

Hey, good morning. How are we? It's going to be that kind of morning. That's good. All right. Hey, one thing before we get started. I don't know how many of you know Steve Chandler. He's actually sitting right there in the back. If you don't know him, that's okay. You've probably seen him when you've walked up from the parking lot. Maybe he has yelled at you or something. Either way, Steve Chandler has been the facilities guy here at the Denton Campus since the Denton Campus opened, and today is actually his last day of work.

So I asked him if he would come up. He said no. I said, "I'm going to call you up, or I'm going to call you out." He said, "You can call me out." I want to pray for Steve because, if you know Steve, he may be gruff and grumpy and harsh on the exterior, but inside he's a big teddy bear. He loves this place, he loves you, and he works hard so you can walk into this place and have everything work, for the most part and most of the time, seamlessly and flawlessly. Let's pray for him, and then we'll go ahead and get started.

Father, you're good, and we thank you for that. We thank you for men like Steve Chandler, who love you, who really seek to honor you, who seek to proclaim your goodness and your grace and mercy. He could do many other things, but he has chosen for the last five years of his life to be here, pouring out his life for the people of The Village Church. I do pray for really just what the next season holds for him, everything you've put on his heart to walk into and move into.

God, I just pray you would bless him, that you would bless Janet, that you would give her patience with him, that you would give her just a sweet gentleness with him. More than anything I pray during this time that their love for one another would continue to grow as they fall more and more in love with you. We love you. We praise you. We thank you for your goodness, your grace, and your mercy towards us. We pray all these things in Jesus' powerful name, amen.

We love you, Steve Chandler.

Okay, well, my name is Jeremy, and so if you're here today and you were expecting to see Matt, let me explain a little bit about what's happening. Matt Chandler is our lead teaching pastor. About 40 times a year, you'll see him on this big screen behind me. The rest of the time, generally, what you'll see is one of the campus pastors, but today you get me. So...surprise!

I actually am on staff here. My role, specifically, is to oversee our Recovery Groups ministry. You heard Clint Crawford give an announcement about the Step studies. Sign ups start January 2 for the next one, so if you're interested in that, go ahead and go online and sign up. I also oversee our support ministry. What that means is I spend most of my time dealing and ministering to people who find themselves in varying states of crisis.

If we're honest, pretty much all of us live our lives in varying states of crisis, right? So what you'll hear us say from the stage is whatever the difficulty, whatever the circumstance, whatever the trial you're walking through, the Lord is with you. In those moments, you can press into him. I have this growing concern in me, which the Lord has really been growing in me over the year about, *Man, do our people know what it means to press into the Lord in moments of difficulty and moments of trial?*

I think Matt said last week for many of us the holiday season, man, it's not a season of joy. It's not something we look to with anticipation all year long, just waiting for it to get here because we love it so much, right? For many of us, it's a season we look to with anxiety. I know, for me, after several horrible things happening during the holidays, for whatever reason, when I think about the holiday season, man, just this despondency comes on me, because there were some heavy things that happened in my life during the holidays.

For me, even, a lot of times, the holidays are not an exciting time. It's not something I necessarily look forward to. I love it while I'm in it. I love to see my kids opening presents. I love to spend time with friends. I love to spend time with family, but at the end of the day, man, there's this despondency that comes to me during the season. So what I want for all of us as we talk about suffering is to figure out what it looks like to press into the Lord in the midst of our suffering. The way we're going to do that this morning is we're going to talk about Job.

Does anybody know who Job is? Yes, good. Here's how the Bible describes Job. Job was a righteous man, right? That means Job was a good man. Job honored the Lord. Job would sacrifice for his children when they had parties, and he thought, "Hey, maybe they sinned and dishonored the Lord. So I'm going to sacrifice for my children." So Job was a righteous man.

One day, God is holding court, because that's what God does, and Satan comes from walking to and fro on the earth. God says to Satan, "**Have you considered My servant Job?**" God looks at Satan, and he says, "Hey, have you seen Job? He's a righteous man. He is a good man, and he loves me. He chases hard after me. Have you seen this guy?"

Satan looks at God, and he says, "Yeah, absolutely he worships you, and do you know why? Because you have blessed him beyond measure. You've given him wealth. You've given him a great family. You've given him many, many things, but you let me touch the things you've given him, and I guarantee you Job would curse you. So God says, "Do you think so?" Satan says, "Yes, I think so." That's not actually what it says, but that's my paraphrase. So God says, "Okay, okay. Do whatever you need to do. Only do not touch him. Don't put your hand on Job."

So the next day, Job has the worst day ever, right? He loses everything. All his children are dead. All his possessions are gone. Everything he had is taken away from him in a moment. So we meet Job sitting in a pile of ashes with good friends and a good wife saying, **"Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"** This is what Job says. **"The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."**

So God is holding court again, and Satan comes back in from wandering the earth. God says, "Man, have you seen my servant Job? Have you seen how faithful he is? You took everything. I allowed you to take everything, and he didn't curse me. You said he would, and he didn't. He is a righteous man. I love this man, and he loves me."

Satan looks at God, and he says, "Yeah, but anybody could do that as long as you protect him physically. I guarantee you if you let me touch his body, he would curse you." God says, "Do you think so?" Satan says, "Yeah, I think so." God says, "Okay, only don't take his life." So God gives Satan permission to afflict Job. The next time we find Job he has boils from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet. He's scraping himself with clay pots, trying to scratch. Again good friends and a good wife: **"Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die!"**

But Job does not curse God. He will not curse God, but then we see Job start to ask questions, right? All his friends are saying, "Man, you must be a sinner. You must have something going on. What are you hiding from us? What's going on with you? Why is God doing this to you? God does not do this to people who aren't in sin. He would not allow this to happen." Job is like, "I haven't done anything. I have loved the Lord my God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. I have not done anything."

Then Job begins to ask questions. Here's the amazing thing: God responds. We'll read that in Job 42. If you have your Bible, go ahead and turn there. We'll start in verse 1. So God responds, and here's what I want you to know. Here's how God responds: "Job, do you have questions for me? Well, here's the thing. I have some questions for you. So gird your loins, stand up, and you need to take this like a man."

So it's not, "Man, Job, I'm so sorry all this had to happen to you, but here's what I was doing. I was showing the Enemy that, man, no matter what happens to you, you would not curse me." He doesn't say that. He says, "Hey, stand up, dress yourself, and get ready. I'm going to talk to you like man. Where were you when..." He starts listing all of these things he has done in creation.

"Where were you when I hung the stars? Where were you when I set the earth in motion? Where were you when I put a ring through the leviathan's nose? Can you do that? Can you do any of that? Who are you to question me? Where were you when I did all of these things?" So in Job 42, starting in verse 1, we find Job's response after a back-and-forth with God, and this is what Job says:

"Then Job answered the LORD and said: 'I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. "Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?" Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. "Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me." I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.'"

So we see here although God does not answer Job's questions, God responds, right? Than Job's good and right response to what the Lord tells him is, "Man, I thought I knew you. I thought I understood. I had heard of you, like I had heard of you with my ear, but I had never seen you. Now that my eye sees you, and I see myself in light of you, I despise myself, and I repent in dust and ashes."

Here's what Job doesn't say: "I don't understand how a good and loving God could allow this to happen to me. I don't know why you would do that. I was a good man. I was a righteous man, and you have done all these things to me. Then you don't even tell me why. You allow me to sit here in the ashes with boils from the top of my head to the bottom of my feet. I've lost everything, and you can't even do me the courtesy of telling me why."

That's not his response. What does he say? "Man, I had heard of you. I had gotten myself involved in things I cannot possibly understand, but now that I see you and I see myself in light of you, I need to repent." Here's what we learn from Job. Here's what we learn from anybody who has an encounter with God. *An encounter with God necessarily changes you.*

We see it in Isaiah, right? Isaiah sees God, and he says, "Woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips. I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the king." Some versions would say, "I am undone at the vision of you," but a vision of God necessarily changes us. A vision of God necessarily changes the way we view our circumstances. No longer do we look at the trial we're walking through and say, "Why would God let this happen to me? How could he? I've done all of these things, and still he allows this."

When we have a right view of God and a right view of ourselves, here's what we know. Man, it doesn't matter what I'm walking through, he is with me. He loves me. He cares for me, and he has it. There's nothing that is outside of his hand. There is nothing that is outside of his power. There is nothing that is outside of his reach, and he has it. No matter how out of control I feel in this moment and in this circumstance, I have confidence the Lord has not abandoned me and he is not unable to heal and control what's going on. I have confidence in that.

An encounter with a holy God changes what we ultimately desire. So at the end of the day, at the end of all of it, regardless of our situation, regardless of our circumstance, what we want more than healing, what we want more than wholeness, what we want more than peace is him, right? So we're able to view our situation and our circumstance in light of all of that. "If you're going to use this suffering, whatever this suffering is, to bring me more of you, then that's what I want. I want more of you, and I want to get that anyway I can. If you have to bring pain, then that's good because that's the best place for me to be if I'm getting more of you, if I'm trusting in you, if I'm dependent on you."

I always say if the Lord saw fit not to make me a wealthy man, he knows I should not be a wealthy man, because if I were a wealthy man, I wouldn't really need him. At least I would act like I didn't. He doesn't give me a lot of money. He likes to keep me dependent on him for that. So, man, there are times when I am on my knees before him saying, "I don't know how we're going to do this. We need you to move. We need you to work," and he does. Here's the thing: Sometimes he doesn't, but he's still good. He's still faithful. He's still righteous. He's still just, right?

So here's what we're going to do. For the rest of our time, I want to talk with you about what it looks like to grow spiritually in the midst of suffering. Man, the Lord has taught me this over a very long and a very difficult year. There were moments when I really wrestled with the Lord, saying, "What are you thinking? What are you doing?" So I don't want you to think I'm standing up here in some position of authority of someone who has gotten this down.

This is a struggle for me this year because it has been a difficult, difficult year. We got a baby, and we lost a baby this year. I reconciled a relationship with my father, and I lost my father this year. We thought we were going to get to adopt a baby girl this year, and it hasn't happened yet. So the Lord, it seems, in an endless string of things from December to December has been... It feels like sometimes he has just been crushing us, but here's what we found. In the crushing we found confidence in him. What I want for all of us today is to be able to be confident in the crushing, to be confident in the suffering.

Whatever the suffering is, whether it's suffering of your own doing because you chose to be whatever it is you chose to do, whether it's suffering as a result of someone else's sin against you or suffering as a result of simply living in a fallen world that's full of sin, I want you to be confident, man, that you can press into the Lord. (This was not supposed to take this long. I told Kourtney Nance I would go like 35 minutes, and that was probably a lie. If you've been in Steps before, you know I lie about things like that all the time.) Let me pray.

Father, you're good, and we thank you for that. I thank you in the midst of whatever situation or struggle or circumstance we're walking in, God, that we would always know that, that we would believe that, that we would trust in that, that we would find hope in that. This morning, God, where we struggle, we pray you would by your Spirit minister to the hearts of your children.

We love you. We praise you. We thank you for your goodness. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for everything he purchased for us on the cross. We thank you that in him we have life and breath and all things. We pray these things in his powerful name, amen.

Okay, before we get started here's my hope for us. What I am about to talk about is merely a means. It is not an end, okay? So before you hear all of this and say, "I don't want you to give me law," please know I'm not giving you law, and if you hear me giving you a set of things to do or a set of rules to follow, you are hearing me wrong. I am giving you a means, not an end. So the Lord can choose to use these things, or the Lord could choose not to use these things. There are three things I want to avoid before we walk into this.

First, *I don't want you to overvalue these means*. I don't want you to put too much stock in "Well, if I read my Bible this much and I do these particular things to put my sin to death and I spend this much time every day praying, then the Lord will do this for me." That's not how it works. You don't place too much value in the means, but what we're trying to get to is the end. What's the end? Him, right? He is the end. These are the means by which we get to the end.

Second, *we don't want to undervalue these means*, which means, "Well, if God's going to do it, he's going to have to do it, so why try?" I've had that conversation, and I've actually tried that. It didn't work at all. So I don't want to put more on you than the Lord would put on you, but you do have some responsibility in your spiritual growth. You don't sit and wait.

I hope, like in your marriage, you don't sit and wait on your spouse to do everything, to pursue you, to ask you out on dates. I would hope you don't wait, because you find out how that goes, right? Does that work out well for you or poorly most of the time? I'm assuming poorly, because you laughed. For some of you it might go well, and congratulations, your spouse is awesome.

We don't want to undervalue these means. We do have a responsibility. Now the work of salvation from beginning to end is a work of the Lord, and so even the ability to do the things we're going to ask you to do is a result of the Spirit's work in you. I will acknowledge that. So from here on out, when I talk about these things, please know that by the work of the Spirit in you, you will be able to do these things.

If you're in this place this morning and you do not have the Holy Spirit in you, you do not have the ability or the capability to do any of this. My prayer for you this morning has simply been as you hear the good news of the gospel the Holy Spirit would quicken your heart to a knowledge and an understanding of his grace and mercy for you and that he would save you. If you have the Spirit in you this morning, you have through Christ's sacrifice on the cross been given the Holy Spirit, and because of the Holy Spirit you have the ability to do these things we'll talk about today.

Lastly, *we do not put hope in these means*, right? Again, the way we grow spiritually is not the end. It is the means to an end, and the end is what? Him. Thank you. The end is him. So here we go.

1. *Put our sin to death*. The first thing we want to do to grow spiritually, even in the midst of suffering... This is going to be hard for some of us to hear because we don't like people to say it, but in the midst of our suffering, one of the things we absolutely need to do is put our sin to death. That's not sitting idly by and waiting for the Lord to deal with our sin and to take care of our sin for us. This is aggressively, violently putting our sin to death.

First Corinthians 9 says, **"Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified."** I am active in the process of putting my sin to death.

Man, so we had a little boy in our home from December until July. We had hopes for him. We had dreams for him. We had a vision of his life. Our goal was to adopt this baby boy, but it didn't work out that way. He ended up going back with his father. So he goes back, and I'm wrestling with the Lord. "How could you send this baby boy back into this situation [which, for the record, wasn't a really bad situation at all]? He was in such a good place. He was in a home that loved the Lord. He was in a home that cherished the Lord. He was in a home that loved him and cherished him, and you've taken him away."

In this moment, here's what the Lord reveals to me: "Man, you think you're better than this boy's father. You are self-righteous. You're looking at his father and all the misdeeds, and you are looking at your life

and thinking, 'Man, I am good.'" Here's the thing. Most of us see our sin as this one big thing. If we could just step past this one big thing, whatever this one big thing is, whether it's addiction or pornography or whatever it is, if we could just step past this one big thing, we would be good, right? We would be righteous like Job if we could just get past this thing, whatever this thing is.

Here's what the Lord revealed to me when he finally got me past my big thing. There were a thousand little wickednesses in my heart that drove that really big thing. Man, I was not seeking to put those things to death. So I did. I looked at this man and thought, "I am better. I've never had any of my children taken away. I've never done any of the things this man has done. I am better."

Then the Lord reminded me quickly, "No, no, no. You're not. You're self-righteous when you get uncomfortable. You eat more than you should. You don't press into me. So the same things you're condemning this man for are the same things you do. Yours are just a little bit prettier." So I want to actively seek to put *all* of my sin, even my little sins, even my respectable and acceptable sins to death. Romans 8 tells us how we do it.

"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

If by the Spirit, relying in, hoping in, trusting in the work of the Spirit in my heart, I am putting to death the deeds of the flesh, I will live. But this is active, right? I'm presented with temptation every single day, temptation to not trust the Lord is good, that his promises are true, and that what he says he's going to do in me he's going to actually do in me.

Rather than trust in that, what I do is say, "No, you're not good. No, you're not gracious. No, you're not sufficient. So I'm going to turn away from you, and I'm going to run to my sin." That's active, right? That's not passive: "I just fell into it. I don't know how it happened." No, it's a breaking of relationship with the Lord and running to your sin, running to our sin.

So in the same way, when we are presented with that temptation, the Scriptures are clear. "He will not tempt us beyond what we can bear, and when there is a temptation, he provides a way of escape." We can choose to run to the Lord and trust his promises are true and trust what he says he's going to do in us he's going to do, or we can doubt it and run away. Those are your two options. So we will actively trust the Lord,

or we will actively run away from him. There is no in-between here. We have to get serious about our sin. We have to acknowledge it for what it is. We have to confess it.

Man, we have to hope in the Lord, even in the midst of our struggle, right? I will tell you this honestly. In the past year, the Lord has shown me more about my sin than he showed me in the previous 22 years that I had been a believer. I'm 34 years old now. He has used this suffering to reveal wickedness in my heart, and I want to put that to death by all the means of grace he has given me by using the church, by using accountability. Man, I want to confess. I want to repent. I want to study the Word. Ultimately, it looks like...

2. *Devote ourselves to God.* If an encounter with God, with the living, holy Creator of the universe, changes me necessarily, what I want to do is I want to seek to devote myself to him, which means everything is now through that lens. Whether I am suffering or whether I'm in the middle of great joy, I want to devote myself to the Lord.

If it's in suffering, it's, "The Lord gives. The Lord takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." I know, I trust, and I believe the promise that he will work all things together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purposes. You can't walk into a hospital room of someone who is dying and say that, but that's a promise we cling to, right? In the midst of our suffering, in the midst of our trial, in the midst of our hurt, we cling to that because we know because that is true, there is nothing he will not use for our good.

We may not see it. We may not get to experience it quickly, but at the end of the day, we know he will use that to conform me into the image of his Son. That is good, and so because that is true, I want to seek to devote myself to God. I want to know what pleases him, and I want to know what grieves his heart. I want to do the things that please him, and I want to stay away from the things that grieve his heart.

Here's a verse we use around here all the time. Isaiah 64: "All our righteousness is as filthy rags before him." The minute we say we want to do the things that please the Lord, that's the place we want to go in our head. Here's the truth. The Bible describes God over and over and over and over as Father. Are there any fathers in this room? You can raise your hand. It's okay. It's a safe place. Great. So the overwhelming picture of God in Scripture is that he is a Father. He is a good and loving and gracious and kind and generous Father.

I'm a father. If you have met my kids... Some of you have, and that's good. I love my children, but I have two boys who are all boy and one girl who is all boy and all girl, which is like a double whammy. Here's the thing. My son, Layton, is 4 years old, crazy as all get-out, destructive, could tear a house down, burn a house down, or blow a house up in less than an hour if you gave him time.

One day, I'm sitting at the bottom of the stairs, and I'm talking with my wife. He jets up the stairs, and I'm like, "What is he doing? That can't be good. This cannot be a good thing." So I walk up the stairs. We have this art station at the top of the stairs, and he's cleaning it. He's picking up all the paper he had thrown everywhere around the room, and he's putting it in the little bins we've given him to put those things in. He's picking up all the colors and all the chalk and all the markers. He's cleaning.

He wasn't asked to do that. I didn't walk in and say, "Go clean the art station." I didn't walk in and say, "Hey, you made a huge mess. You need to go clean it up." I didn't do that. He just on his own decided to walk up and clean that. Do you know what happened in me in that moment? I can't tell you how many people I told that story to. "Do you know what he did? He just walked up the stairs and started cleaning."

I didn't love him any less when he made a huge mess than I did when he was cleaning, but in that moment my heart was filled with joy because, man, this little boy went, and he cleaned, which is a big deal for him because he does not ever clean. My heart was filled with joy, and when my kids do that, I am overjoyed. It's not just cleaning and doing things I want them to do. Sometimes it's...

Last night, we're sitting there praying, and Layton starts asking about John Warren's dad. "What's John Warren's dad's name?"

"Well, John Warren's dad's name is John Warren."

"What's John Warren's mom's name?"

"I don't know what her name is. I'll text and find out." So I texted him. Then he wants to pray for them. He wants to pray for Mr. John's mom and dad. That brought me joy, and in the same way, God, who is a good and loving and right and just Father, is pleased with us when we seek to obey him, when we seek to walk in his statutes. It pleases his heart.

On the other side of that, there are things we do that absolutely grieve his heart. Here's the best analogy I can use. The past two weeks, I don't know if any of you have seen me. I've been walking around with a black eye. The reason I have that black eye is my daughter was supposed to be going to bed, so Staci said, "Put that girl down." I said, "Okay."

I went to grab her. She was holding my wife's phone, and she screams at the top of her lungs, goes back with the phone, and then she just throws it. She's deadly accurate. It hit me right in the eye. As soon as she does it, I feel this goose egg pop up on my eye. I'm like, "That's not going to be good." I pick her up, and

I'm like, "I can't spank this child. She's a foster child. That's illegal. They'll take her away. I really want to keep her, and so I can't spank her. Then she looks at me, and she spits in my face. I'm going to tell you the truth. In that moment she grieved my heart, but do you know what I didn't do?

I didn't say, "Do you know what? I'm going to call CPS and tell them to come pick her up now. I'm done with her. I don't want this one anymore. If she's not going to do what I ask her to do, if she's not going to go down when she's supposed to go down, I don't want anything to do with her. I'm done." I didn't say that, right? She is mine. I loved her just as much in the moment when she threw a phone at me and spit in my face as I do when she runs up and says, "I love you," and gives me a kiss. Because she is mine.

In the same way so many of us... You're in here today thinking, "Man, he must be angry with me. He must be so done with me," but the truth is he is a good and loving Father, who loves to give good. In fact, Luke 11 says, **"What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"** He is a good and generous, kind and loving Father.

Wherever you're at, he's not angry with you. He has not washed his hands of you. He is not done with you this morning. So you can devote yourself to that good and loving Father. Listen, he is not your father. Regardless of how good or bad your father was. He is not your father. He is so much gentler, so much kinder, so much better. He is not your father. So whatever that picture of father is in your head, you can do away with it because he is good. He is gracious. He is gentle. He is kind. He is merciful. He is abounding in steadfast love for you this morning, and we can devote ourselves to that kind of Father.

I seek to honor the Word. I seek to honor the Scriptures. Here's the thing: The approach matters. The way you approach the Scriptures matters. So this year I go through several different things, and specifically when I'm trying to reconcile with my father who had been out of the home for almost a decade, I'm searching the Scriptures. I'm like, "Lord, I don't know how to deal with this," and so I'm looking through the Psalms.

I'm like, "Where is the Scripture here that talks about fathers leaving and then coming back." But my approach to the Scriptures was, "Here's my situation and here's my circumstance. I want to see how the Scriptures speak to it." That's not how we approach the Scriptures, right? Jesus said it best to the Pharisees. "You study the Scriptures in vain because you think in them you find life, and you totally miss the one they point to." I'm not going to the Scriptures with my situation and my circumstance and trying to figure out how God speaks to it. I'm going to the Scriptures to find God. I want to find him there.

Jamie Hipp is in the front row. That's him right there, my good friend, probably my bestie. I'm not supposed to say *bestie*. Jamie will red card me. We were in the same home group for like five years or something, but a few years ago, this is what he said: "I wake up every morning, and I've kind of disciplined myself to go into the Scriptures. Even when I don't want to, it's the thing I do because I want to find the Lord there."

So here's the thing. Most of us, when we have a hard time being in the Word, we just don't read it, but the way we approach the Scriptures matters. Regardless of our situation, regardless of our circumstance, regardless of the suffering, if we go to the Scriptures to try and find how it speaks to our situation and our circumstance, we're going to be frustrated because it's not about us. It is not about us. It is about Christ and Christ alone.

Here's why we go to the Scriptures. Here's why we devote ourselves to the Word of God. Because if we want to know how to please him and what grieves him and want to know how to put sin to death, we find that in the Scriptures. Man, so we honor the Word. We love the Word because we pursue God there, not because we're going to find life there, not because we're going to find the formula to crack the code to get us out of whatever situation or circumstance we're in, or to find the hope and healing for our hearts. That's not what we find there. What we find there is God and the promises he has made.

"I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. I have gone to great lengths to rescue you. Even though you suffer, it is but for a little while, and at the end of the day, there is coming a day when you will suffer no more. I will wipe away every tear from your eye. I will be your God. You *will* be my people. I will make you holy. I will complete the good work I've started in you." None of that has to do with your situation or circumstance. None of that has to do with your suffering, none of it.

So the other thing is difficult. A lot of times we have a hard time being in the Scriptures because we undervalue the Scriptures. We don't see the value in it. "I don't feel like it. Man, I don't want to be legalistic about it, so I'm just not going to do it today." You don't do that really in any other area of your life, and things go well, right?

How many of you have a job? Right. Are there days when you don't want to go to work, but you do it anyway? Why? Yeah, you get a paycheck, and so there is a tangible reminder even though you don't want to do it, you gain something from it at the end, right? How much more valuable are the Scriptures, the Word of God?

So the moment we stop looking at the Scriptures as the key to figure out my situation and start looking at them as the lifeline to the Father, to the God of the universe who created everything, we start to see them

as valuable because ultimately they are valuable, much more valuable than any paycheck we get. They are valuable. We want to honor the Word for its value, for whom it proclaims, for whom it speaks to, for the promises it reminds us of. We seek to honor the Word, and we see it as valuable.

3. *Abide in Christ.* Finally, and most importantly, I seek to abide in Christ. Matthew 11, starting in verse 28, says, **"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."**

Here's what Christ says: "Are you tired? Come to me. Are you weary? Come to me. Are you burdened? Come to me." What does he say? **"...I will give you rest."** How does he give us rest? Anybody? He gives us rest by becoming our rest. So to abide in Christ means we want to know him. We want to know about him. So I search the Scriptures to see what they say about him. I read books about him. I pray to him. I want to abide with him. As I do that, here's what I do. I stop asking him to give me things, and I start asking him to be things for me.

"So, God, don't give me peace; be my peace. Jesus, don't give me hope; be my hope. Don't give me comfort; be my comfort. Don't give me rest; be my rest. Don't give me joy; be my joy. Because I don't have the strength to kill sin on my own. I don't have the strength or the courage or the desire to devote myself to you. I don't have the strength or the desire to be in the Word, but I believe your promises are true. I believe you can be my rest. I believe in you I have life and breath and all things, not because you give me those things, but because you are those things. Where I doubt or disbelieve that truth, help me in my unbelief."

Here's the hard one. "Don't give me a better circumstance, don't give me a better situation, but give me a more clear vision of you in the midst of my circumstance. Give me a more clear vision of you in the midst of my struggle, because I believe you love me. I believe you care for me. What I'm walking through right now makes it difficult for me to believe that. So I want to with everything in me believe that, but I need you to be my strength in this moment. I need you to be my joy in this moment. I need you to be my comfort in this moment because everything else I've run to to try and find it has let me down." He never will. Romans 5 says:

"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the

Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly."

Here's the truth this morning. It doesn't matter how far gone you think you are. At just the right time, Christ died for you. It doesn't matter how dire your situation or your circumstance; God will use your suffering to produce endurance so you can persevere. So, this morning, hear this, church. God is not angry with you. He has not abandoned you to your own devices. He has not abandoned you to your suffering. He has not abandoned you in the midst of your difficulty.

He is there, and he has given you access to himself through the blood of Christ. Those are the promises we want to cling to, right? We want to cling to that. We want to take advantage of all the means of grace he has made necessary. We want to put our sin to death. We want to devote ourselves to a good Father. We want to honor the Word. We want to honor the Scriptures. We want to seek him in them. Then we want to abide in Christ.

Every single day when we wake up, we need to remind ourselves that, man, this is difficult, this trial is real, and my hurt is valid, but at the end of the day, the gospel is still true. I am secure in Christ. Everything that has been promised but is not quite here yet, those things are still true for me. I'm secure in Christ, and I'm secure because of what he has accomplished on the cross.

So I'll conclude this way. If you have a Bible, I'm just going to read and let the Lord do the heavy lifting, and then we'll be done. Hebrews 12 says, **"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."** Listen, church, what does it say next? Do not grow weary.

"Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons [and daughters]? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.'

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?

For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it." Listen, church. "Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord."

So, Father, I do pray this morning more than anything you would help us, that you would give us the ability to lift our weary hands, to strengthen our droopy knees. That you would, in your grace and in your mercy, allow us to see a vision of you that changes us, that changes the way we view our circumstance, and that changes the way we view everything.

I pray you would help us to put our sin to death, that you would reveal it, that we would confess it, that we would actively pursue crushing it, that you would allow us by the Spirit to devote ourselves to you, a good, gracious, kind Father, and that you would help us to honor the Scriptures, not to use it to see what we can get from you, but to really pursue you through it.

Finally, Lord, we pray you would help us to abide in Christ, to remind ourselves of the gospel every single day. That when our strength is fading and our situations seem too difficult, God, the truth of the gospel remains, and we can rest there because he is our rest. We can find peace there because he is our peace. We can find comfort because he is our comfort. We thank you these are not gift you give but these are aspects of your character and nature. As we receive more and more of you, we get those things. So we love you, and we praise you. We pray all these things in Jesus' powerful name, amen.