

# Purpose of Suffering

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[ 0 : 00 ] This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alfred, Georgia. It is our prayer that you'll be blessed by the preaching of God's Word.

Turn your Bibles, if you would, to 2 Corinthians. I appreciate the opportunity to be here and preach tonight at Vision. I'd be more honored if I thought your pastor even knew I was here.

However, I'm not sure anyone told him, but I'll take you. I'm glad to be here with you all. And I know there's a lot of key members and good friends of mine, people that I love that are not here today, that are in every place all around the country and people all around the world.

I think some of you know my brother, Paul. He's been around here now for a little while, so I think some people know Paul. I know some people get us mixed up sometimes. It's hard for them to tell a difference. If it's helpful, I'm the bald one who's not in denial about it.

That should help you keep it straight. But we're very happy to be here, and we're very happy that we're here for the first time with our little daughter, Galilee. And we thank you so much for those of you who helped us in prayer for that.

[ 1 : 12 ] It was a very scary, very nerve-racking occasion and experience. But we are so thankful for it, and God just showed his grace to us so richly in that time.

And we're just enjoying parenthood. And we've been—Galilee is seven weeks old tomorrow. So we pretty much have it all figured out, and we know all about parenting.

So if anyone here has any questions about parenting, you can see me after. I'd be happy to, you know, help you out with some of your parenting struggles. But we appreciate your prayers. Hopefully, Lord willing, we ask you to pray to this end.

We're going to try to leave and go back to China in January. So if there's some things that have to be done, some paperwork that's got to be done, some lawyers and people that have to be sued, and petitions have to be made, things like that.

But if it works out, then hopefully we will be able to leave the country and go back to China in January. And some exciting things have happened in China since we were here last summer. And we've had an exciting year.

[ 2 : 13 ] Man, 2012 has been a really exciting year in Harbin. And, Tayo, we have a little brochure that we've made, and it's kind of a report. And it's got some pictures and kind of a play-by-play explanation of what we've seen happen there in Harbin over the past year.

And I stuck a bunch of those over there on the table in front of the foundation sign. So please grab one of those on your way out tonight and look at those pictures and read little captions in there. They're kind of tiny if you can read them. And rejoice with us.

And we ask for you to pray a lot. And I'd like to ask you to rejoice with us. We've seen God do exciting things this year. And we're not done. You know, a lot of what we want to see God do in the future. But we're excited about what he has done. And we're praising him for that.

When we were here last year, some of you remember last year when we were here, we just kind of had to run in with the police. And they kind of come in and shut down one of our services. And honestly, when that happened, Steph and I were in Kentucky.

And when that happened, I just told Steph, I was like, I think that's it. I mean, I think everything that we've done in the past few years is just down the tubes. When we first got the phone call, our guys were still in the police station. And we didn't know if they were going to let him out.

[ 3 : 16 ] We had no idea. And, you know, God got us through that. And he didn't just get us through that. But he made things better as a result of that, as he sometimes does, right?

And we've seen exciting things happen this past year. We've seen two new churches started. And then Ben and Crystal Johnson. Have they ever been here giving a report? Okay. They haven't given a report yet, though?

Okay, good. Well, when they'll give you a report, they'll tell you about one of the big projects they were working on. Not to steal their thunder too much. But they started a Bible study in a new area of the city. And we're hoping to kind of transition that into a church over the next couple months.

And so it has just been an exciting time in Harbin. We've seen great things happen. So please rejoice with us. And please grab one of those things and find the baby somewhere and say hello to her.

She will be happy to meet you. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. I am taking my life in my hands a little bit tonight to preach from 2 Corinthians. Since you guys have been listening to a wealth of information on 2 Corinthians over the past couple months, as I understand.

[ 4 : 17 ] But this is just a passage that has, over the past year, kind of captivated me. And it's a passage that, you know, I don't know if you've had this experience. You ever have a passage of Scripture you just kind of fall in love with?

You don't really. It happens slowly. It's not maybe love at first sight. But as you dig through it, after a while, you find yourself in love with a passage of Scripture. And it's really, it becomes something that's kind of special to your heart. That's kind of what 2 Corinthians chapter 4 is to me.

And so I'd like to share with you what's going on there. Fortunately, I don't have to do too much background information since you guys have been working through here. But 2 Corinthians is by far, by far, the Apostle Paul's most combative letter.

When you read 2 Corinthians, it's like he has got his guns on and he is going to war. I mean, he is really addressing some problems in the church of Corinth. Now, Paul in chapter 2 and chapter 3 has been talking about the glory of his ministry as an Apostle.

Now, he has to do that because there's some people at Corinth who are kind of casting some doubts on Paul and saying, Is Paul really an Apostle? I mean, is he really? I mean, we know Peter and James, those guys are Apostles.

[ 5 : 21 ] But is Paul, is he an Apostle with a capital A or Apostle with a lowercase a? I mean, is he really an Apostle? And so Paul has come out guns blazing saying, I am a real Apostle. And he says, and you can't underestimate, don't underestimate the glory of the ministry I have of preaching the gospel.

And really, in chapters 2 and 3, he really just talks about a ministry that we all have, the ministry of proclaiming the gospel to this world, the ministry, as he says in chapter 5, of the ministry of reconciliation.

But, chapter 4, he kind of hits a speed bump. And he pauses for a second because he's been saying, he's been talking about how great his ministry is.

And if you didn't have chapter 4 and you just read 2 and 3, you might think, man, it must be really fun to be an Apostle. It must be great to be an Apostle. I wish I was a missionary like Paul.

I wish I was a church planter like him. He gets all the glory. And then in chapter 4, look at what he says in verse 7, a verse I'm sure you're very familiar with. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.

[ 6 : 22 ] But we have this treasure in earthen vessels. Now, when Paul says we, he's talking about us, those of us who have a commission to preach the gospel. When he says we have this treasure, what's the treasure?

Well, it's this glorious ministry he's been talking about. He says we have this glorious ministry that we don't deserve, this commission to preach the gospel. It's a glorious treasure that no one is worthy of. If you're here tonight, let me tell you, you're not worthy to preach the gospel.

You're not even worthy to hear it. I wasn't worthy to hear the gospel. I wasn't worthy to experience the gospel. And I'm certainly not worthy to take the gospel to China. And then look what he says.

He says we have this treasure. So he says, yes, it's glorious, but we have this treasure in what? In earthen vessels. What's that mean? Weakness. So we have glory, but the glory comes in a weak package.

Now, what Paul is talking about here, and we'll read this in chapter 4, what Paul is talking about is the hardships and the suffering that come to us as we preach the gospel. So we're talking about ministry hardships.

[ 7 : 28 ] Now, anyone who is serving here in ministry, and I hope everybody here on a Sunday night, I hope everyone here is involved in the ministries of this church. And if you are, what do you know?

You know that ministry is usually not very fun. That there are hardships that come along with it. Now, let me pause here for a second. Don't think that Paul is primarily talking about persecution here.

Now, what Paul is talking about includes persecution. Part of the hardships that we as Christians undergo and experience as we preach the gospel is persecution. I'm defining persecution as Robert says he loves Jesus, and so I hate Robert and want to hurt Robert because he loves Jesus.

That's persecution. But you know what? A lot of the problems that we've had in Harbin over the past year weren't related to the fact that we love Jesus at all. I mean, they're indirectly related, but not directly. Let me give you an example.

One of our churches there, Grace Baptist Church, they had a piece of property that they were renting a house that they had been renting to have their services in. And then they got a notice from the bank that they had to get out of the house because their landlord was on death row, and so the bank was seizing all of his properties and all of his assets.

[ 8 : 40 ] And so they said the church has a month to get out of there, and so we lost half. We had to pay a year of rent in advance when we rented the place, so we lost like six months of rent. Now, did that happen because we love Jesus?

Well, yes and no, right? I mean, the guy didn't go kill someone and get on death row, and the bank didn't take away our property because they knew that we loved Jesus and they wanted to hurt us. But things like that happen in ministry. And here's what we find out.

If you care about preaching the gospel to people, your life will be full of inconvenience, hardships, suffering, and general pain. Now, when Paul talks about this, yes, Paul is talking about sometimes he got stones thrown at him.

But Paul's also talking about the pain of a co-worker, of a co-laborer betraying him. He's talking about physical exhaustion. It's just tiring to serve the Lord.

Some of you here are probably real close to quitting the ministry you're serving in because you're just exhausted. It's just tiring. Paul had bodily ailments. He had travel hazards. The guy was getting shipwrecked all the time.

[ 9 : 41 ] He had false teachers to deal with in all the churches that he went to. He had huge, Paul had major financial burdens. And he had times where it just seemed everyone he shared the gospel with wasn't interested in it.

He had times of fruitlessness. And so what do we find? We find that not all the hardship that we suffer in ministry is persecution, but it's hard to deal with anyway, isn't it? Ministry brings hardship.

Ministry brings hardship. And so here's what we're going to find in chapter 4. Paul is going to tell, let's look at verse 16. We just read kind of the first verse of this paragraph, and now we're going to look down at like the last verse, the last sentence of this paragraph, verse 16.

For which cause we what? Faint not. We faint not. So something between verse 7 and verse 16 is going to tell us what? How to not faint.

Because when you're in ministry, and you're in ministry up to your neck, and you're going through hardships, and it's hard, and you want to quit, you need something to keep you from fainting. You know what Pastor Gardner is doing this week?

[ 10 : 44 ] He is suffering hardships. I hope no one in this church thinks that he just was really dying to go down to Chile to just have a vacation down there or something like that. No one's laboring under that false understanding, right?

He's suffering. The original plan was, this got canceled because of our baby and our adoption and everything, the original plan was for him to be in China as well next week. Now, maybe going to Chile would be fun, and maybe going to China would be fun, but going to Chile, China, and Alpharetta in three weeks is not fun.

Why is he doing that? Ministry brings hardship. And if you don't understand what comes between verse 7 and verse 16, you will faint, and you will quit.

Maybe some of you already have. Maybe some of you are this close to it. So I want to look with you tonight in the time we got tonight at four things, four truths about hardship that Paul shares with us in these verses.

First, the purpose of ministry hardships. The purpose. Second, the limits of ministry hardships. Third, the thrust of ministry hardships.

[ 11 : 56 ] And fourth, the end of ministry hardships. We haven't even read the text yet, have we? I'm sorry, I forgot. I got carried away. All right, let's read verse 7. We have this treasure in earth and vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, not of us.

We're troubled on every side, yet not distressed. We're perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Cast down, not destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believe and therefore have I spoken. We also believe and therefore speak. Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God, for which cause we faint not.

But though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

[ 13 : 07 ] While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen, which are not seen, are eternal. Number one, the purpose of ministry hardships.

Remember Paul says, we have this treasure in earthen vessels. I got a question for you. Why would God do that? Why would God want to put a treasure in an earthen vessel?

So what exactly is the point of that? If you've gone to all this trouble to give us a treasure, why not at least wrap it up nice? If you want to give us such a nice thing, then why don't you give us a little bit of benefit to go with it?

Instead, he says he gives us a treasure, but he gives it to us in this earthen vessel. What is the point of that? Verse seven tells us. Let's look again. We have this treasure in earthen vessels that, circle that, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

What does that mean? This is a theme in 2 Corinthians. I encourage you, and 2 Corinthians is, you know, as you're, as you're, you know, following along as this book is being preached, or I hope you're reading along with it.

[ 14 : 15 ] Notice how many times Paul comes back to this theme in 2 Corinthians, where he says, I'm insufficient. I'm not worthy. This is too much. The ministry is too big.

I don't deserve this. And Paul says here, he says, why do we have this treasure in earthen vessels? That it may be seen where the power comes from.

You know, the weaker we are, the more incredible God's power, the more incredibly God's power is put on display. Now, what that means is, you know, we as humans, we celebrate strength, wisdom, talent, ability.

We, we, we value all those things. And so, when we see somebody who in our eyes has those valuable traits, when we see them doing good things, what do we all think? Man, that guy is really sharp.

That guy's really got it put together. Okay? So, if we see Jeff, and he does some, he does some things that are, we, we see him accomplishing some things in ministry, and we think Jeff is a great, we think Jeff is real strong, we think Jeff is real great, we'll be real tempted to say, man, Jeff is really, he's really doing a great work.

[ 15 : 20 ] He's really got things put together. But, if the minister, if the servant, if the person who is serving God, if they are in weakness, if they're broken, if they're suffering, if they're struggling along, if they can't barely keep it together, if they have major stress in their life, you know what that shows?

It's not them doing it. There's a power, there's a power at work in them. Let me give you a little illustration. Let's say we're out in the street, and we saw a Lamborghini. That's a nice car, right?

Lamborghini, right? Everybody know that? A Lamborghini came flying by at 200 miles an hour. Flew down right in front of us, 200 miles an hour. You might say, man, Lamborghini really makes a nice car, don't they?

Man, Lamborghini, they make some good cars. And then another, about 10 seconds went by, and a Chrysler minivan, a 1985 Chrysler minivan, flies by at 200 miles an hour.

Would anybody here say to their friend, man, Chrysler sure makes a good minivan, don't they? No, you'd say, somebody got their hands on that Chrysler minivan, and they did something to that thing. Somebody changed something inside of that Chrysler minivan.

[ 16 : 27 ] Let me tell you, God wants to use the Chrysler minivan more than he wants to use that. Why? Because if you're all sharp, and you got your life all put together, and everything's hunky-dory, and there's really no problems, when you accomplish something, everybody's going to say, yep, guys like that accomplish things like that.

But when somebody who's weak, and somebody who's broken, and somebody who's suffering, and someone who can't keep their life together hardly, when God does something through them, everybody's going to say, man, what a God.

What a God that can do something through that. And so what he says is, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. And so what Paul is saying is, what's God's purpose in your ministry?

God's purpose is to show his own power. And so you know what he lets you do? He lets you suffer. He lets you suffer. He lets you be tired.

You know, sometimes we pray for strength in ministry, and I understand what we mean, and we should do that. But we also need to understand that sometimes God just gives us enough strength to keep going for one more week, for one more service, for one more month, for one more activity, for one more youth event.

[ 17 : 31 ] He does that to keep us weak. He keeps us on life support, so that whenever we do something, it draws attention of what a great God, what a great and powerful God he is.

So Paul says, man, if you look at me, and Corinth was looking at him. This church was looking at Paul, and like, man, they were thinking, Paul really doesn't look very sharp. Paul really isn't that great of a preacher.

Paul really isn't our favorite apostle. But you know what they saw? When things were happening through Paul's ministry, when churches were being planted, and people were getting saved, all they could say was, man, God is doing some great things through Paul.

So the purpose of our ministry hardships is to demonstrate the power of God. Look again in verse 10. Always bearing about the body, the dying Lord Jesus, that, there's the word that again, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. You know what that means? Sometimes it's going to feel like dying.

[ 18 : 35 ] Sometimes it's going to feel like giving everything. That's what ministry is. That's what it's going to take to minister to people. That's what it's going to take to get the gospel to this city and around the world. But when we do that, what happens?

God starts to do miracles, and his resurrection power starts to become apparent in our life. And inexplicable, miraculous, incredible things start to happen. So that's first the purpose of ministry hardships.

But second, I want you to see the limits of ministry hardship. The limits of ministry hardship. Now you say, what do you mean by that? What I mean is, when you're suffering, there's only so far that it can go.

There's only so far it can go. And this should encourage us. This should encourage us. Look at verse 8. Paul says, we are troubled on every side. Look at the next two words.

Yet not distressed. We're perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Cast down, but not destroyed.

[ 19 : 34 ] Now what's Paul saying? You say, Paul, does a Christian ever lose? Paul said, yeah, a Christian will lose. You say, Paul, will a Christian ever get beat up?

Paul said, yeah, a Christian will get beat up. You say, Paul, will a Christian ever suffer? And he said, oh yeah, a Christian will suffer. But you say, Paul, will a Christian ever be destroyed? He said, no, a Christian will never be destroyed.

Will a Christian ever lose it all? No, a Christian will never lose it all. Paul, will a Christian ever die? No, a Christian will never die. So what I want you to see is, we will suffer, but that suffering, you've got a seatbelt.

That suffering has a limit. There's only so far it can go. God won't let it go any further. But God wants us to suffer, but he makes sure that it will never be, you'll never hit the point of no return. When you get discouraged in ministry, realize this, you will never reach the point where you'll never be joyous again.

There will be times in ministry where you won't feel that joy that you used to feel. But hang on. It's not gone for ever. There'll be times of fruitlessness. There'll be times where it seems like God isn't doing that much.

[ 20 : 36 ] Let me tell you, it's not forever. It's never forever for a Christian. A Christian doesn't go all in. A Christian never has the option or the possibility of losing everything.

It's just not a possibility. You can't lose it all. That's why Romans 8.28, I was afraid Jason was going to steal all my thunder tonight. That's why Romans 8.28, it says, what? All things work together for good.

Even the bad things, they will work together for good. So man, when I find out that the homeowner is on death row and we're losing the house and we're going to lose a couple thousand dollars, you know what that means?

This is going to work together for good. It's not over. When it feels like you are so tired you cannot minister anymore. When this person has hurt you so bad you're sure that you can't love them anymore and you can't be a faithful discipler anymore, at that moment you need to know this will work together for good.

A Christian does not know ultimate failure, does not suffer ultimate loss. We will win. We will be victorious. And Paul, what does this mean?

[ 21 : 42 ] This means that Paul is not afraid to risk. You know, there's a lot of Christians I find who are very nervous about risking.

They approach service and ministry to God in much the way a careful financial planner will approach his stock options or his retirement fund.

very carefully wants to minimize his risks. Let me tell you, as a Christian, we don't need to be afraid of risk. You don't need to be afraid to risk losing something.

Let me tell you, if you want to minister to people, if you want to be a messenger of the gospel to this world, you'll have to risk. There's no guarantee. I cannot guarantee you that if you try to disciple some people of this church, that those people will not hurt you, take advantage of you.

I can't guarantee that. No one can, the Bible won't guarantee that. It might happen. There's a risk involved. I can't guarantee that if your child becomes a missionary, that they won't be martyred in a Muslim country somewhere.

[ 22 : 45 ] We don't get that guarantee. We, but because of what Paul says, there's no ultimate loss. What does that mean? I can risk. I can risk. Because I know, even if I risk, I may feel like I'm risking a lot, but I know I'm not risking all.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, 31, he says, I die daily. What does he mean? Paul says, I wake up every morning and I prepare to give everything I got.

I wake up every morning. I prepare to give everything I got. I lay it all down. And he says, and so far, every day in the morning, God's given me more. And I've gotten up the next day and I've had more to do.

I've had more to give. But he says, I wake up every day and I give it all. I die daily. Now, let me tell you, that means we as Christians, we can never be too stingy with our lives.

Some of you Christians, sometimes me too, we act, and you act, like this is the only life you've got. I remember when I was a kid, I heard that cats had nine lives.

[ 23 : 47 ] And I think that's a nice way of saying people are always trying to kill cats and somehow cats always seem to survive. But, you know, I remember being a kid thinking, man, if I had nine lives, I would do some crazy stuff.

I would definitely bungee jump, man. If I had nine lives, I mean, rope breaks, it's okay. Eight more lives, you know? Some of you might, you know, stand up to your wife, you know, you had more and more, you had nine lives, you know?

You could afford it. You might tell your boss, you know what? I won't accept that. I won't accept these conditions you're offering me. I won't accept that. If you had more than one life.

But what happens is some of us are too stingy with our lives. You forgot. You don't just have one life. You got one life and then you got an eternal life. Okay? So we as Christians, we can't be too stingy with our life because we know that our ministry hardships have limitations.

We have a seatbelt on and it's only going to go so far. Okay, we got to keep going. Number three, my favorite, the most important, I think, the thrust of ministry hardships.

[ 24 : 48 ] Now here's a question. Is suffering in ministry, is that basically just spinning our wheels? I mean, are we just suffering just so God can look at us suffer and people can look at us suffer?

Or does our suffering actually have a product? Does something actually come out of our suffering? Is our suffering an engine that creates something?

Does something good actually happen in the world because we're suffering? Or is the world just overall a more miserable place? And the answer to that is yes, something does happen. Now look down at verse 12. Paul kind of has a little shift here.

What's he been talking about? Paul's been talking about I have life in me. Paul, what did he just say in the verse above? He said, the death of Christ, I bear in my body the death of Christ, right? And he says, what happens? The life of Christ is shown in me.

But now look what he says in verse 12. So then death worketh in us, but life in who? In you. So now Paul's little shift. Now he's talking about you. He's saying, when death works in me, life works in you.

[ 25 : 48 ] Now this is what Paul is talking about. Paul says, when I suffer, it does good to the people that I'm in charge of ministering to. What that means is Pastor Gardner's suffering this week is good for you.

And my suffering is good for the people in China that I work with. And your suffering is good for the Sunday school class you teach or for the people you pick up and bring to church or the person you're working with in discipleship or whatever you're doing, your suffering is good for them.

You say, why would that be? Why would that work? Now we're going to skip 13 to 14 because we don't, you guys, I trust you guys have already been through this, down these paths before. So we're just going to skip to 15 and this is where I want to camp out here for a second.

Verse 15. He says, for, and what's this for? He's explaining why he has this confidence that he's been talking to me. He said, I have confidence that death works in me and then life comes out in you.

For all things are for your sakes. Now what's that first all things mean, do you think? He says, all things are for your sakes. If you want to, next to that first all things, next to it, you can write suffering.



[ 27 : 00 ] What Paul's talking about is all things that I suffer. And he says, what does he say? All things are for your sakes. Meaning Paul says what I just said, suffering is for your good.

Let me tell you why that is. That is true because the more Paul suffers, what does that mean? It means he's ministering more. If Paul's more tired, why is he more tired? Because he's been running around ministering to more people.

If Paul got beat up, why did he get beat up? Because he went to a new city to preach the gospel. If Paul got shipwrecked, why did he get shipwrecked? He got shipwrecked because he was trying to go to another city to preach the gospel. If Paul has a financial burden, why does he have a financial burden?

Because he was trying to help and try to build a new church. Everything that Paul went through was for the good of other people. And so Paul says, you know what? All my suffering is for your sakes.

All my suffering is for your sakes. Now what does Paul want? Paul says, all things are for your sakes. Now I want you to take this, I gave you little gears here. Okay? We're talking about this driving force. We're talking about the thrust of our suffering.

[ 27 : 56 ] This goofy little chart here, but if you would, you got a pen, if you would, in your far left, your far left gear here, if you would write, and write in there, in the first one, suffering. Okay?

Now how do gears work? If you turn the first gear, what happens? The second gear turns, right? And the third gear turns, and the fourth, right, et cetera. So the first one I want to talk about is suffering.

What happens when you turn that crank of suffering? When you're turning that gear of suffering, and you're suffering in ministry, and you're going through hard times, and you're going through hard things in ministry, what happens? The first one, what I want you to write in that second one is people.

Paul says, the more I suffer, the more people I'm able to minister to. The more I suffer, the more people I'm able to minister to. Now let me tell you, if you're tired right now because you've been serving God, that's a good thing.

Because the more tired you are, the more people that you've been ministering to. The more people you've been giving the gospel to, the more people you've been discipling and teaching and training. That's a good thing. The lighter your wallet is because you've been given, the better.

[ 29 : 01 ] It's been helping more people. The more stress that you have in ministry, the better because it's been turning that gear and more people have benefited from that.

Now here's what Paul says. Paul is saying, I want more people. I want to minister to more people. I want to serve more people. Now let me tell you why that's important. Some of you may be like me a little bit.

Now Steph's a lot different than me. Steph really likes to make new friends and to meet people and to know everybody and to stalk everybody on Facebook and all that stuff.

I don't even have Facebook. I'm trying to be the last person on the planet to not have Facebook. That's my goal. But I am the opposite of that. I am naturally antisocial and I honestly, I always feel like I got a good number of friends.

I don't really need any more. This is a good number of friends. I'm pretty lucky and I'm not really interested in going out and hunting down and trying to find new friends. Is anybody kind of like that? Kind of naturally antisocial?

[ 29 : 58 ] Some people are saying no, some people are saying yes. Let me tell you, there's no place for that in a Christian's heart. There's no place for that. Because as a Christian, what I want, I want that gear to be turning.

I want more people to be receiving the benefits of the gospel ministry and to do that, I'm going to have to suffer more. I'm going to have to be doing more to touch more people.

I want my life to touch more people's lives. And the second that we try to pull back and say, you know what, it's kind of painful to know so many people. They're always wanting stuff from you. They're always calling you, asking you if you can help them move. You know what, I'm going to pull back and I don't want to have so many social relationships.

You know what's going to happen is those gears start to turn a little bit slowly and yes, your life becomes more comfortable. But there's fewer people that benefit from it. Okay, so Paul says, all things are for your sake, but we're not done.

Look what he says down below. He says, for all things are for your sakes that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. Now what's that abundant grace? You can write grace in that third little gear there.

[ 30 : 59 ] Now here's what Paul is saying. I suffer more, more people are benefited from my ministry and what happens? Those people that my life is touching, what do they get?

They get grace. Where's that grace coming from? Grace comes from God, right? God is giving them grace. Now this is exciting. Paul says that as we suffer and as we minister and as we share the gospel with people, what happens?

God gives grace to people through us. That means that, you know, I need help. I've got a problem in my life. Things aren't going good and I'm not sure what to do. And then Robert comes along and then he allows his life to come in contact with my life and he discipless me and he teaches me and he trains me and he brings me along and what happens?

Through his work, God gives me grace. And so Paul says, you notice all these big words? He says, abundant. Abundant. What that means is the more I suffer, the more people are benefited, the more of God's grace is shown in our midst.

Let me tell you, that's what Christians should be excited about. You know what grace is? Grace is basically God's presence to us. Presence with a T-S, like gifts. Now we don't say it like that because, you know, we're taught as kids, you know, wanting presence is childish, but God's grace is his presence or it's his gifts to us and we need to rejoice when we see God giving us gifts.

[ 32 : 24 ] When I see God giving gifts to Mike and Cindy, I should say, man, that is exciting that God is giving you gifts that God is blessing you with presents. That is wonderful. Now, let me tell you, Christmas is coming up and if you, you know, if you believe in Santa or you tell your kids about Santa, I'm not here to tell you about that or I don't have an opinion about that, but I'll tell you what I do have an opinion about.

I think your kids should think that Santa is small time when it comes to giving gifts. They should hear about Santa and say, so this is this big guy and he brings you remote-controlled cars and candy bars.

Have you heard about what Jesus brings us? Have you heard about the gifts that God gives? Have you heard about the gifts that he's in the business of giving? The gifts he gives are incredible.

He gives abundant grace. And so, you know what Paul is saying? Paul says, man, I'm out here and I'm suffering. I'm getting shipwrecked. People are throwing rocks at me. I'm sick. I'm weak. I'm tired. I'm poor.

I got nothing going on for me. I'm homeless pretty much. And then Paul says, but I know that when I'm doing that, I'm touching so many people's lives. I'm meeting people. I'm ministering to people in Corinth and in Ephesus and Antioch and all these different places.

[ 33 : 33 ] And you know what Paul says? And God is raining down gifts. Gifts are pouring out of heaven. What is that grace? That grace is the gospel. That grace is what Jesus Christ has done for us.

And Paul sees that happen and Paul is so excited. So look at those gears. You know what has to happen for that? You have to be willing to suffer. You got to turn that suffering gear. You have to suffer some hardships.

You know what happens? You start touching more people and gifts start coming down from heaven. Now that, we just got a couple more gears.

Look what he says below. He says, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many. Now what's thanksgiving? You write thanksgiving. So we got suffering, suffering, people, grace, thanksgiving.

Now what happens when those gifts come out of heaven? Church, when God's gifts come to us, what do we do? We thank him, right?

[ 34 : 33 ] When God gives us gifts, right? When I find out God has given a gift to Ed or to Hazy, I want to say, man, that's awesome. Let's thank God together. You know what this church, one of the church services, you know why we call it a worship service?

Because it's a time where we corporately, where we together come and we thank God for what he's done. We're throwing thank you cards, notes of appreciation. We're sending our thanks.

To God. Let me tell you while we're on this, this is why you need a church. You know, if you don't come to church, all you're ever thanking God for is what he's doing for you. But if you come to church, you know what we're doing?

It's a big party, a big chorus of thanks. We all sit here, we face in the same direction and people are, who are you singing at? We're singing to God. We're just throwing this thanks at him. We're throwing this appreciation, this praise, this thanksgiving, this adoration for what he's done.

And so Paul says, man, I get excited. Paul says, I almost get giddy. I get happy when I see that I'm suffering. Paul's like, man, I'm suffering. And that means more people are being reached, which means there's more grace coming down, which means there's more people thanking God.

[ 35 : 38 ] There's more people in the business of thanking God and that is an exciting thing. We got one more thing. What happens when everybody's thanking God? that the thanksgiving of many might redound to the glory of God.

You can put that in your last little gear there. Glory. Now what happens? Paul says, I suffer, then people get grace, more people, the more I suffer, the more people get more grace, the more thanksgiving there is and the more thanksgiving there is, what happens?

The more glory that God gets. Now we as Christians, we talk about this a lot, a lot, don't we? We talk about how we want God to get glory out of our lives. You know what Paul just told you?

How to bring God glory in your life. How do you do it? You suffer. You suffer. You suffer in ministry. You're tired. You have burdens. You have stress.

You want to quit. But you keep going. Why? To bring glory to God. Now you say, why does people giving thanks bring God glory? How does that work? Okay, so yeah, this church here, I was in a different church this morning up around Chattanooga.

[ 36 : 42 ] Those people were praising. They were singing. They were giving glory to God. They were thanking God. I come down here. You guys are singing. You guys are giving thanks to God. How does our praise bring glory to God?

Well, it's real simple. When someone hears us thanking God for all that he's done for us, then they find out what God does. They find out what kind of a God he is. Let me give you an illustration. Let's say some nice old man that you didn't really know invited you over to his house.

And he seemed like a nice enough old man, sweet old man. And you didn't want to hurt the nice old man's feelings. So he said, okay, sure, great. So he tells you to come over to his house. You go over to his house and you're sitting there talking with him in his living room and you're just thinking, man, this is kind of dull.

This is kind of boring. When can I leave? This guy's kind of old. And then the guy, you know, you're talking to him and the guy goes up and he leaves and goes in the other room. And when he goes in the other room, you notice there's a box on a kind of an end table next to a couch in the living room.

And you open up that box. You know, you're bored. You know, you're looking for something new. So you open up that box and inside that box are hundreds of letters, hundreds of cards, little notes.

[ 37 : 51 ] And you pick them up and it says, dear so-and-so, dear old guy, thank you for saving my life. And you put it down and you pick up the next one. Dear so-and-so, old guy, thank you for rescuing me and my family.

And you put it down and you pick up another one. And you read all these letters and every one of them is thanking this guy for doing something incredible for them, for doing something heroic for them, for doing something amazing for them. And then you hear the guy come back, you close the box real quick and the guy comes back in the room.

Do you look at that guy the same way now? Was he just that old boring guy you were talking to a second ago? No, because you've seen, you've heard the praises, the thanksgiving of other people and all of a sudden you see the glory of this old dude that you're sitting in a room with.

Let me tell you, there's some people to them, God's just some old, nice guy that lives up in heaven that you really don't need. He's a nice guy. It's nice to sit and chat with God if you've got the time to.

But, you know, he's really kind of a nice, boring old person. But when they come into this church, they ought not think that. Because when they come in here, they hear people praising God and thanking God and saying, do you know what God did for me?

[ 38 : 58 ] Robert says, God did this for me and it was incredible. I said, wow, God did that for you. Listen to what he did for me. And I tell Robert what he did for me and Robert's like, wow, he did that for you. And then we're like, let's praise God together. Let's give thanks to God together. And when we do that, what happens?

Then a third person comes up and listens to us carrying on and says, what kind of a God is this? I thought he was just some old dude that lived up in heaven. Turned out he's amazing. He does these incredible things.

He saves us. And when we share that, what happens? When Thanksgiving is rolling, what happens? When that Thanksgiving gear is turning, God is receiving glory in this world.

But what's got to happen? You got to suffer. You got to go through more junk. You have to be willing to be tired and exhausted and broken and hurt and depressed and stressed and frustrated.

You have to be willing to do that. or those gears are going to turn a whole lot slower. There's going to be a whole lot less people receiving a whole lot less grace.

[ 40 : 02 ] There's going to be a whole lot less Thanksgiving and there's going to be a whole lot less glory to God. That's the thrust of our ministry hardships. I want to show you one last thing real quick.

We've got a couple minutes. The end. The end of ministry hardships. What is the final result of all this? Or how does this finally end?

Are we just going to be suffering forever? I think we all know that we're not. Verse 16. We already read this. For which cause we faint not. Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

Paul says every day. How many times do you think Paul thought that he had just given everything he had? That it was over? I think probably when they were hitting him in the head with rocks and he was literally dying, he probably had at least a moment where he thought, this is it.

Gave all I had. It's all over. I bet when Paul's ship was sinking into the middle of the ocean, I think Paul probably thought, well this is it. Gave all I got. That's all I had.

[ 41 : 02 ] When Paul was arrested, we know in Acts, in Acts chapter 20, before Paul was arrested, he told the Ephesian elders, he said, I'm going to Jerusalem and this is it. I'm going there to give the last I got. That's it.

And we know from history, most likely, that was not all he had. That God freed him from that imprisonment and he went on to start some more churches before he was in prison again. Then we all know that finally one day, Paul did put his head down on a block and got it chopped off.

And I bet right then, Paul was thinking, I wonder if this is it. I wonder if this is really it. I wonder if it's really going to go down right now. Okay? And Paul over and over again, he thought, this is it. My outward man is finished.

But you know what he found out? The inward man was renewed. Day by day by day. He lived right here. Suffering, but not losing everything. And God every day gave him a little bit more. But look at verse 17.

I really want you to see verse 17. Man, I love verse 17. I don't know any verse that has encouraged me more in the past couple years than verse 17. For our, what kind of affliction? Now wait a second.

[ 42 : 02 ] Paul, you mean those rocks that people are hitting you in the head with? You mean your boat that was sinking? Do you mean when your closest friends betrayed you?

That affliction? Paul, if that's light affliction, what is heavy affliction? You know, Paul says, it's all light to us, buddy. It's all light. Now how is it light?

Look what he says. Which is, but for a moment. It's only but for a moment. Worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

You want to know the only way that your affliction can be light? is if it is compared with an overwhelming weight of glory. Now let me ask you, whose glory is that in verse 17?

Think about this for a second. Whose glory is that in verse 17? We know in verse 15 we just read that that was God's glory, but whose glory is this in verse 17? It's ours.

[ 43 : 02 ] He says, it worketh for us a far more exceeding weight of glory. Here's what's amazing. You might need to make another little gear coming off your first gear here and write another word glory in there.

Because what happens when we suffer? God is building glory in you. He is making you worthy to partake of his glory. He is getting you ready for heaven.

He is building a capacity for glory within you. And you know how you do that? You dig deep. Imagine that you were a person with a lot of money and you wanted to build a building.

And you didn't know anything about building buildings. You didn't know anything about it. Let's say you wanted to build the tallest building in Atlanta. So you took all your money and you went and you found a guy, someone who knew about building. And you said, I want you to build me the tallest building in Atlanta.

And so you gave him all your money. He said, build me the tallest building in Atlanta. And you don't know anything about building. So you let him work for a little while and two weeks went by and you thought, it's probably done by now. So you drove up, you know, downtown Atlanta to see where he's putting you up this biggest building in Atlanta.

[ 44 : 06 ] And you're shocked and you're horrified because not only is there no building, there's a huge hole in the ground. And you say, are you an idiot? I told you to go that way and you're going that way.

You were digging. I'm telling you to build up. What's that builder going to say? The higher you want me to go, the lower I have to dig. The bigger you want, the deeper I have to go.

And you know what God is saying? When you're going through suffering and hardship, you know what he's saying? I am doing this because I want to build something out of you that you can't even really wrap your mind around right now.

Here's the thing. We all, in our minds, we think we have the finished product in mind. I think I know what Jake 2.0 should look like and I don't at all. Because I would be happier with a slightly better version of me.

You know, a me that, you know, was maybe a better reader, you know, who was treated his wife a little bit better, you know. I wish I was like a little bit better than what I am now. And God wants to turn me into the image of his son.

[ 45 : 11 ] And so when you come to him, you say, what are you doing? He says, you don't know how high I want to build. And if you did, you wouldn't question how deep I'm digging. So when it's hurting, church, when you're suffering, when you're going through some junk and you think, man, I can't, I can't go through this anymore.

I can't keep serving God like this. If he doesn't help me out, I'm going to die. You know what you need to realize? He's doing that. The deeper he's digging, you need to rejoice with Paul. Paul's rejoicing. And you need to say, you know what? He's digging because he wants to go way higher and he wants to do way more and he wants to turn me into the, into the incorruptible, magnificent, glorious, splendid image of his son.

It's because he wants so much more even than what I want. Let's look at the last verse and we're done. Verse 18. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

For the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal. Let me tell you, if you only, if you only measure your ministry and your life and your existence by what you can see and measure, by what you can see and measure, then you will, suffering will never make sense to you.

How could you suffer? It's a bad business deal and so you'll cut your losses and you'll move away. But, if your eye is focused on that which is not seen, meaning, focused on Jesus Christ, as Hebrew says, looking unto the author and finisher of our faith, when you do that, you will be empowered to suffer.

[ 46 : 45 ] Why? Well, it's like Hebrew says. He says, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, the cross, the suffering, despising the shame.

You know what that word despising means? It means to laugh at, to think little of. It's what you say, it's what you feel when a first grader says he's going to beat you up.

You despise him. You look down on him. You think little of it. And Paul says that Jesus despised the shame. He thought, not that big of a deal.

When you look unto him, you know what he says right there? He says the same thing that Paul says. We don't look at that. Hebrews 12, he says the same thing that Paul says here in 2 Corinthians. He says, despising the shame is set on the right hand of the throne of God.

He says, when you look at him, you must look to Jesus lest you be weary and faint. in your own minds. That means when you take your eye off Jesus, when you take your eye off the unseen, you will faint.

[ 47 : 51 ] But when you fix your eye and what it is that Jesus has done already for us, what happens? You have power to suffer for him. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word.

We thank you for having higher plans, desires, goals for us than we have for ourselves.

There may be someone here who feels like they have a higher goal for their life than suffering. And they would prefer not to spend the few years they have on this earth suffering for you in ministry.

God, I pray that tonight you will break that person's heart and let them see clearly the unseen. Let them see what great things that you have in store for us and the glories that you are trying to build into us.

And that cannot happen, that the glory will not come to us, nor will the glory go to you, nor will the grace flow out to the people around us unless we are willing to go through some suffering.

[ 49 : 03 ] Father, we thank you for putting us into your ministry, for blessing us in that way. And Father, I pray that you will find every one of us willing and joyful in our suffering of hardships in the ministry of reconciliation.

We thank you in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. This message was recorded at Vision Baptist Church in Alfred, Georgia. For more information, log on to [www.visionbaptist.com](http://www.visionbaptist.com) where you can find our service times, location, contact information, and more audio and video recordings.