handed out, that'll be on page 417. This is a longer passage and that's why we read it earlier.

But in these two chapters, we're going to learn that how we relate to God determines whether we will suffer well in times of weariness, in times of hardship, in times of sorrow.

So there are two ways to relate to God in Job chapters one and two. There are two kinds of relationship with God. So here's the first kind of relationship with God. It's a distant transaction with

God. A distant transaction with God. Now maybe you've never thought of your relationship with God in those terms. Maybe you've never thought about it consciously. But perhaps you relate to God in this way. You and the Lord have an unspoken deal. You've almost got a business relationship with him.

If you wanted a symbol of that relationship, it's a handshake. You've got a good handshake going with God. You know, you do your part of the deal. God does his part of the deal. Each of you meet the conditions of the deal. You live a moral life. You're a good person. And then the Lord does his part. He gives you resources and relationships that bring your family, you and your family, a sense of security.

You work hard. You fulfill your religious obligations, or at least the ones that you'd prefer to fulfill. And the Lord gives you resources and relationships that fill your life with a sense of glory.

[6 : 05] Now notice that this is, in Job chapters one and two, this is exactly what Satan believes that Job's relationship with God looks like. That's what Satan is saying about Job.

In chapter one, verses nine through 11, here's what Satan asks God. Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side?

And then again, chapter two, verses four and five, Satan argues, all that a man has, he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.

So in other words, Satan believes that Job has a distant transaction with the Lord. He's got a handshake deal. God provides the things that keep Job and his family and his health secure. And Job responds by living a righteous life and worshipping God. This is the mindset of a handshake relationship. God gives me things that bring me and my family security. I, in turn, honor God with a righteous and religious life. He scratches my back, I scratch his. Now, Satan is arguing that Job not only seeks security this way, he seeks glory this way as well. In chapter one, verse 10, Satan tells God, you have blessed the work of his hands and his possessions have increased in the land. So words like blessing and increase, those are words in the Old Testament that were associated with honor.

[7 : 47] They describe a man of great status in his community, a man who is really living the good life together with his family. So again, Satan says that this is a distant transaction. God provides the things that supply Job and his family with glory. Job responds by living a righteous life and worshipping God. This, again, is the mindset of a handshake relationship. God gives me things that bring me and my family glory. I, in turn, honor God with a righteous and religious life. So now, Satan is challenging the Lord. What happens when your handshake relationship with Job falls apart?

What happens when that relationship falls apart? What happens, God, when you don't hold up your end of the bargain? Satan says in chapter one, verse 11, stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face. And he says it again in chapter two, verse five. That is the mindset of a handshake relationship. If God fails to provide the things that I need for security and glory.

Then I'm going to curse him to his face. Satan is right. That is the mindset of a distant transaction. That is the mindset of a handshake relationship with God. That is the pagan way of relating to God and suffering. That's the way that the people of the nations around Israel, that's the way they related to their gods. That's how you would relate to the Baals and the Asherah. Now let's dive deeper into the response that this mindset produces. Not many people have the boldness to, you know, I don't know, climb up on a rooftop and scream curses at the sky when they're suffering. I mean, how many of you have ever done that? Probably none of you. I don't know. Maybe you've got a good story you can tell me afterwards about that. But Job's wife, in her response in chapter two, verse nine, Job's wife shows us the emotional core, what's driving that dramatic pagan response. So here's what she tells Job.

Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die. Now, I don't want to come down too hard on Job's wife here. Remember that she has been through this same massive suffering. The only thing that she's not dealing with right now is all the physical pain from the sores in his body that Job is dealing with.

But she has had to go through losing everything herself. The thing is though, when pressure gets to you, what's inside of you will come out of you. When pressure gets to you, what's inside of you will come out of you. And the emotional response reveals what is in your heart. Emotions are a horrible guide to truth. And they're not always a good way to make decisions. But they're an absolutely

steadfast, reliable guide to what's in your heart. What are your real desires? What's really driving you?

[11 : 02] suffering produces emotions. Suffering reveals what kind of relationship that you have with God. And Job's wife is urging him toward two emotional responses. And, you know, she says, do you still hold fast your integrity? In other words, why are you still holding up your end to the deal?

God hasn't held up his end. Why are you still holding up your end? The first response is anger toward God.

Anger toward God. Curse God. That's what she tells him. And maybe you have done that in a moment of rage. You've yelled curses and insults at God.

But maybe for you, maybe you're just not that dramatic a person. Maybe the fire of anger is not a blazing inferno. It's more like this smoldering bed of coals. Maybe your anger takes the shape of bitterness, which is anger drawn out over time, sowed in a soil, producing a bitter crop.

Inside your heart, you're asking God questions like this. How could you do this to me? Is this how you repay me?

[12 : 25] I thought you loved me. Now, Scripture and the Psalms especially are filled with questions towards God.

People questioning God, but they're questioning him out of confusion. They're questioning him out of lament while still maintaining faith in his goodness. The questions driven from bitterness and anger, they are questions of challenge and frustration and irritation and resentment.

God has broken the handshake deal that he has with you. He has treated you unfairly. He has treated you unjustly. That's the response that this mindset produces.

A relationship of distant transaction. It may lead you to respond with anger toward God when you are suffering. And that's one emotional response.

Here's a second one that we see in Job's wife. A second response is despair. So a first response is anger. A second response is despair. She doesn't simply say curse God.

[13 : 37] What she says is curse God and die. Life is no longer worth living. Why go on?

God has broken his handshake deal with you, Job. Now your life is an utter vacuum. It is evacuated of all security and all glory. You can't trust anything anymore.

And boy, you can trust God least of all. Maybe some of you have wished for death in a moment of black despair. Or maybe for you, the despair comes out in a milder form.

It comes out drawn out over time. This despair plays out as detachment. Inside your heart, you're saying things like this.

It is what it is. Other people have it worse. God doesn't have anything to do with this.

[14 : 41] This detachment, really almost a stoic resignation, we use that to avoid coming face to face with a God that we no longer trust.

God has broken the handshake deal that he had with you. A relationship of distant transaction may lead you to respond with despair toward God when you are suffering.

So together, these twin responses of anger and despair, and that's just from this passage. There are other ways to respond as well, but those are the ones that we see here.

But these twin responses of anger and despair, they reveal that we are still relating to God the way that a pagan would. We still have this mindset of a distant transaction with God.

You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours. This sort of mindset, this sort of response, they have real consequences for people who are suffering.

[15 : 46] Chapter 2, verse 11. We see that three of Job's friends arrive to comfort Job in his suffering. But these friends, they too are, you find out over the course of the book, Job's friends are also locked into this mindset of a distant transaction.

They're convinced that God is trustworthy, he is faithful, he would never break his end of the deal. Job must have broken his end first. Job must have done some really wicked stuff.

In chapter 22, one of Job's friends goes so far as to slander poor suffering Job to his face. Wow, you know, here's a great example of how to comfort someone when they're suffering.

Is not your evil abundant? There is no end to your iniquities. For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing, and stripped the naked of their clothing.

You have given no water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry. The man with power possessed the land, and the favored man lived in it. You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.

[16:54] Therefore, snares are all around you, and sudden terror overwhelms you, or darkness so that you cannot see, and a flood of water covers you. There's a reason Job calls them miserable comforters, right?

Boy, they really did a lot more harm than good. A relationship of distant transaction with God, that is going to lead you to find fault in someone who suffers.

You're going to find fault in someone who suffers, whether that someone is you, or whether that someone is a family member or a friend. So that's one consequence of this distant transaction relationship.

A second consequence of this mindset, it's found in the person of Job himself, because even Job slips into this pagan mindset at times. And that's the thing we see, is that those who are genuine followers of God, sometimes we still have bits of that mindset still left in us, that need to be cleaned out of us.

And Job slips into this pagan mindset, as his suffering wears on, and his dialogues with his friends wear on. He tells his friends in chapter 10, I loathe my life. I will give free utterance to my complaint.

[18:10] I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. I will say to God, do not condemn me. Let me know why you contend against me. Job is demanding an explanation from God.

Job is speaking as though the great tragedy of all of this, as though the great tragedy is simply his ignorance. Job is speaking as though finding answers, that's what he needs.

Job's ignorance is not the tragedy of this book. You know what the real tragedy of the book of Job is? The mindset, the response, the consequences of a handshake relationship with God.

Job doesn't need answers. Job needs to lean into a better sort of relationship with the Lord. There is a better relationship with the Lord.

If this handshake relationship, this distant transaction with God, if that is a pagan way of relating to him, maybe that's raising in your mind a question. What is the Christian way of relating to the Lord?

[19:18] How does a genuine disciple of Jesus relate to the Lord? And the answer is a relationship of intimate union with God. Intimate union with God. If that first kind of relationship was like a handshake, the second kind of relationship is like an embrace.

It's like an embrace. Let me show you what the mindset of this relationship is like. Because there is one man who held this mindset perfectly, who had the most perfect, intimate union with God in suffering.

And this man's name is Jesus. He is the son of God. On the night before Jesus was crucified. Just like anyone else, when the pressure got to him, what's inside of Jesus came out of him.

His mindset was revealed to us in the garden of Gethsemane. In Mark chapter 14, we read these words. They went to a place called Gethsemane.

Gethsemane. And he said to his disciples, Sit here while I pray. And he took with him Peter and James and John and began to be greatly distressed and troubled.

[20:39] And he said to them, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. Remain here and watch. And going a little farther, he fell on the ground and prayed that if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.

And he came and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, Simon, are you asleep? Could you not watch one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.

The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. And again, he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again, he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him.

And he came the third time and said to them, Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough. The hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.

[21:52] Rise, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand. I want you to notice. Notice how beautiful the mindset of Jesus is.

Notice Jesus is not a stoic. He doesn't feel this detachment from his suffering. He doesn't downplay it. He doesn't act like it's no big deal. Others have it worse. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

He doesn't deny the sorrow. He doesn't deny the misery of it. He comes right out. Verse 33, he says, He is greatly distressed and troubled. He says that right in front of his disciples. He tells them that.

And he tells them in verse 34, My soul is very sorrowful, even to death. He doesn't simply admit, confess his sorrow, his weariness to other people.

Jesus confesses it to God, his Father. He falls on the ground. He prays that the hour of suffering might pass from him. He honestly cries out, Remove this cup from me, the cup of wrath that you and I deserve, that we should have received and drunk down to the dregs for our sin, the punishment from a just God.

[23 : 05] Jesus confesses his sorrow to God and man for the suffering that he is already enduring and that is only going to grow and grow to an unimaginable degree.

Jesus feels and he voices the full weight of misery and pain and weariness, this suffering. But along with that honest confession of sorrow, right alongside it, Jesus has a mindset of childlike dependence on his Father.

Abba. Father. That's what he's crying out. Abba. That's a term of endearment. That's one of the first words a little child can speak, isn't it?

Abba. Abba. His Father is the one that he will go to in his misery. His Father is his only comfort and consolation when everyone around him has failed him.

Jesus will only find rest in his Father's arms and if not there, then he will find rest nowhere at all.

Along with the honest sorrow of a childlike dependence, Jesus has a mindset of surrender.

[24 : 28] Surrender to the will of God. Verse 36, Jesus tells his Father, yet not what I will, but what you will.

Jesus is in the process of bending his human will to align with the will of his Heavenly Father. As one author I've read says, he's melting his will into his Father's will so that he can embrace the cross and go willingly so that he can embrace the shame and pain and misery and death that the cross is going to bring.

Here in Gethsemane, Jesus is fully surrendering to the will of his Father. And Jesus wants his disciples to share that same mindset.

Beginning in verse 37, he challenges his disciples, watch and pray that you do not enter into temptation. They're going to be tempted to abandon the suffering that they're facing.

They're going to be tempted to run away from Jesus. He's challenging his disciples to join him in his confession of sorrow, his childlike dependence, his surrender to God's will. Jesus is encouraging them to find their rest, not in sleeping, not in self-reliance, not in the flesh, but in the spirit, in the same relationship of embrace, of intimate union with God.

[26 : 09] The spirit, that is Jesus' strength. The flesh is weak. The spirit is this, brings this intimate union with God.

The flesh is nothing but a distant transaction. That is the mindset of Jesus Christ. And Job, Job too, he shared some of the same mindset.

And he wasn't perfect as we've seen. He wasn't perfect the way that Jesus was. Job at times would waver between this Christian mindset of intimate union and that pagan mindset of a distant transaction.

But in Job chapters 1 and 2, Job, he just confounds all the expectations, all the reasonable expectations that we might have. Job has a response that is very different from what his wife expected and from what Satan expected.

First, Job responds by affirming it is in fact normal for God to take away from Job the people and possessions that he loves.

[27 : 21] Job is actually affirming that that is normal. In chapter 1, verse 21, Job says, naked I came from my mother's womb and naked shall I return.

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. That's the very first thing we sang when we came in this morning. He gives and takes away.

Blessed be the name of the Lord. Again, Job says in chapter 2, verse 10, shall we receive good from the Lord and shall we not receive evil? Literally, shall we receive good from the Lord, shall we not receive what's bad?

In other words, Job expects that both good things and bad things, disastrous things, both of those are going to come from the Lord. The Lord will give, the Lord will take away the people and possessions he has given.

Naked I came into this world, naked will I depart. Now, understand, those are not words of resignation and detachment. We're going to see that in a moment.

[28 : 24] These aren't stoic words. These are words affirming. What Job is doing is he is normalizing his experience. He is affirming that what has happened to Job is normal and expected. This horrible, disastrous thing is normal. Job doesn't pretend that God has nothing to do with it. Job doesn't wave it off as, well, that's the Sabaeans, that's the Chaldeans, oh, you know, that's just the forces of nature at work.

Job sees God's hand behind all of that suffering and he sees this as normal. Second, in spite of these normalizing words, Job responds by grieving honestly.

Job responds by grieving honestly. It is normal, but it is also awful. He holds on to both truths. In chapter 1, verse 20, we read, Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped.

Now, tearing your robe, shaving your head, we don't really do, well, obviously I did that, but not for the same reasons, right? Those, that shaving of your head, your head and your beard, your face, tearing your robe, that, those were the expected signs of mourning in Job's culture.

[29 : 49] In chapter 2, verse 8, we read that Job is sitting in ashes. Job is not burying things inside of himself. Job is not pretending everything's okay.

That was one good thing about Job's culture was that there wasn't this weird, stoic, macho thing going on. And there wasn't this, you know, inward repression. These are all outward symbols, outward expressions, honest expressions of an inward desolation.

Job, like Jesus, responds to his suffering with open grief. Third, Job responds by refusing to slander God.

He's refusing to slander God. In chapter 1, verse 22, we read, in all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. Chapter 2, verse 10, in all this, Job did not sin with his lips.

Even when Job doesn't comprehend what is happening to him, and by the way, he never is told, given answers for what's happening to him. He never comprehends it. But Job does not accuse God of evil doing.

[31 : 07] Job refuses to slander the character of God, even when the actions of God make no sense to him. Instead of slandering God, Job does something else.

Fourth of all, Job responds by worshiping God, by worshiping God. In chapter 1, verse 20, we read that Job fell on the ground and worshiped, and then in verse 21, he says, blessed be the name of the Lord.

I don't think those were easy words to say. They were agonizing words to say. But Job chose to honor the Lord even in his suffering.

He chose to lean into his relationship with God, that intimate union with God, rather than pulling away from it. Job's response reveals his mindset.

You don't respond like this unless you have a relationship of embrace. This reveals that Job has that intimate union with God.

[32 : 17] So we've seen the mindset of this relationship. We've seen the response of this relationship. And there are consequences to this relationship too. Just like that pagan handshake with God, the Christian embrace of God produces consequences as well.

The consequences of this relationship with God. Here's what it is. This consequence is that the Christian finds contentment and rest in Jesus. The Christian finds contentment and rest in Jesus. In Hebrews chapter 5 we read this about Jesus. In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears to him who is able to save him from death.

That's what we just read about in Gethsemane. And he was heard because of his reverence.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.

And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him. Being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

[33 : 29] Jesus was the perfect high priest. Jesus, he is the one who could perfectly represent you and me before God. Our representative, our mediator.

He represents before God anyone who believes in his name. so Jesus can be a place of perfect rest for you and me in our weakness. We are united with him.

Our union becomes communion as we suffer. And we are welcomed into the presence of God. We read in Hebrews chapter four, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet without sin.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Jesus has been where we've been. Unlike us, Jesus has walked that road perfectly. He has gone through the valley of the shadow of death and he walked it perfectly.

[34 : 44] he can stand before God when we could not. And because we are united with him by faith in Jesus Christ, we too get to enter the presence of God with him.

And we know that Jesus has sympathy. We know that Jesus has a heart of compassion toward us because Jesus has been where we've been. Jesus has felt what you've felt.

Jesus has endured suffering. every one of his disciples must walk the road that Jesus walked. If you are a disciple of Jesus Christ, if you are a Christian, you walk that same road.

And Jesus will be walking it with you. You trace out his descent into shame and misery and death. And he is embracing you in that.

This is part of that J curve that we talked about. You go down into shame and misery and death, but you know what? You don't go down alone because Jesus has been there too. And he will continue to embrace you because in him, united with him, God raises you up to glory and joy and resurrection life.

[36 : 00] there is hope. Jesus is inviting you. Here's what he's inviting you to do. Stop suffering on your own.

Stop suffering at a distance. Stop suffering apart from him. Jesus is inviting you to take your weary soul and yoke yourself to him.

You've been trying to pull a load of grief and misery and you can't pull it. It is wearying. It is exhausting. So here's what Jesus cries out to you in Matthew chapter 11.

Come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me.

For I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. You know why Jesus' yoke is easy and his burden is light?

[37 : 09] Because he's the one who's carrying the burden. He's the one who's pulling. He's the one who's doing the work and you can find rest. That only comes from an intimate union with Jesus Christ, with that deep relationship.

Job, he was longing for a priest and a mediator to come and stand between him and God. And Jesus, he is the fulfillment of all that longing.

In your sorrow, in your shame, in your suffering, in your misery, in your grief, Jesus is inviting you to find rest in him.

Trying to remain faithful and obedient in that is exhausting. But it's not exhausting when Jesus is in there with you.

In that intimate union of being yoked to Jesus, it is in that embrace with Christ that you will suffer well. That's how you suffer well. So how then can you and I help others in their suffering?

[38 : 22] How do you and I turn around and help others who are suffering? How can we pass down to our children a theology of suffering? Parents, this is one of the most important things you can do for your children.

On the one hand, we must avoid the language of distant transaction. You've got to avoid the language of distant transaction when you're speaking to someone who is suffering.

So this means that first of all, we must not minimize anyone's suffering. Do not minimize anyone's suffering. Go look through the Bible. You're not going to see a righteous man or woman in the Bible who goes to someone and says, you know, you're not really suffering that badly.

Tough it out. Other people are going through worse. You know, we're not in the business of comparing my suffering to your suffering. We're not in a suffering contest. Right? There's always somebody who's suffering worse.

You can always point to Job no matter how bad you're suffering. You can always point to a martyr who gave their life for the faith. So we don't minimize anyone's suffering.

[39 : 33] Second, we must be slow to blame the sufferer. We must be slow to blame the sufferer. You know, there are indeed cases and God's word does make it clear that there are some cases where some people are suffering for their sin.

They are under the discipline of God. There are also cases where someone is suffering and then their sinful response makes that suffering worse. We've all seen that too.

There are going to be a time and place to raise those issues. But first, we have to be careful about leading with a spirit of blame because that's what Job's friends did.

They led with a spirit of blame. Third, we must be slow to give tidy answers. We must be slow to give tidy answers.

And that was an error of Job's friends as well. At one point in chapter 13, here's what Job tells them. As for you, you whitewash with lies.

[40 : 37] Worthless physicians are you all. Oh, that you would keep silent and it would be your wisdom. In other words, Job is saying, you guys sound a lot wiser when your mouths are shut. You know, when I come alongside someone who's suffering, here's what I'm not meant to do.

I'm not meant to speak, you know, some nice maxim, some nice cliché that makes me feel better. Oh, buddy, you know, your child died. Well, when God closes the door, he opens a window. Right? You know, that's not gonna help. Right? I, you know, I think a lot of times we say things like that because it makes us feel better, not because we're, not because we have a heart to help the other person.

It's better to be silent. It's better to be silent, to begin the way Job's friends began, to begin with being silent and grieving with him. Read them a psalm.

Find a psalm. That's one of the, that's something I simply do when I'm visiting someone who's suffering. I just sit with them. I hear them out. I read a psalm together with them. I pray with them.

[41 : 39] It's very simple. And that has so much, that's so much more helpful than giving a bunch of clichéd answers. If you are, if you do not, if you, if you, you know, there's gonna be a time for teaching and correction.

That time will come eventually. But when you first approach someone who's suffering, if you don't minimize their suffering, if you avoid blaming the sufferer, if you avoid giving a tidy answer, then you will avoid the language of distant transaction.

On the other hand, it's not enough just merely to avoid that kind of language. You and I must embrace the language of intimate union. We must embrace the language of intimate union.

First, we must acknowledge the suffering. We must acknowledge the suffering. That's what Job's friends did at the first in chapter two, back when they were being good comforters.

They raised their voices and wept, and they tore their robes and sprinkled dust on their heads toward heaven. They entered in Job's world. They grieved and mourned alongside of him.

[42 : 49] Second, we must be patient with the sufferer. Be patient with the sufferer. That's something Job's friends did well at first too. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.

They took time, they waited, they let him speak first when he was ready. They didn't rush the grieving process at first. So be patient with the sufferer.

Grieving takes time. Third, and finally, we must encourage the sufferer to see Christ with them in their suffering. This only works if this person is a Christian, is united with Jesus Christ by faith.

That's, that's, you know, honestly, that is, that's something that is, can be so hard if you're trying to comfort someone who's suffering, who does not believe in Jesus Christ, who's not a disciple, because this is the best thing you can do for them.

Oh, that each and every one of you here would know Jesus. And when you suffer, lean into Jesus. Embrace Jesus on the cross.

[44 : 01] And then these words of comfort would bring rest to your soul. We must encourage the sufferer to see Christ with them in their suffering. We read in Matthew chapter 11 that Jesus is calling everyone who is weary and heavy laden to come to find rest in him.

We must remind them that Jesus too has suffered. Jesus has suffered just as they have. We must encourage them to embrace the cross of suffering alongside Christ.

One of the best things, another really good thing you can do for someone who's suffering is encourage them, sit down and read the account of Jesus in Gethsemane. Read about his betrayal. Read about his trials and his crucifixion. Read about the suffering of Christ. Not to compare yourself with Jesus. But to see that you are tracing out the same path that Jesus went through.

To know that he has been where you've been. Paul calls it in Philippians chapter 3 sharing the sufferings of Christ. We must encourage them to embrace that cross of suffering alongside Christ to find a deep communion with Jesus as we walk that road to Calvary.

[45 : 24] As we look forward just like Jesus did. to God's promise of glory. God's promise of joy. God's promise of resurrection life. Bits of that are going to break through into your life.

And the fullness of it will come beyond the grave. the presence of Christ in our suffering. The fact that God is with us. That is the reason why a true Christian can suffer well.

Back at the beginning I mentioned that letter from Ann Bradstreet that she wrote to her children and she wrote it in her final days as her life was drawing to a close. Here in her own words here is what the difference that the presence of God made to her in her own suffering.

Oft have I thought were I in hell itself and could find there and could there find the love of God toward me it would be a heaven.

And could I have been in heaven without the love of God it would have been a hell to me. For in truth it is the absence and presence of God that makes heaven or hell.

[46 : 32] It is the absence and presence of God that makes heaven or hell. We suffer within a relationship of embrace a relationship of intimate union with God.

It is the presence of God that makes this hell of suffering become a heaven of his blessing. We suffer well when we suffer in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let me pray. Let me pray.