

Light on Dark Clouds: Doubt

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Today I'm going to speak on trusting God in the darkness.! Trusting God in the darkness. And we will go down some dark places, but we'll end up good in the end.

If I come back to speak again in the future, I promise you I will preach on joy. But this is an important topic, and we're going to jump off. It's going to be a topical message. It's a different message for me.

I usually speak expositively through books of the Bible, but this is an important topic. And we're going to jump off from Isaiah 50.10. If you want to turn there, Isaiah 50.10, one verse. And it's just a starting place, and we'll end up there as well.

And I'll read to you that verse. It says this, Alright, so let him who walks in darkness and has no light, let him who walks in darkness and has no light, trust in the name of the Lord, and rely on his God.

[1 : 13] Alright, so let him who walks in darkness and has no light, in those times, trust in the name of the Lord, and rely on his God. And why don't we pray together before we start? I need God's help. And I pray that God will meet each of us where we are today.

Some of you are going through suffering. We prayed for Greg, who's going through suffering. Some of you have experienced suffering. Some of you are struggling with doubt, I'm sure. Let's ask God to meet all of us, okay? So let's bow our heads together.

Father, would you help me this morning as I share? Lord, you have brought... There is no one here by chance this morning. Lord, you've brought people here to hear your word. And I pray that you'll take this message, you'll help me to clearly preach your word, your truths from your word, and that each one will be met where they are, and that you will help those who are struggling with doubt to walk in faith in the Lord, even in the darkness, I pray.

Amen. Amen. So we're going to talk about battling spiritual doubt, and we know that spiritual doubt sometimes can occur because of our own failings. We cannot pursue the...

It can be self-induced. We cannot pursue the disciplines of grace. We can maybe at times not gather together with the church. And when we do those types of things, we fail to follow the spiritual disciplines of grace, like reading God's word and prayer, or gathering with the church.

[2 : 22] We will struggle with doubt. It's self-induced. But what I want to talk today about is the doubt that comes as a result of facing significant or prolonged trials.

And I know some of you have walked through trials, and you've done so faithfully, and there's much we could learn from you. So I'm aware that some of you have suffered greatly, and you're walking in faith. And I'm also aware that one message can't cover everything when it comes to talking about doubt.

But today we're going to look at spiritual doubt, and for faith in the Christian, it really comes down to two issues in our lives. To have faith in God, we must first of all believe that there is a God and that He's sovereign, that He by definition is a God who rules over heaven and earth.

And secondly, we must believe, we must answer the question, is this God trustworthy? If we're going to have faith in this God, He must be a God who is good and personally involved in the world. And that's the kind of God that we can trust in our lives. He is both sovereign and He is good.

Hebrews 11, 6 says this, and it covers both aspects. Without faith, it's impossible to please God.

[3 : 27] Whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who earnestly seek Him or that He is that good God.

He exists, He is a God, and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. The existence of a sovereign God and the character of that God are the foundations for a vital living faith. And we want to have a living faith, don't we? That's our church name. We want to have a living faith, one that we live with day by day. Now, my personal struggle with doubt revolved around two main issues and culminated in a particular event.

And this was a few years ago, not that long ago, but a few years ago. First of all, I struggled over time. I have four daughters and one son. I struggled watching my two youngest daughters live unmarried through their 20s into their 30s.

They desired to be married. They are both Christians who followed God faithfully in relationships through their teen years and in college and beyond, and yet they remained unmarried. One of them got married a month ago.

[4 : 33] So I still have one who's 30. My 35-year-old got married a month and a half ago. But I struggled as a Christian father, raised these daughters to follow the Lord, to trust Him, to marry a godly husband, and yet they remained unmarried for decades.

And it was a challenge for them, and it was a challenge for their dad. That was one struggle. The second struggle came about when we had a season of deaths and funerals in our church. We had nine funerals, or I had nine family members and friends over 16 months who passed away. And I did all their funerals, and it included one two-week period where my father and two first cousins passed away.

Except for my dad, many others died earlier in life, and some died very tragically. And so it was just one after the other in that period of two weeks. Being with my dad who was dying of heart disease and cancer.

He was 91, so he was an older gentleman. At the same time, having a cousin in the hospital, another cousin passed away unexpectedly. Really challenged my faith. But the culminating event that occurred was a suffering my sister experienced after the death of her 26-year-old son.

[5 : 48] And she was told the news at midnight on Christmas Eve. And I could fill you in more details that are even more tragic that surrounded that.

And it was also not the first heartbreaking situation in life. And here's the thing about her, and others in our church would say this as well. She is one of the most godly, sacrificial, gentle, compassionate Christians that I know.

She came to a Christian at a young age, and she did not drift in her life. And she followed the Lord, and she prayed faithfully for her children throughout her life and was a godly example.

And she has no assurance that this son was a Christian when he died. And so I watched her suffer, and that was a culminating event that challenged my faith. Suffering in the accompanying darkness comes unannounced into our lives.

Some suffering is acute. Other suffering is chronic and drawn out. We experience suffering through sickness, death, and loss, and family trials. We have children who are drifting from the faith.

[6 : 54] We experience unfulfilled hopes and dreams and seemingly unanswered prayers, and the cumulative effects of setbacks and betrayals and disappointments. Sometimes there's a seeming disconnect between our spiritual labors and any fruit.

And all these take a toll on our faith, our Christian faith. And I think at times age increases, this challenge in our life as we watch the sunset on dreams that we had that we realize aren't going to be fulfilled.

Yet this verse says, let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God. That's what we're told to do.

In these dark times, we're to trust on this God, trust in the name of the Lord, and rely on his God.

The question is, how do we do that? How do we do that? How do we trust in the name of the Lord when walking in darkness with no light?

How do we trust that God is good when the immediate circumstances communicate that he might just be the exact opposite? That's the challenge.

[7 : 55] And here's what I said in the beginning. You can't fake faith. You can't fake that, well, I do trust God, because it comes up in your prayer life. It comes up in your spiritual life.

So today we're going to look at three things. We'll look at the stark reality of inexplicable suffering. We're going to look at doubt as a suspension between faith and unbelief. And we're going to look at darkness, faith, and the name of the Lord.

Now there's going to be a lot of quotes here. You don't have to write them down. I did send them to Walt, so he has them. There's quotes from books that have helped me. I also gave him five books that helped me through this.

It was over a period of a couple years of trying to wrestle through these issues. They were very fundamental, foundational, deep issues. So let's look at the stark reality of inexplicable suffering. In spite of the presence of joy and blessings and beauty in our world, and you have a beautiful area in which you live, and so do I, in spite of those things, our world is a dark place.

We know that. And we know the reason why as well. Ever since the garden, we live in a fallen world, and part of church life is assisting one another walking through the challenges and trials of living in this fallen world.

[9 : 03] We provide comfort and care to people. We counsel people and help make connections with God's Word. If sin is clearly a cause of our suffering, and it can be, then we talk about reaping and sowing, and we call for repentance and faith.

We remind people that God uses even suffering, as Hebrews tells us, to discipline us for our good that we might share in God's holiness. We discern links of what's going on in our lives, and we share promises.

But what about the suffering that has no clear reason or purpose that we can see? What about that suffering? What about intense pain that it seems both inexplicable and fruitless?

Now that's the reality of the book of Job. That's what's going on in the book of Job. We're not going to study the book of Job, but I want to read the first verse from the book of Job. There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright.

Don't you wish that were said about you? That man was, he was not sinless, but relatively speaking, he was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

[10 : 09] That was Job, yet Job suffered terribly, and Job never knew why. You know some of the reasons why. Job did not, but he suffered, and Job's friends had no category for inexplicable, unexplained suffering.

For them, if the world was ruled by a sovereign God, then life must be solely a matter of direct cause and effect. Okay? That's what they believed. In their mind, this was true for all suffering, including Job's.

They believed in the retribution principle. We reap what we sow. We reap, and there is truth to that, is there not? But they believed that for everything. We reap what we sow, and with that one trick category for suffering, their words and counsel for chapter after chapter just become thrusting swords of accusation that merely increase the suffering of Job, and you read it.

It's over and over again. It's the same thing. Job, you're righteous. Don't suffer, which means you aren't righteous. That's why you're suffering, Job. That went on for chapter and chapter.

They must find a reason for Job's suffering. We tend to do this as well because deep down, watching Job suffer, if they couldn't give it a direct reason, was a threat to them.

[11 : 26] It threatened them. Their whole worldview is extinct because if God allowed suffering in Job's life without clear cause, that meant what happened to Job might also happen to them.

And then how could they believe in such a God? Now, we all face that. We all face that. So they might say, how are you doing to J. Job? Let me tell you how you're doing, Job.

You're doing better than you deserve. Job's friends of graphs, Christopher Ash says, that unless God is just and fair, the moral fabric of the universe will disintegrate.

That's what they were wrestling with, this suffering in light of the fact that God has to be just and fair. They couldn't deal with it. Elizabeth Elliot, many of you have heard of her.

Her husband died as one of five martyrs in Ecuador. She was a young mother with a young daughter and her husband was martyred. 1956. Upon returning in her book, *Becoming Elizabeth Elliot*, rereading her book these words.

[12 : 33] Upon returning to churches in the U.S. after her husband died, Elizabeth Elliot detested the shallow, God-justifying platitudes of many who sought to comfort her in her suffering.

They gave platitudes. Well, look how many people were saved. You know, all these things. Trying to give her platitudes. Their answers, like the answers of Job's friends, were often a means to prop up and protect their own flimsy faith that couldn't stand the test of inexplicable suffering.

Because if this abhorred suffering could happen to her for no apparent reason, when he was doing something really good, it could happen to them. Christopher Ash writes these words in his

commentary on Job.

We need to be honest and face the kind of world we live in. Why does God allow these things? Why does he do nothing to put things right?

And why, on the other hand, do people who could not care less about God and justice thrive? Why is that? It's part of the world we live in.

[13:40] Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 12, 1, wrote this. He said these. He said these words. He said, You are always righteous, Lord, when I bring a case before you. And then he follows up with this.

Yet I would speak to you about your justice. Why does the wicked prosper? Isn't that interesting? You are always righteous, so, Lord, I know that when I bring a case before you.

Yet I would speak to you about your justice. There's something I don't understand, Lord. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? And Elizabeth Elliot just says it this way. I've read somewhere that anyone who is not confused by this is very badly informed.

Don't you love that? If you're not confused, she says. If you don't understand, she went through all this. She said, and she lost three husbands, by the way. If you're not confused by some of this, then you're just very badly informed.

I like that. Here's the truth. At times, God allows intense, inexplicable suffering in life, and he has not told us why.

[14:45] He has not told us why. In specific instances, we don't know why. The suffering has nothing to do with sin. Sometimes it does, but it has nothing to do with sin.

The suffering is not directly proportional to the need for spiritual growth. In other words, Job-like suffering is more common than we think. It's more common than you and I think.

This Job-like suffering happens commonly, and we don't know why, and God hasn't told us why.

That's the reality of the world we live in. Now, here's the second area we're going to look at.

We're going to look at doubt, which is the suspension between faith and unbelief. You see, this type of suffering brings into question God's character. That's the challenge.

Remember, faith in God must believe there's a God who's sovereign and that He is good and just.

And suffering brings the good and just portion into question, which brings doubt into play in our lives.

[15:45] So doubt, let's look at doubt. Deep and prolonged suffering is uniquely, by the way, challenging for Christians. It's uniquely challenging for us.

We believe that God is sovereign, right? We believe He's sovereign, right? By definition, here is a sovereign God who rules over heaven and earth, who's intimately involved in people's lives, who numbers the very heads of our hair, or the hairs of our head, I shouldn't say heads of our hair, hairs of our head, who counts as sparrows, right?

He is intimately involved. We know He's sovereign. We know that everything comes through His hand. The world doesn't have to deal with that knowledge. They don't believe that.

We do. Christopher Ashe said this, there is a pain for believers that gives suffering a unique sharpness for believers.

Suffering is a common experience of the human race. And yet suffering touches the believer with a sharper and uniquely piercing pain. The worshiper truly believes God is sovereign.

[16:50] He or she really believes that the living God is in control of the world. And so when suffering comes, it must be God who ultimately sends it. After all, He is in control, is He not?

It is God who is in some sense doing the hurting. And I know right now you've got red flags going off. But He is sovereign. And then He says, and yet surely God is just, isn't He?

This is the added pain for the believer living in a world of undeserved suffering. For undeserved suffering is a threat to the moral foundations of the universe. Either God is not in control or He is not fair.

And that causes the believer deep and sharp perplexity. See, the world will just say He's not in control. It's a chance. It just happens. But we believe He's in control. And then He says this, there are believers with a clear conscience, no hidden sin, trusting in God for forgiveness and walking in the light with Him and yet who suffer terribly.

It is a problem. But it is important for us to notice that it is a problem only for the believer. That's a problem. And we're trying to say, how do we deal with this?

[18:10] Here are some comments I've heard from believers who have experienced deep suffering. Here are some comments. One person told me, not only did I lose my loved one, I also

lost my best friend, meaning God, who I have leaned on in prayers and hopes with promises from Him for all these years.

I had these hopes and promises from God's Word and I leaned on Him and then this happened in my life and I lost not only this person, I lost my best friend, meaning the Lord.

That's heartbreaking to hear, isn't it? Here's another one. What makes this suffering so hard? It's the believer. What makes this suffering harder is that I know too much.

So this person told me, I know too much, meaning, I know God's sovereign. They never read these books. They just said, I know too much. I know God is sovereign. I believe He's sovereign. That's what makes it so hard.

If I didn't believe He was sovereign, it would be a little bit easier. But I know He's sovereign. I've wrestled more with my faith. This tragedy had to at least be allowed by Him. It's heavy stuff, isn't it? [19:22] And then this comment. Listen, if a human being did what God allowed, we would put them in prison. an accessory.

So what about doubt? What about doubt? Well, doubt, struggling with doubt is a reality as we live between the resurrection and the consummation. We live between promises that have been made but are yet to be fully fulfilled.

That's where we live, isn't it? We're living in the now but not yet. We are living in a broken, fallen world that is filled with evil even though God is sovereign. When Job said the Lord gives and the Lord takes away?

Blessed be the name of the Lord. When did he say that? Chapter one. Not chapter, and that happens, doesn't it, when you're suffering? Sometimes immediately you have this faith and you say, I trust God.

That's chapter one. He didn't say that in chapter 11, chapter 21, or 31. He wrestled with doubt through Job. Now, so doubt is something we are going to struggle with in this world or at least have to wrestle with.

[20:35] Secondly, doubt is not, this is important, doubt, if you're struggling, I'm going to ask you something, how many of you have struggled or are struggling with doubt? Are you honest? Yeah, I mean, we do, don't we?

Here's what the Lord would want you to know. Doubt is not the same as unbelief. Doubt and belief are not synonymous. They're not the same. In Jude 22, after warning against certain kinds of evil, blasphemous, and divisive men, and Jude writes strongly against these men, he says this regarding to those who are wavering.

He says, have mercy on those who doubt. The blasphemous, the divisive, the evil men stand strongly against them.

But how about the doubter? Have mercy on him. It's not the same. Doubt is not the same as unbelief. Doubt is not the opposite of faith. Unbelief is the opposite of faith.

Okay? Doubt's not the opposite of faith. Doubt is not sin. It is a wavering between what we believe about God that is contradicted by what we are experiencing at the moment.

[21:46] I believe this about God but here's what I'm experiencing and that's causing me to doubt. Doubt has not come to a conclusion about God. The heart of doubt is a divided heart.

Doubt has its reservations. It hangs back. Doubt is the suspension between faith and unbelief.

Doubt's right in the middle. Do you all have swinging bridges or ever have swinging bridges around here?

We had a springing bridge in our town. It got wiped out by the flood of 85 which was a massive flood in our town but that swinging bridge had a pier on this end and it had a pier on this end and in the middle it just swung back and forth and you would walk from this side which was solid and you get out in the middle and you just start wavering back and forth until you got to the other side.

Well faith is over here. Unbelief is over here. Doubt is in the middle. You're wavering. You're swinging back and forth. You're not, you haven't gotten to unbelief.

You're wavering. The verdict has been but in unbelief you're no longer wavering. Once you come to the other side you have, you have come to a verdict. You've decided you don't believe God.

[22:49] That's unbelief. The debate is over. It's a willful refusal to believe. Unbelief is a settled choice about God. Doubt is not settled.

It's wavering. To believe is to be of one mind. To disbelieve is to be of another. So if you're doubting today, you're not sinning. You are struggling. Okay?

But, doubt, if not dealt with honestly, will lead to unbelief. If you don't, if you aren't honest about your doubting and your struggles, it will lead you to unbelief if not dealt with.

Doubt is not always fatal but it is always serious. Alright? Doubt if not answered satisfactorily, and that's what we're going to try to do here is answer satisfactorily, will eventually lead us away from God into sin and unbelief.

See, the special temptation is suffering is we want an answer and we want someone to answer for the suffering. And if we can't find an answer, then ultimately God is going to have to answer.

[24 : 00] and we're going to end up accusing God with what's going on in our lives. And then the temptation comes when we can't find an answer to malign God in such a way that He is the person you need to answer.

He is the God who answers for this. So we're going to malign God's character if we don't deal with doubt. Because we're going to start questioning Him and then questioning is going to begin thinking things about God that aren't true.

C.S. Lewis lost his wife, got married as an older man. I think they were married four or five years and she died of cancer. And he wrote, wonderful writer, he wrote a book called A Grief Observed where he just wrote his raw feelings about what was taking place.

And here's what he wrote. He said, when it comes to the situation, it's not that I think I'm in danger of ceasing to believe in God. I'm not going to become an atheist again. He was an atheist, but he became a Christian.

He said, my fear is not that I think I'm in danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not so there's no God after all, but in my suffering to come to the conclusions that so this is what God's really like.

[25 : 14] So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer. He said, for me, suffering isn't going to cause me to become an atheist again. It's going to cause me to believe something about God that's not true, that He is evil.

That's the danger. Oz Guinness wrote, the temptation to doubt does not come in not believing God, but in believing what is not God. The danger is that we press judgment too far and our speculation and doubt, because we're looking for answers, creates such a distorted picture of God that we can no longer continue to believe in good faith.

So you've got to deal with doubt. It's serious. It will lead you away from God because you keep speculating and keep speculating until you think things about God that are not true and you're going to think enough things about God that eventually you're going to say, I'm justified in not believing Him because look what He's like.

That's what C.S. Lewis says. And then Oz Guinness writes, believing the wrong thing is always halfway to believing nothing. Our misrepresentations of God are so pathetically inadequate or so monstrously hideous that to believe in Him any longer is unnecessary or repugnant.

That's where doubt leads us if we don't deal with it. Okay? It doesn't stay the same. It's moving one direction or the other.

[26 : 39] It's swinging. Am I going to go back this way? Am I going to keep going? And finally, I'm going to feel like, yes, I won't believe in Him because look what He's like. And we've made an image of God.

And what I've seen that happens is we distort the image of God either into a monster we could never trust or we shrink Him into an image and make Him something that doesn't actually exist, doesn't truly exist.

And a lot of times it's just a caricature of ourselves. And we say, yeah, trust Him, but it's not the true God. That's doubt.

doubt. So doubt is not sin, but it will lead to unbelief. Doubt is not the same as unbelief, but it will lead us there if we don't deal with it.

Now, the question is, how do we do that? Well, let's talk about out of the darkness to a place we have faith in the name of the Lord.

[27 : 40] In God's kindness for me, and this was, again, this was over a period of a couple years because you can't, you know, for me at least, I couldn't shorten it. You can't just say abracadabra and all of a sudden you believe. You have to really wrestle through these issues.

And I'm sure even as I'm talking about some of these things, you might be wrestling with some of the things that I said so far. You think, well, what about the devil and what about evil and all that?

That's true, but yet God is sovereign.

You can't get past that fact as a believer that God ultimately, He's either God of all or He's not God. He's either or He's not the author of sin. We know that. He cannot be tempted to evil.

I know what James says, yet there's these questions in our mind, isn't there? This is what comes up. He's still sovereign. But how do I deal with it when I'm suffering? Well, let's talk about, I'm going to tell you first what helped me.

When I was struggling with this, I saw a post on social media. It's probably the only good post I've ever seen in all my years on social media. But it was an acquaintance who lost her 24-year-old daughter to drug addiction.

[28 : 41] She had a small child. And in the obituary, he's a Christian man. He quoted a quote from God in the Dark by Oz Guinness. And if you want to read a book on this, it will help you.

Again, I gave five books to Walt that are helpful. Becoming Elizabeth Elliot, I found that helpful. Providence by John Piper, I found that helpful. The book by Christopher Ash and Dane Ortlund on Job, I found those books helpful.

But this quote came out of Oz Guinness, the third part of his book. And here's what he wrote. To this, help me because I'm trying to figure out, I don't understand why these situations are going on, particularly with my sister. Because I can't make connections.

She's much more godly than me. You don't know, but she's much more godly than me. There's five of us children in our family. In my family, there's five children. The two who I would feel are the most godly growing up have experienced the most suffering in our family and some tragic things.

And you don't, you just wrestle with it and say, Lord, I don't understand this. And the issue comes down to faith. I want to believe. I want to trust. I want to know. Well, how do we get there? Well, this quote helped me because I'm trying to figure this out.

[29 : 49] Oz Guinness wrote this. Suffering is the most acute trial that faith can face. If you're suffering, Oz Guinness would say this is the most acute trial that you can face.

You say, I'm struggling with doubt. Well, no. You're in a terrible trial. Suffering is the most acute trial that faith can face. And the questions it raises are the sharpest, the most insistent, and the most damaging that faith will meet.

Can faith bear the pain and still trust God? That's the issue, isn't it? Can faith bear the pain and still trust God? Suspending judgment, that's key, and resting in the knowledge that God is there, God is good, and God knows best?

Or will the pain be so great that only meaning, I've got to know the answer, that only meaning will make it endurable. So that reason will be pressed further and further, and judgments must be made.

See, that's the doubt wavering. I've got to make a judgment. I've got to have an answer. But if a Christian's faith is to be itself and let God be God at such times, it must suspend judgment and say, Father, I do not understand you, but I trust you.

[31 : 09] Suspend judgment. We're going to talk about that. Listen, when we're suffering, we all want answers, do we not? And he's saying there's times you're going to come into life that you're not going to be given answers, and he says at that moment, if you're going to go from doubt to faith, you must suspend judgment.

He says we come into Christian faith with both faith and reason. We have reasons for believing. But he says somewhere along your life as a Christian, you're going to have to suspend reason and walk by faith.

That's what he's saying. When necessary, we must be willing to suspend judgment in the face of inexplicable suffering, because inexplicable suffering means you're not going to find a reason for it, even when you look.

And then, put it this way, we must, I think I read this in him or another, might be in his book or another. We must reject what is called keyhole theology.

Now, my grandmother's house was a two-story house that had the old style doors. I'm sure you all, many of you older ones have been in them. They lock with the key, right? Skeleton key.

[32 : 14] And you pull the key out and you have a keyhole. And back in the day, criminals were indicted based on keyhole testimony. And that's when a maid or a butler would look through the door in a motel, look through a keyhole, see a crime, and they would allow that testimony as admissible evidence in a criminal court because this person looked through the keyhole, they saw a crime, saw what was going on.

Keyhole theology is drawing overarching and false conclusions about a whole situation from some partial information you actually do see.

Because when you look through the keyhole, you see what you see you really do see. But you don't see everything. And neither do we in suffering.

We don't see everything. We don't have the whole picture. But once we see a little, it's difficult to resist trying to extrapolate the rest about God from what we do actually see.

That's the danger. We must be willing to suspend judgment, recognize that we do not know everything as God knows. Job didn't. And neither do we.

[33 : 30] You got to peek into Job. You knew a little bit more what was going on, but Job didn't know that. But the danger is, I do know what I'm going through.

And I do see that clearly. And from what I do know, I'm going to extrapolate the rest. But we always see dimly through a glass. God's ways are higher than our ways.

God is not mere man that we should be like him. His ways are infinitely higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts. We must admit in these situations that the known facts that we know are against God.

You've got to admit that. We've got to admit that the known facts are against God, but then we must say my known facts are not all the facts.

I don't know all the facts. Now, I'm going to walk you through. You say, well, that's nice to say, but how do I have faith? Okay, first thing. That does not mean that we don't continue to seek to understand.

[34 : 39] We are mindless people. We do want to understand situations. We do want to understand situations. Even when we don't know, but we can drive ourselves crazy trying to understand, can't we? I mean, there's things that happen in our lives we're never going to understand.

And we can never, sometimes can never get past that until we just say, I'm just not going to understand. So, how do I suspend judgment? Well, it doesn't mean we don't longer seek to understand.

It doesn't mean that we deny the emotional suffering that we're going through. That's walking in reality. It doesn't mean by saying I'm going to suspend judgment, it doesn't mean, well, I don't care and it doesn't hurt anymore.

That's not true. It does hurt. And we have to admit that even when we suspend judgment. Because we aren't walking in reality and there's a reason that 30 to 40% of the Psalms are Psalms of lament. They're there for us. That's the reality of living in this world. So, we're not saying we aren't going to try to understand some if it's available. And it might not be. We might just have to say, I'm going to quit.

[35 : 35] And it doesn't mean that we deny the emotional reality of suffering. Suspending judgment in suffering is not irrational. It's not irrational to suspend judgment, but only if we know why we trust God enough to suspend judgment.

Let me say that again. We can suspend judgment in a moment only if we know why we trust God enough to do that. Okay?

Here's what the Bible says in Psalm 5010, or in Isaiah 5010. Let me say this point again.

Suspending judgment in suffering is not irrational, but only if we know why we trust God enough to suspend judgment now in this situation.

We can't just do it for no reason. Well, I'm just going to suspend judgment. That doesn't have any solid ground beneath, does it? You know, it's just, I'm going to look through rose-colored glasses. I'm just going to suspend judgment. I'm just going to deal with it. No, that's not faith either.

Suspending judgment has to know why you're willing to do that. And that's what we're going to talk about next. How can I suspend judgment in the moment?

[36 : 41] And that, that's what Psalm, or Isaiah 5010 addresses. It says, let him who walks in darkness and has no light. And he wants to say it two different ways.

You got darkness, you got no light. You don't understand why. Let that person trust in the, here's the word, the name of the Lord and rely on his God. Let that person trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.

Now listen, we can suspend judgment in the darkness because our God is not just the sovereign God. He is the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's who he is. That's what the New Testament says. That's what the believers began to call him more and more. He is the God. He's not only God. He's not only Yahweh. He is the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And that makes all the difference. What do I mean? Our God, who is the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, has proven his infinite and unchanging goodness once and for all on the cross of Calvary in history for all who believe.

[37 : 56] Once and for all. It's an objective fact. God sent his son, Jesus Christ. He is the God and father. Listen, the father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He sent his son when we could have cared less to the earth to live the life that we should have lived, to die the death that we deserved, took all the sins of his people upon himself, experienced darkness we couldn't imagine in our place, and bore our sins until all the wrath was paid for in full. At a point in history, at a point if you're a Christian, in your history. And if you're not a Christian, it can be part of your history if you turn to him.

That's who this God is. The truth of God's goodness, this sovereign God was proven in a point in time in history. And through his son, Jesus Christ, doing what he did makes his goodness unassailable, even if we don't understand it in the moment.

I don't understand why what happened happened to my sister. But I do know this. There was a point in time when God came to earth, and he lived my life, and he died my death, and all those who put their hope in him will ultimately never be put to shame.

[39 : 18] That's the God we serve. And in this moment, I don't understand, but you know what? I can suspend judgment here because of what I know back there and what my father did for me when I was yet a sinner.

For a good man, someone might die, but God showed his love for us, and while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Is that an amazing grace? That's amazing grace.

So I can suspend judgment here in the darkness because God has proven his infinite goodness there in Christ. Our God being that God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, makes all the difference in every situation.

Amen. Makes all the difference. The writer wrote, how can I be sure that God is there and that God is good? His answer is satisfactorily only in Jesus Christ.

Any proof of God's existence or argument in favor of his goodness that ends anywhere else is bound to be inconclusive or wrong. That's the only place we see God's goodness unassailably shown for us, on the cross.

[40 : 21] It's proven. So let the unanswered questions about God's goodness drive you to the place where his goodness is most clearly and unassailably displayed.

Where would I tell Greg to go when he goes to the hospital? I'd say, in your heart, go to the cross. You know God loves you. We are in a fallen, broken world.

But that God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ came into the fallen, broken world and gave his life for sinners. He gave his life for us that the end result is going to be eternal life.

So let the unanswered questions about God's goodness drive you to the place where his goodness is most clearly and unassailably displayed. Job returned to faith through a majestic revelation of God. We have been given a much greater revelation of God's goodness once and for all through Jesus Christ.

And if you open up your Bibles and you can turn back to Isaiah 50, who is calling us to trust God in the darkness? Look at the verses before. It is the suffering servant who obeyed God fully.

[41 : 25] In verse 6, it's the one who gave my back to those who strike it. That's in verse 6, right before verse 10. It's the one who gave his cheeks to those who pulled out his beard.

The one who hid not his face from disgrace and spitting, he did that for us objectively. The one who set his face like a flint, knowing ultimately he would not be put to shame.

That's the one who calls us to trust in God in the name of the Lord, who trusts in God in the darkness when there is no light. He's a suffering servant of Isaiah 53 who displayed the infinite goodness of God on the cross.

I don't understand a lot of things, but I know God loves me because 2,000 years ago, his son went up Calvary's Hill and hung on a cross in my place.

I know that. And I'll define it. I'll interpret everything else through those glasses. That's where we've got to go in suffering times.

[42 : 30] Only the inexplicable love of God explains such inexplicable suffering of his son on our behalf. It's inexplicable. Why did God love me?

Why did God love you? Is that not inexplicable? It's in the heart of God and proves his goodness. Our God is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that makes all the difference in the dark.

I can suspend judgment now because knowledge of that love then puts to rest any doubts in this present darkness. That's what served me. I don't have doubt now because I see his love clearly displayed.

God took me back to say this is what's proven my love. He's written, there are facts of life and fallen world that we will never be able to explain, but we must never explain away.

We must not make light of them. We're not going to explain them away and say it doesn't matter. Suffering doesn't matter. It matters. It does. So there are facts of life and a fallen world that we will never be able to explain, but we must never explain away.

[43 : 32] Faith, however, can suspend judgment on these questions. For there is no question we cannot leave with God if he is the father of Jesus Christ. Let's leave our questions with God.

He's the father of Jesus Christ. That's enough. We sing the song, you know this hymn, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness veils his lovely face, I rest where? On his unchanging grace, right? In every high and stormy gale, my anchor holds not here within the veil.

On the other side, right? That's where our anchor holds. On Christ's solid rock I stand. All other ground is sinking sand. Folks, all other ground is sinking sand. Ellen Vaughn wrote in the epilogue of becoming Elizabeth Elliot, and Elizabeth Elliot journaled her whole life.

And she's reading her journals as a young girl. Can you imagine that? And when Ellen Vaughn wrote this, her husband was actually dealing with cancer. I believe it was cancer ran cancer. I believe it was cancer brain cancer. He was being treated as she writes this book.

[44 : 46] She's reading Elizabeth Elliot's journals as a young girl, so full of faith and hope. And she writes, turning the thin pages of Elizabeth Elliot's journals. I knew the end of that story.

The young Elizabeth Elliot writing did not. I wanted to warn her. To shout across the decades. To prepare for the storm. Get ready.

The hurricane is coming. She's reading journals. She's thinking, get ready, Elizabeth. The hurricane's coming. You don't know it. But it's coming. And then it says, she wrote, it's mercy that none of us knows what's coming.

That's right. But then she reads these words from Elizabeth Elliot's journal. Elizabeth wrote these words. She said this. I belong to God.

He is faithful. His words are true. And the transformation, the ultimate springtime already planted is coming.

[45 : 42] Folks, keep your faith in God. The ultimate springtime already planted on Calvary's hill is coming. And every believer will experience it. And there will be no more sickness.

There will be no more sadness. There will be no more suffering. There will be no more sorrows.

We'll have no more questions because we will see him face to face. May the Lord meet you.

Let's pray together, could we? Father, I pray. I know there's people and situations in this church right now who are going through suffering, who have experienced suffering. Lord, they're wrestling with doubt.

It's going to take some time. Lord, I pray that you'll meet them. And I pray that these words and your word, as they read back through Isaiah 50 and see who the one that is speaking, the one who struck in our place.

As they read Isaiah 53, as they look at Calvary's hill. Lord, I pray they will allow reason to take a second, a back seat, and that their faith might be strengthened, that they will trust in the Lord and they will know you are good.

[46 : 48] You are good because you're our God is the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that changes everything. Help each one, Lord, I pray. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com. Thank you, absolutely. Thank you, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, absolutely,

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absolutely, absolutely, absolutely, Thank you.