

# Help Others Suffer Wisely & Well

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Preacher: Walt Alexander

[ 0 : 0 0 ] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

I'm going to read three passages that are kind of going to form, frame out this morning, a little bit atypical, but I'll explain more in a moment. 1 Corinthians 12, 26, the Word of God says, If one member suffers, all suffer together.

If one member is honored, all members rejoice together. 1 Peter 1 says, In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 4, verse 16, the following, So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

[ 1 : 2 0 ] For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look, not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Years ago, I read about this story of a lady named Laura Brinkley.

Laura was a missionary in Moscow, Russia. She was 33 years old. And in October 1993, Laura was murdered.

She saw it coming as a missionary, I guess, in a hostile place. She saw it coming and said to her mother on the very last phone call they had together, she said, Mom, if something happens to me, grieve me properly.

But what does it mean to grieve properly? Perhaps to grieve properly means to remember the person who died.

[ 2 : 3 8 ] I mean, isn't the worst thing you can do in your grief or in your life after death is to forget the person who died. But even more importantly, to grieve properly is to remember the person, if they died and feared the Lord, is in heaven.

Right? Their hope of heaven is real. And so to grieve properly is to remember the hope of the resurrection. Right? But we could also add that to grieve properly is to become the better for it.

Tim Keller in his book on suffering says the stakes are high in suffering here. Suffering will either leave you a much better person or a much worse one than you were before.

Trials and troubles in life, which are inevitable, will either make you or break you.

But either way, you will not remain the same. So what does it mean to grieve properly? What does it mean to suffer properly? How do we help others grieve properly?

[ 3 : 5 1 ] How do we help others suffer properly? How do we help others suffer wisely and well? That's where we're going this morning. This is our final message in our series on Job.

And you may be thinking, I thought we got through Job. Not Job again, please. Please. As I said at the beginning of this series, a lot of people preach the book of Job in four sermons.

So they can talk about suffering and tidy it up with a bow. I guess that sounds a little negative to say that about them. I don't think they're necessarily doing that. But it does seem like a little bit of a short sermon for such a long, hard book about suffering.

We wanted this sermon series to be a bit long. Because suffering is long and hard. And there's no quick fixes.

But this message is the last in a series. It's a little bit different. That's why I didn't pick one text. I'm just going to reflect on suffering and how to help people suffer wisely and well.

[ 4 : 55 ] So this is not our norm. We normally preach one text. I'm just going to give you some reflections from my heart to yours and hope it'll help. It just felt like it's rare that I get to preach the book of Job.

We get to go through the book of Job. And I felt like I would be remiss to not take time to linger a bit. So I have eight points for you today.

Not of equal length, each of them. And we send all these out on Tuesdays. So if you're having a hard time transcribing, they are a bit long at times. You can get them all.

If you want my notes, I give you those. But wouldn't wish that I'm a worst enemy. But point one, those who suffer feel alone and isolated. Those who suffer feel alone and isolated.

We're all familiar with this aspect of suffering, right? We all know what it likes to feel alone, isolated, and forgotten in times of trouble. You know, Job said in Job 19 that he's abandoned by everybody.

[ 5 : 56 ] David sings about it memorably in Psalm 142. He says, look to the right and see. There's no one who takes notice of me. No refuge remains for me.

No one cares for me. Why do we say things like that in suffering? Well, because suffering is lonely because it plucks you out. You suffer in a way unlike, at least in every detail, anyone else.

And so you feel alone, isolated. You feel plucked out. J.I. Packer says, a most painful part of the pain of grief is the sense that no one, however sympathetic and supportive in intention, can share what we are feeling.

Regardless of how empathetic everybody in our culture wants us to be, you cannot feel what others feel. The loneliness of grief is one of the worst and most draining things about it, and be it said, one of the most dangerous.

Aloneness and isolation often takes a massive toll. Job was so wrecked by suffering that his friends didn't even recognize him anymore.

[ 7 : 10 ] Others describe the initial stages of grief as melting grief, as a combination of fear and restlessness, of feeling mildly drunk or concussed.

For these reasons, there's danger all around the person who suffers. Danger of running to things that deaden the pain. Danger of concluding horrible things about God.

Danger of isolating yourself all the more. But there's also darkness and discouragement and sluggishness. A long time ago, Richard Baxter, one of the Puritans, wrote a book on grief after his wife died.

It's a really striking book for 300 years ago on grief. And he said, no one told me about the laziness of grief. Except at my job, I loathe the slightest effort, even shaving.

Partly because of aloneness and isolation, time seems to move incredibly slow.

[ 8 : 16 ] After trouble strike, life goes on for everybody else. But for the sufferer, it is not. One of the best things you can do for those who suffer is to check in.

One movie that's striking to me, I actually never seen the movie, just read about it, got the story. But it's called Lars and the Real Girl. It powerfully captures how this is supposed to work.

Lars is played by this guy, Ryan Gosling. Might have heard of him. Awaiting death and the loss of his friend. And so he's waiting, you know. He's doing the vigil, which some of you have done.

Waiting on someone to die. One morning, he wakes up to find flowers and candles and prayer cards for her on his front porch.

He steps back inside and notices several older ladies knitting on the couch. We brought casseroles, one said.

[ 9 : 18 ]    Lars sits quietly, moving the food around on his plate and asks, Is there something I should do? No, dear, you eat. Another responded.

Still another said, We came over to sit. That's what people do when tragedy strikes. They come over to sit. What a kind of a salient word.

Come over to sit. But don't just go over once. Check in regularly. Follow up. You have a wonderful opportunity in suffering to make sure this person is not alone, you know.

Sometimes, and I can do this so often. Let me know if you need anything. Don't say that. Say, I'm coming over to bring you something. Find something. Coffee, chocolate, meals, anything.

What a wonderful opportunity to reach those. Point two, those who suffer do not just grieve the loss itself, but the loss of innumerable memories, hopes, and expectations.

[ 10 : 21 ]    Those who suffer do not just grieve the loss itself, but the loss of innumerable memories, hopes, and expectations. There's few more provoking examples of this reality, this truth, in the Bible than the book of Ruth.

So you know that story, Naomi and her husband moved to Moab to find, I guess, to find wives for her two boys.

And then the book of Ruth begins with her returning back to Jerusalem, to Israel. Except that both of her sons have died. She says, my name is no longer Naomi, which means pleasant.

My name is Mara, which means bitter. Why? She's lost her sons, right?

But in losing her sons, she's lost her future. We misstep when we relate to those who suffer and speak to them as if they're only grieving the loss.

[ 11 : 29 ]    I told you the story last week about my friend Jeff. And when that tragedy happened in 2021, I spent a week in South Carolina.

I came back on a Wednesday night with my wife after the funeral. On Thursday night, we had an end-of-the-year presentation for my kids. And my daughter was standing up there reading a paper.

And all I could think about was my friend who would never see his daughter do that again. It hit me like a ton of bricks.

Sometimes we think the loss can just be tucked away and moved on. But the loss is not just the loss itself, but the loss of so many hopes and dreams. You know, what happens when we lose our parents?

What happens when we lose our children? One author has said, and I think it's insightful, parents are our past and children are our future. So the loss is painful in and of itself, but it's more than a single loss.

[ 12 : 30 ]    So what happens when we lose our parents? We lose our past. We lose this catalog of memories and experiences, the sense of understanding and being understood.

We lose this connection to all that happened before. And so what happens when we lose our children? We lose our future. It's a cascade of losses in the other direction.

Not the loss of things we have enjoyed, but things we thought we would enjoy. Hopes and dreams and expectations, milestones, baby dedications and graduations. All these things.

So helpful for those who help those who suffer to remember that loss is not a singular incident, but a cascade.

Point three, those who suffer are continually reminded of with who or what they lost. Those who suffer are continually reminded with who or what they lost.

[ 13 : 31 ] Life, as I said a moment ago, moves on quickly for you, but not for those who grieve. Not just because they're isolated and alone, but because they're continually reminded of what they lost.

There are continual reminders. You know, the movie Mission Impossible captures this pretty well. You know, there's 18 runs of it, I think.

It's hard to keep track of. Which ones have we seen? I don't know. They're all the same, it seems like. Well, the main character, Ethan Hunt, claims his wife was killed so that she could be safe.

And sends her into some witness protection or something like that. Vows to never see her again. So he loses his wife. But what's striking about the movie is he sees her everywhere.

He sees the shape of someone's back and thinks, that's my wife. Or the color of her hair. Thinks, that must be my wife. Or someone's complexion that looks like her and runs over to her.

[ 14 : 38 ] Well, that's the same way it is for those with loss. Everything has the potential to be a reminder. A laugh, a phrase, a face, a neighborhood park, a specific type of car, a restaurant.

You used to love all these things. They're not just things you pass, but things that become reminders of what you lost. There's no way to forget. For those who suffer, there's no way to not remember.

I think sometimes we, as those who help, those who suffer, think these are problems to be solved. It's like, got to fix this. You got to stop thinking that way. I don't think that's from wisdom.

I think rather this is the weight of grief. Exacts a slow toll. And so it can be our privilege to weep with those who weep.

As grief exacts a toll over time. Trusting in the truth that the eternal way to glory will overwhelm it.

[ 15 : 51 ] Point four, those who suffer can go through deep darkness and yet still be a believer. Those who suffer can go through deep darkness and yet still be a believer. And you might be thinking, after 13 messages on Job, why did you include that?

And I had that thought too. But here, here's the, I want to just say it because I think it's so easy to conclude that those who are in deep darkness are no longer walking with the Lord.

We must not do it. You know, if you pass Job on the street, you would have thought, there goes a man that has a problem with the Lord. But that's not true. That's not the verdict from the book of Job.

And so though people may suffer, may doubt God's goodness, utter complaints against God, question whether they're even a believer, they may in the end prove to be a true believer.

That's one of the vital lessons we learn from the book of Job. Christopher Ashe helps us, which is a very important quote in my opinion. A real believer can go through utter despair and desperation.

[ 16 : 51 ] A blameless believer who's not fallen into any sin might go through utter dereliction. You know what that is? The despair of an utter dead end, of feeling completely forsaken.

It's Jesus Christ on the cross, why have you forsaken me? And yet in the end, be judged a real believer. And so that's all I'll say about that. But that's one to hold on to, I think.

I think it's very important. It took me a while to learn it. Point five, those who suffer experience an often excruciating reordering of their loves.

Those who suffer experience an often excruciating reordering of their loves. Now that phrase, reordering of loves, is old. It came from St. Augustine and other people have referenced it.

This idea that after becoming a Christian, there's a new rank of order. You know, Jesus says, whoever loves father and mother more than me is not worthy of me.

[ 17 : 57 ] There's a new ranking of order. God says, have no other gods before me. And so there's an ordering of our loves. And first and foremost is the Lord.

The Lord who's merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. And all of our lives meant to be ordered around this love for the Lord. And yet suffering brings out a test to see, is this really who you love?

It's an acid test. To see, is this legit?

Are you really one who serves God, loves God? You know, suffering can be that way. How do we know if we love God for God or for the things that he gives?

We've said that through Job, but that's what's going on in the test. How do you know that you love God for God or for the things he gives? How do you know that you're not a mercenary? You're not just a hired hand.

[ 19 : 01 ] You're not just paid to love him. You don't know until you suffer. Until the test. That's what Job taught us, you know. One of the books I read throughout this series is a book called A Grief Observed by C.S. Lewis.

You've heard his name, one of the most important apologists of the last century. His wife died early of cancer, and he wrote this book.

He wrote about the test of suffering, and I find this very insightful. It's really like his journal. But in it, he realized that suffering had brought about a test.

He said, you never know how much you really believe anything until its truth or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you. It's easy to say you believe a rope to be strong and sound as long as you're merely using it to court a box.

To twine it up and give it away as a gift. But suppose you had to hang by that rope over a precipice.

[ 20 : 09 ] Wouldn't you then first discover how much you really trusted it? Only real risk tests the reality of a belief.

You probably heard this story about, I think his name was William Blondin, but he used to tightrope off all sorts of places. And supposedly, one of the great evangelist illustrations was he did a tightrope across Niagara Falls.

And then he did a tightrope where he walked across it. Then he did a tightrope with a wheelbar. Then he did a tightrope. He invited anybody to get into the wheelbar, and he'd walk them across.

And that's when you really found out whether you believed this guy could make it across. When you've climbed in the wheelbarrow. Well, the same thing's kind of going on in suffering.

There's a test. Will you love God for God, or will you love the things he gives? And I think, you know, sometimes we think this is only the test of the big, bad stuff.

[ 21 : 10 ] You know, the cancer and the Alzheimer's and things like that. But the reality is, faith needs to be tested, is what the Word of God says. We've got to find out whether these people are fans of Jesus Christ or followers.

Satan has a ministry, Job 1 tells us, of helping determine that. And so, there's a test going on. Whether at a younger age, it can be the fall of relationships.

It can be peer pressure and trying to fit in. All these things, these tests can begin so early. But you want to begin to understand what's going on. And this opportunity to follow the Lord and trust Him.

Even when you can't see why it makes sense. That's why it's a test. If you had the deck of cards, it'd be easy, right? But you don't.

You don't know what's coming on the river. You know, you don't know what card will be flipped next. So too is life that way. You have to trust God even when it doesn't make sense. And so, it's precisely for this reason that suffering is so difficult, so painful, you know.

[ 22 : 20 ] D.A. Carson says, pain will either make people better or bitter. It's precisely for this reason. Suffering will either reveal that our faith is legit. Or it'll reveal that our faith is not.

That it's just for show. And so, you need to be prepared.

You need your best theology for your darkest moments. Your best theology. You need something more than John 3.16 and a pat on the back and a casserole.

You need your best theology. You need to know how to trust God. I heard this great story. The Lutheran pastor, Helmut Thielik, was preaching in Germany near the end of the war.

What a fascinating time to be a pastor during the Allied bombing. Even as you disagreed with the Nazi Germany cause. During one period of heavy Allied bombing, the next morning he was walking around the city discouraged.

[ 23 : 27 ] He was absorbed in gloomy thoughts. I mean, I would be too, you know, if town was being bombed. When he found himself looking down into the concrete pit of a cellar that had been shattered by a bomb.

And in which more than 50 young people had been killed. Last night. He says, a woman came up to me and asked whether I was the pastor.

Since I was not in my normal clothes. Then she said, my husband died down there. His place was right under the hole.

The cleanup squad was unable to find a trace of him. All that was left was his cap. We were there the last time you preached at the church.

And here before this pit, I want to thank you for preparing him for eternity. Now you may be ready for this series to be over.

[ 24 : 32 ] But we're preaching it because we want you to be ready for suffering. I want you to be prepared.

Don't think it's... Don't be shocked. Don't be surprised, Peter says. When trials come upon you. And so too, Christian, don't be surprised. I want you to be ready. We've been preaching through this series to say, prepare for suffering.

Whether it's cancer or criticism. Tragedy or loneliness. Bankruptcy or chronic pain. Miscarriage or job loss. Suffering is coming. You don't get to choose the Mack truck that's going to hit you.

But all you have to do is live long enough in a fallen world. And you will suffer through many tribulations. We must enter the kingdom of God. And so you need your best theology.

You need to be prepared. So that your faith stands in suffering.

[ 25 : 33 ] Point six. Those who suffer need friends to incorporate all the Bible says about suffering. I think I've only reached eight points one other time.

So the future looks bright. Those who suffer need friends to incorporate all that the Bible says about suffering. Why do we suffer? What is God doing in suffering?

I trust we've all learned from the book of Job that suffering is not always because of sin. Because of personal sin. It's not always about you reap what you sow.

But what other reasons are there? Eric Ortland says, a lengthy quote, but I think an important one.

As Christians we are told in no uncertain terms that we will suffer. It is through many tribulations that we enter the kingdom of God. And we should not be surprised by fiery trials as though, for it is no strange thing for a Christian to undergo them.

[ 26 : 36 ] What might be more difficult to see, however, is that the Bible portrays our suffering as Christians as taking different forms. We suffer in different ways for different reasons.

Our afflictions as God's children are not uniform. Nor are God's expectations for us always the same. The Bible's portrayal of the Christian suffering reveals that God has different expectations for us in different kinds of trials.

It makes promises distinct to each. This means that part of our suffering well as a Christian includes wise discernment. That's why we've entitled this series Suffering Wisely and Well.

It includes wise discernment about the particular kind of trial we're undergoing and responding to suffering. And we have this graph that sought to summarize kind of all the different aspects of suffering.

It looks a little bit more like an egg than a circle is what it's supposed to look like. But this idea of personal sin up there in the top right. Or growth, spiritual growth and godliness.

[ 27 : 42 ] Or the world's brokenness. Fellowship, persecution, sufferings that you inherit. The persecution that were meant to fall on Jesus Christ fall on you. Or spiritual warfare.

We have an enemy that is real and serious. I'd like you to keep that up for a minute. But this idea is when we're helping someone who's suffering, we want to be discerning.

Now, it's not always clear, but many times it is. Like if you cheat on your spouse and then live in a marriage clothed with fear, insecurity, and distrust that is annoying to you.

You are suffering because of sin. Right? That's clear. If we neglect the word of God and prayer.

If we start every day with the ESPN app, which guilty as charged, I'm so tempted. And feel distant from God. It's not a mystery. It's neglect.

[ 28 : 41 ] It's failing to take the word of God into your heart. And so take them to Psalm 51 and other places and repent and turn.

Just like Revelation 3. You've fallen from your first love. So just turn back. God's so gracious and merciful. Loves for us to turn back. We may get into a job with a supervisor who does things very differently than us.

And it might reveal a lack of maturity in us. Our anger and frustration. It's not likely, or it's not probably a mystery there. Just God wants us to grow more like Christ.

And sometimes God puts difficult people in our life to help us grow more like Christ. You know? And so it's part of discipline. It's part of instruction. Hebrews 12 can be so powerful there.

Persecution. This idea that you're... The Nigerian Christians right now. Being killed by Muslims for trusting in Jesus Christ and refusing to recant.

[ 29 : 49 ] That's very clear. Persecution. Brokenness of this world. Things don't work as they ought to. This world strikes us.

So this idea, we want to be discerning. We want to be careful. We want to be thorough, you know? I don't want to get you too much in your head on this type stuff. But the biggest takeaway I want you to have from this series is that when someone suffers, don't assume it's because of sin.

And don't assume it's just because God wants them to grow in some way. It's not always that simple. Obviously, these things can overlap. But the idea is God is working all sorts of things in suffering.

And so we want to be friends that speak well and help them suffer wisely and well. And wonderfully in the scriptures, God's not all about just explaining the purposes.

Sometimes he keeps suffering a mystery. Why did this happen? It remains a mystery. But the Bible calls us to trust God every time we suffer. No matter what the suffering is, one of the greatest goods or one of the greatest things we can bring, the best word in season for those who suffer is the trustworthiness of God.

[ 31 : 00 ] God is trustworthy. You belong to him. The trials that you're facing have not overwhelmed his design and his purposes.

We can hold that out. We give him a big God that's so vital. A God who's loving but not powerful. There's no help. Away with him. It's not the living God.

But a God who's sovereign and wise and good is what we give people. Point seven. Those who suffer need the gospel.

Those who suffer need the gospel. Some say, many say, actually, I've heard it said lots of times, there's no wrong way to grieve. But that's not true. That's not true.

If we suffer in a way that we lose our grip on the gospel, we've grieved wrongly.

[ 32 : 06 ] We've grieved improperly. And we'll be the worst for it. The gospel promises that our suffering is never meaningless.

I love these truths, you know. If the gospel of Jesus is believe in Jesus and you will be rich, then suffering is a problem. It's a five-alarm fire.

We got a problem. Jesus said, I'll be rich, but I'm not rich. I'm suffering. If suffering is, or the gospel is believe in Jesus, and you'll always be content, happy, and fulfilled, and satisfied in life.

Then we got a problem again, because life is pain, princess. As they said in the princess bride, we all feel it, right? Life hurts.

Life sucks sometimes, you know. It stinks. It's not happy, you know. But the gospel is not those things. The gospel is about a suffering savior. What other religion has a suffering God?

[ 33 : 04 ] A God who didn't just create all things and leave it to us to work it out, but the one who came into this world, not just to know about suffering theoretically, but to experience it, to then have his people that he created in his image, to turn the guns on him, not for his sin, but for ours.



So the Bible brings meaningless, innocent, inexplicable suffering to life, because that was the suffering that fell on Jesus Christ. There's no other religion like it.

And so if suffering was not meaningless for Jesus, you can rest assured suffering will never be meaningless for you. The gospel promises that our suffering is never because he doesn't love us.

Now the book of Job, if we could sum it up, God says essentially something like, I know what I'm doing when you suffer, so trust me and be quiet.

But the gospel announces that God came to suffer in our place. So do not believe that when you suffer, that God doesn't love you.

[ 34 : 21 ] The gospel does not solve every problem of suffering. But it does solve one.

As a believer, you will never suffer because God doesn't care. You'll never suffer because God doesn't love you.

It feels that way, right? Feels like the paint's coming off the walls. Everything's going to pot. And yet, the loud statement of God's love for you is in the cross beam.

It's in the punishment he undertook for you. The gospel promises that in our suffering, we're never alone.

I remember this hitting like a ton of bricks. I read that quote about parents are a past and children are a future the night after all those people died in South Carolina.

[ 35 : 39 ] But then I realized, you know, parents are my past and children are my future in some respects, but Christ is my past.

Christ is my future. Christ is my present. So what does suffering mean? It's not like we're cut off and alone. No, the truth of union with Christ announces that Christ is with us all the way.

Your life is hidden with Christ and God. I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live. Who is that man? Christ lives in me.

Christ lives in you. You can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. That's not meant to be a verse so you can get a touchdown. That's a verse so you can live through hell. You can live through the pain of this life, trusting in God, resting in his promises.

You're not alone ever in suffering. Why? Because you're in Jesus Christ now. Once you were in Adam and in Adam all die, but if you've trusted in Christ by faith and I offer this to you, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, if you remain in Adam, you remain in your sin, remain in the wrath of God that is going to fall down on you because of your sin, you will die and experience the furious wrath of God for sin because he's holy and his eyes are too pure to look upon evil.

[ 37 : 00 ] But if you trust in Jesus Christ, you are no longer you anymore. You are now in Jesus Christ by union with him through faith, you're united to him as death and resurrection.

All that is true of Jesus is now true of you. So Christ is your past, your present, and your future, so do not fear.

Yeah, amen. Amen, amen. People need the gospel in suffering. suffering. They don't need platitudes.

They need the gospel that Jesus is the vine and you're the branches. Whoever abides in the vine and the vine in him will bear much fruit.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord. Point eight at the risk of overwhelming you completely. Those who suffer need the church.

[ 38 : 10 ] I've come to believe we just grieve wrong. We suffer wrongly. You know, in ancient cultures, suffering and grief was worked out slowly, you know, a week at least.

We tuck it into a few days, you know, around a funeral, neat and tidy, leave the funeral home, resume life.

But the problem is life is not resumable. And also, you know, we've, we've, you know, the dust revolution has happened and many of us are no longer close to the people that were supposed to help us suffer well.

Not close to our, we're not in the same, proximity wise, we're not geographically close to our family, to our siblings, to our brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles.

And so suffering and grief proved to be even more difficult because of that. and I think this reality presents a tremendous opportunity for the church because we're to be a new people, a new man, brothers and sisters together, members of one another, suffering with one another.

[ 39 : 36 ] Paul Tripp says in his book that I think is so helpful on suffering, he says, one of the sweetest, God's sweetest gifts to us between the already of our conversion and the not yet of our home going is the gift of the body of Christ.

God makes his invisible grace visible by sending people of grace to give grace to people who need grace. His people are meant to be the look of his, on his face, the touch of his hand, the sound of his voice, the evidence of his love, the picture of his presence and the visible demonstration of his faithfulness.

God hasn't left us to ourself but has blessed us with an abundant community of help. The question is whether your suffering will drive you inward to go it alone or call you outward in humble, honest, willing dependency.

I can only say that in seven years as a church, we've seen this to be the case. we've suffered a bit.

We've learned how to rejoice with those who rejoice, to weep with those who weep, become members of one another and walk together.

[ 40 : 55 ] Laura Brinkley said to her mom on that last phone call, Mom, if something happens, grieve me properly. and as believers, we know that when suffering hits, cancer, criticism, Alzheimer's, chronic pain, particularly in a surprising way, we're called to something.

God's doing something, right? We all feel that. Called to go deeper. It's a tall order. It's a knife's edge. It's a crucible.

That's why when Dr. Piper years ago got prostate cancer, he said, don't waste your cancer. My hope is for us as a church, individually and corporately, we wouldn't waste suffering.

In fact, in so many ways, the people that knows how to suffer well has a song to sing and a message to proclaim to the world in the darkness.

So let us suffer well and wisely. May God help us to prepare one another for suffering and help us to help one another suffer well, wisely and well. Father in heaven, we humble ourselves before you.

[ 42 : 17 ] I pray that you'd seal this series up in our hearts. God, we don't want to think it's strange when trials fall upon us, fiery trials fall upon us, and yet it feels strange and we need to learn what you would have to teach us.

God, I pray particularly for the young folks in the room just feel impressed now, God, that they have a future that I won't always be in and their mom and dad won't always be in and our deepest longing would be that suffering would not derail them, that their faith would remain strong.

Just like the Lord said to Peter, Satan demanded to have you and to sift you like wheat, but I prayed for you that your faith would be strong and that's what we want, God. We want to be a people that knows how to walk through the fire and not be burned.

We want to be a people that trusts you when it doesn't make sense, Lord. We want to be people that walk by faith and not by sight, walking in the darkness, but trusting in you, leaning not on our own understandings and all our ways, acknowledging you and trusting you'll make straight our path.

We know that the end is not until the end, God, and we want to be people that live unto you and unto your purposes, that refuse to judge you by the things we experience, but instead entrust you and call on you to do that which only you can do, to refuse to assess the invisible God in light of what we see and experience right now, but instead to live in light of the truths about this invisible God who's made himself known to us in Jesus Christ.

[ 44 : 04 ] Lord, all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ, and we are more than convinced that you love us. and if we're not, Lord, I pray that you would fill us with your Holy Spirit, that the love of God would be shed abroad in our hearts, and so we trust you in the dark by faith.

In Christ's name, amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at [trinitygraceathens.com](http://trinitygraceathens.com).