

Learning to Pray with Paul: Suffering and Prayer

2 Corinthians 12:1-10 || Pastor Paul Hahn || 9 January 2022

*To CARE for one another in truth and in love,
To GROW together as followers of Jesus,
To SERVE those God has placed in our path.
– CG Mission Statement*

Icebreaker: What's your opinion on New Year's resolutions? Do you have a favorite one?

Worship: [Psalm 69](#) (Remain a few moments in worship with this passage. What is God's invitation?)

Sermon Summary for 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (Read the passage aloud before reading the sermon summary.)

Much of 2022 will be spent equipping and encouraging our community groups to be people of prayer. May we look to Christ and His word as His disciples did – that we might become a house of prayer for all peoples ([Isaiah 56:7](#)), especially in times of suffering. Because it's easy to celebrate God in times of joy and plenty. But pain and hardship will be a part of our journey too. These are the times when we will truly learn to pray. As Paul Miller wrote, these unexpected turns create a path from our hearts to God. We see this in the Apostle Paul's suffering:

Where is Paul's place of suffering? Throughout this letter, Paul brings up all kinds of suffering he's had to endure. Here, he centers on physical suffering, something chronic – a thorn in his flesh. We don't know what exactly it was; he doesn't go into specifics. All we know is that it was terribly painful, enough at times to despair for his life. Many of us have experienced such trials. And what makes physical suffering so awful is that we cannot escape it; we're stuck with our body. Chronic or intense suffering therefore seems to sideline us from the flow of life.

Who is active in Paul's suffering? Paul's thorn is both “a messenger of Satan” and a gift from God. It's vital to hold these perspectives in tension with any suffering we endure. There are greater and lesser players and purposes with our sufferings. The Devil is the lesser player; his malevolent desire: our destruction. Suffering isn't natural. It's anti-God – the product of a world gone amok in rebellion against Him. It's never good in itself, and so we should pray for its removal, just as Paul tells us he did. We should pray for healing and renewal where there is such brokenness. But, God is also at work in suffering, to work good out of it. He uses such pain to mend not just the source of our pain, but the whole of who we are. And He is the greater player here, working His redemption in us and through us, in the middle of our broken lives in the midst of a broken world ([2 Cor 4:17](#)). Why?

- > Because there is sin in our lives of which we need to repent, and physical suffering wakes us up to this.
- > Because there are idols we need to let go of, and suffering helps us to do that.
- > Because there is a new direction or turn God wants us to make in our life, and suffering redirects us.
- > Because we know Jesus uniquely by sharing in the fellowship of His sufferings ([Phil 3](#)).
- > Because, like Paul, we need to be humbled, so that we might boast of our own weakness.

How does Paul respond to his suffering? God doesn't want us to stoically suffer. He wants us to engage with Him in the midst of our pain, as Paul does. He wants us to crawl up into His arms for comfort. But He also wants us to wrestle with Him in such times (like Jacob, Job, Moses and even Jesus did). Because our Savior is acutely aware of such pain, and He knows God might not remove it even though we ask Him to. Paul rests in the grace and power of Christ amid his own weakness. We can too. It begins with small steps: leaning into Jesus, asking Him to meet us in our suffering. We open up humbly about the reality of our brokenness. We look to fellow Christians for support and prayer. We pray for pain's removal. We pray against Satan. We cry out to our Father... and He will rejoice and celebrate these first steps as we make them.

Discussion Questions (You will not be able to discuss all the questions. Pick the ones you like. Some are personal perspective and application questions for life-transforming discussions.)

Where is Paul's place of suffering?

- Have you ever dealt with chronic pain? Do you know others who deal with chronic pain?
 - How did this shape your life or how do you see it shaping the lives of others you know?
 - Can we take time right now to pray for them (or for you)?

Who is active in Paul's suffering?

- What does it mean that Satan and God are both active in suffering? What are their different motives?
- C.S. Lewis notes in The Problem of Pain, "God whispers to you in your pleasures but screams to you in your pains." Do you agree with Lewis's statement? Why or why not?
 - Are there applications where you see this in your own life?

How does Paul respond to his suffering?

- Using Paul's example, what does Paul's thorn serve to remind us to do when we face suffering?
 - What makes continual crying out to the Lord so challenging (in times of suffering, or generally)?
- If God answers "No" (or "Not yet" or "Wait") to deep suffering and prayers for healing, it's very difficult for us. But we are called to persist – to trust in God despite what we do not know, and trust in what we do know: that the Lord has, is, and always will be fighting for us. It just might not look and happen exactly the way we wanted and prayed for.
 - What small or big steps can you and your group make (and commit to) in praying against suffering and crying out to the Lord together?

Prayer

For use in your personal prayer times, or family or group prayer – the Weekly Prayer Guide is linked [HERE](#).

Engage & Experience: Prayer & Gratitude

People whose prayer life has grown and deepened will tell you that this path involves pain and suffering, knowing God's word, opening our hearts to Him in prayer, and asking for His will and not our own. This is what David did over and over again in the Psalms. [Psalm 145](#) and [150](#) are prayers that worship and praise various attributes of God's character. Take time this week to pray two or three times focusing on these qualities without asking for anything. Share your experience with the group at your next meeting.

If your group wishes to work through the book Pray With Your Eyes Open by Richard Pratt, along with the discussion guide, you can find the link to purchase [HERE](#).