

Would you pray with me? "Father, every time that we undertake to open the Scriptures, Your holy Word, we feel inadequate. And how much more inadequate do we feel when we face suffering and we're in a situation that is not home, like I am in now. And so I pray for Your anointing and for this word. I pray that I would be faithful to Your Scriptures, that I would be filled with Your Holy Spirit, that You would grant me words that would be strengthening to the church and an encouragement to this body and that You would do things here in marriages and in parenting and in friendships and in bodies and in minds that people do not expect to be done but are good. So draw near and exceedingly and abundantly and beyond everything that I can ask, work here for the glory of Christ I pray. It's in His name. Amen."

I listened to the same four messages that most of you listened to in the last four weeks, namely the ones that were preached here at the Village from Beau and Josh. I went online and listened to them so that I would know what you were being taught. I came away from those messages with a very clear and strong conviction that you don't need me here. You're being very well shepherded through this, through Matt's suffering and your suffering. So I reflected on, "If they don't need me to go do this, if they've got shepherds of their own who are doing a good job in caring for the people and telling them what they need to hear, what's there for me to do?" There are two things that I want to do. The first is to say out loud that I love Matt Chandler. And I think I speak for thousands that are beyond this church. And so just know that my presence here is a statement about my affection for one of your pastors. I told that to him last night. The second thing is I am asked to preach, and so I will. And as I reflected on what I might do that other pastors might be slower to do, it's this. Since I come from outside and sort of represent the bigger picture of the impact of the ministry of the Village, it might be good for me to bring a bigger picture to bear on the issue of suffering. There are two things you do when someone is suffering. The first thing is you hug a lot. You don't talk a lot; you just hug a lot. You're just there. That's the first and very, very crucial thing to do. But if you have lived any length of time and have suffered much or thought much about it, you have to have a place stand when you're hugging. If the ground starts to give way underneath, all the hugging in the world doesn't help. Hugging can get very thin and very shallow and very sentimental and it doesn't work over the long haul only to hug. There has got to be a place to stand, I mean a rock solid, biblical ground to stand. And one of the ways the Bible gives that is by putting suffering (Matt's, yours, mine, the world's. . .) in a global context. And that's what I'm going to do.

So there's a passage of Scripture that does this. I didn't decide that this should be done. God decided that this should be done, and He put it in His book. So if you would like to look at it with me, it's Romans 8:18-25. It's one of my favorite passages. I think Romans is the greatest book in the Bible. I think Romans 8 is the greatest chapter in the greatest book in the Bible. I won't argue that this is the greatest paragraph in the greatest chapter in the greatest book in the Bible, but it comes close. The question you should be asking as I read this over you is, "How does the apostle Paul help me suffer well by putting suffering in a global, eternal and universal context?" We often ask the question, "If I'm going to suffer, what's the meaning of my suffering right now in this moment? What might it do for me in this moment to help me?" I'm stepping back from that question to the much bigger question of, "Why is it in the world? Why is this history of our a conveyor belt of corpses?" Yesterday we marked the fifth anniversary of the tsunami where 250,000 folks were killed in a few hours. There's a tsunami every five days. This is the world, and Paul knows that and God knows that. And they're not silent about that. And we don't have to be silent, and I'm not going to be silent about it, because that's what this paragraph is about. So that's what you're listening for: "How are You going to help me, us, the church suffer, help Matt suffer by putting it in a global context?" So let's read it:

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

The verse just preceding this paragraph says to you Christians, those of you who believe in Christ, "Trust Jesus as your Lord and embrace Him as your Treasure in life above all treasures. You are going to inherit with Jesus Christ whatever He inherits. You're going to inherit the universe. It's going to be yours, provided you suffer with Him." Do you see that in verse 17? Provided we suffer with Him, we will be glorified with Him. So having said that the pathway to your glory beyond this life is suffering, now verses 18-25 tell you that it's worth it. The way he shows you it's worth it is by putting it in this creation oriented, global context. It is so crucial that you have a head and a heart that can embrace this teaching, because you will bail on Christianity in the moment if you don't. Many people lose a child, get cancer, their mom gets killed in a car wreck, they lose their job, their marriage breaks up and they look up and say, "If that's the way You treat these years of faithfulness, I'm out of here." Nobody suffers more than most devoted disciples. Paul just lives a lifetime of suffering. Jesus, a lifetime of suffering. I was reading through my devotion in the Gospel of John back here in the green room just to get my heat ready. And He says to Peter, ""When you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.)" He just said, "God's got a death plan for you, Peter, like being crucified upside down. And I'm giving you a hint that it's coming." You're going to bail on that unless you have a theology, unless you have a biblical perspective from this paragraph and others that help you come to terms with why this world is the way it is. It's no just Matt. Matt is one of millions. This church is one of hundreds where leaders suffer and one of millions where everybody suffers at least some time or another.

So let's walk through the text once more by pointing out three ways that Paul puts our suffering in global context and gives meaning to it. And then we'll walk through it again and look at six promises that are given in that global context so that we won't bail out on the faith in view of the fact that God is so unbelievably realistic with us in telling us that it isn't going to get better in this life. So on the first pass, he says that the whole creation groans. It's the spatial, global, universal scope of the thing that clobber me here. Verse 22, "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth." So picture the whole creation groaning. Verse 21, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption." So for now, till that freedom is coming, the way that he describes creation is slavery or bondage to corruption, decay, breaking down, things going wrong. It's entropy where bodies break, minds break, marriages break, things are corrupt. Verse 20, "For the creation was subjected to futility." So you've got corruption, you've got groaning, you've got suffering and you've got futility. Paul is piling up all these words to describe the whole creation. So that's number one. The first way he puts suffering in a global context is by using this term "creation" four times to say that there is no place in this universe where there is not groaning if there were somebody there to groan.

Number two: it's not just spatially or geographically extensive, but it's the whole history. Look at these time references. Verse 18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." What is "this present time" referring to? Well, maybe we can get an idea by looking at the temporal references in 20 and 21. Look at verse 20, "For the creation was subjected to futility." So it happened. This thing we see, this world, this suffering, this decay, this corruption, this bondage, this groaning happened. There was a point where it happened. And then look at verse 21, the future. "The creation itself will be set free." So there is a point in the future coming where it won't look like this anymore, there won't be devastation, there won't be disease, there won't be mental

illness, there won't be depression, there won't be brain tumors anymore. That will be over. So there is coming a point where this present time stops. So from whenever that beginning was (and we'll get there), it begins there and ends at the second coming, and this is the present time where we live, where Matt lives, where this church lives. So that's number two. All of creation is number one, and all of history is number two.

Now number three is kind of a qualification of number two, because it's not quite all of history. If it had a beginning, then there was something on the other side back here, I don't know how long that was, where it wasn't this way. Over here it's this horrible, groaning, corrupt, slavery, suffering way, and over there it wasn't. What was that? When did that happen? What went wrong? So the third thing Paul does here is tell us what happened. Now there are several places in the book of Romans where he talks about this, like chapter 5 in particular, but here, let's look at verse 20. "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope." Who is that? Who did that subjecting? You've got three candidates, it seems to me: Adam, Satan or God. Because we know what he's talking about. He's talking about Genesis 3, where everything came down. It was beautiful, glorious and everything was good. God looks down at His creation and calls it very good. There was no groaning, no futility, no corruption, no suffering. It was very good. And after chapter 3, we have this disease, this tornado, these floods, these epidemics, this sin, this wickedness, these wars. So who did that? Well you can rule two of those out by the little phrase at the end of the verse, "in hope." Let's try Adam. "Adam subjected the world to futility in hope." He didn't. That was not his plan at all, nor Eve's. They weren't calculating a glorious future on the other side where this creation would be set free. No, that wasn't their idea. And try Satan. That doesn't work either. He didn't do this tempting, he didn't try to bring the whole thing down in hope. One Person did it in hope. God did it in hope. So my third point here is that this text teaches that God didn't just ordain some sort of natural law; He judicially sentenced the world to what it is today. It was a judgment on the world in response to sin.

And I admit that you have to have a very high view of God's holiness and justice and glory and deservedness and worth and you have to have a very clear view of the outrage and the horror of sin and rebellion to keep this world from looking like an overreaction to Adam and Eve. Most people, if they try to come to terms with the problem of suffering, will say, "That's an overreaction." Because it just doesn't make any sense if you don't know how great God is. It doesn't make any sense if God isn't the most important reality in the universe. So if you put Him on one side of the scales and 6 billion people on the other side of the scales, it's not even close. The 6 billion people side is like dust. Isaiah 40 says the nations are like drippings from a bucket. They're like dust in the scales. Until God is that central and that massive for you, God's response to sin makes no sense. It is simply an overreaction. It's like a judge telling a guy who stole a loaf of bread, "Your head's coming off." And everybody is like, "Whoa, wait a minute. Maybe a fine." Paul says God subjected the creation to futility, not because we wanted but because it was right to do this to the creation that had rebelled against him, and this room right now is filled with rebellion against God, starting with me. And all I mean by that is that I don't love God at this very moment the way I ought to love God. I love Him. But the Bible says, "John Piper, love Him with all your heart, all your strength, all your mind and all your soul. Love Him 100%, all the time." How are you doing at that? Badly, that's how you're doing. Therefore, not only is Adam and Eve there in the beginning with their rebellion, but we do the same thing. It's just more sophisticated and more subtle at times. This world seethes with rebellion against God in nice, squeaky clean, suburban form and then gross, criminal forms, and it is not an overreaction for God to say, "This world will stay what it is until My Son comes. And it will experience pain, suffering, groaning, corruption, bondage and decay, because that's how serious sin is. The ultimate global meaning of all suffering is that sin is ghastly. Every time you look at some horrific suffering, you should think, "That's how serious sin is." In one of the sermons that I listened to, Beau said, "Physical evil is rooted in spiritual evil. Brain tumors exist because of my rebellion against God." He didn't say, "Brain tumors exist because of Matt's rebellion against God." That's very important. He said, "Because of mine." And he didn't mean, "Two years ago, I did a bad thing and God zapped Matt for it." He meant something like Romans 8. He was touching on what I'm trying to unpack here, namely our sin is the corporate reality, from Adam and Eve until we're perfected at the last day. Our sin is the corporate reality that is being documented as horrible by all disease. All

disease in the world, all tornadoes and floods and epidemics in the world are a dramatic statement from the judge of the universe saying, "That's how horrific sin is." That's what Beau meant, and that's right. So instead of getting in God's face with your fist when you suffer, you should be broken by all suffering to say what Jesus said. Do you remember in Luke 13 where they came to Jesus and said, "Hey, the tower fell on 18 people and killed them. They were just standing there and the tower of Siloam fell on them and killed them. What about it?" Jesus said, "Do you think that those people were any worse sinners than the rest of the people in Jerusalem? Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." You might be like, "That's not what I asked. I wanted an explanation for the suffering. I don't want you to tell me I'm going to die." Well, that's what you need to be told. You should have been under the tower, and so should I. I should be the one with the brain tumor. I should be dead a thousand times today. The fact that I'm breathing at 63 after my teenage years? The point is that God has put suffering in a global perspective so we have some sense of why the world is the way it is, including our own suffering. Look with me at verse 23. "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly." Why does he talk like that? Why is there all that stress on "even us. . .even us. . .even us?" When the gospel comes to us, it comes with spectacularly good news. Your sins are forgiven because of Christ. Righteous in Christ is provided that you could never live out. By faith alone, you can be justified. By faith alone, you can have eternal life. By faith alone, you can have fellowship with the living God. This is glorious news, and the natural response for us would be to say, "Yes. And all my suffering is gone in Christ. My curse is lifted. As far as the curse is found, He came to bear my load." Verse 23 is there to say, "No, even we who have the Holy Spirit, even we who are united to Jesus, even we whose sins are forgiven, even we who will have eternal life, even we who are totally justified, even we who are so loved by God that He works absolutely everything for our good, even we groan waiting for the redemption of this thing, this old, glasses needing, balding, aching thing called body." The prosperity gospel, the "name it and claim it" folks, they don't get that "already of the kingdom" doesn't include everything. Verse 25 says we've got to wait with patience.

Let me shift gears now. That's the global context that provides this tremendous place to stand where we can go, "Alright, God's not out of control. He's got a plan. He knows what He's doing. This all has some judicial, just sense about it. Do you have some promises for us, God? Do you have something to help us here in this? If You've appointed for us to live here, are You going to say something helpful to us about what You're up to?" There are six magnificent promises. The first one is that God promises that after this present time, we are going to see an all satisfying beauty. Verse 18, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." All beautiful, overwhelming, powerful greatness out there, glory will be revealed to me. I wonder if that even lands on you with good news. I wonder if that makes you say, "Yes! It's worth it." Let me try to help. Why do human beings all over the world want to see greatness? Not everybody defines it the same way. They want to go to big, tall mountains. They like to go to the Alps, the Himalayas or the Rockies. Or it's canyons, like the Grand Canyon. Or oceans and take an ocean cruise or through some deep fjord in Norway to take pictures and make a book and put it on your coffee table so you can feel some of the greatness when you get home. Why do we do that? Of if you're a teenager, maybe you just do it with movies like Avatar. Why is there Lord of the Rings? Why are there these huge, multi-million dollar, take ten years to make them, cinematic productions? Because there's something in us that wants bigness, that wants greatness, that wants to see it, get drawn into it. The meaning of that is God. This is God's form written. This is made for God. This longing inside, this aching for greatness, that's all about the image of God in you. So this text is saying, "That's coming, and it's coming in a way that will absolutely blow you away." The best statement of this I think is in Jesus' prayer in John 17. It goes like this, "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory." Isn't that an amazing prayer? I would be absolutely vain to pray that. "I want this whole church to be able to see my glory." But when Jesus says it, it's love. Because He is the most glorious being in the universe. We all like to be around great sports people or great scientists or great intellectuals or great whatever. We love greatness. And there isn't any human greatness compared to Jesus. So the first promise we have in verse 18 is that glory, namely the glory of Christ, will revealed to you.

I know you get frustrated like I do to hear promises like that. I know that I'm supposed to be profoundly, fully and deeply satisfied with that promise, but I don't even have the power to be satisfied with my birthday for a day and a half. My capacities for enjoyment have been so stunted. Maybe my parents never celebrated, never rejoiced in anything, never approved, never modeled for me any kind of capacities to enjoy. It was just negative and anger and brokenness. And here I am, given this promise and I'm supposed to be excited and satisfied with what's coming my way, to see glory. So we're not left with our present capacities. The second promise is in verse 19. "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." What does that mean? Now verse 18 says that the glory is going to be revealed to us. Verse 19 says that we're going to be revealed. What does that mean? Are you ready to be revealed? What does that mean? I think it means that you don't look like sons of God now. You look like Texans, really ordinary human beings. They're just ordinary people. They dress like everybody else, they get sick like everybody else, they die like everybody else. What's with this sons of God stuff? The sons of God are supposed to be titans. You will be. That's what it means. You right now are walking through Texas as sons of God incognito, and hopefully there's enough of God in here that it's coming out in beautiful ways. People have to get to know you a little bit to see, "Oh, there's a bit of deity here. There's some love in here, there's worship in here, there's some kindness here, there's some patience here, there's gentleness here, there's some fruit that I can't explain any other way than connection. And so maybe I'm dealing with a son or a daughter of God here." There will be no question in those days. Do you remember what Jesus said in Matthew 13? "The righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." I picture yourself looking at me now. Okay, I'm totally ordinary. My hair is falling out, I'm 5'8". And one day you will look at me and my countenance will be so bright you won't be able to look at me. It will be like the sun. Which means you have to be changed as well so we can look at each other. You have to have capacities for the glory of Christ and for the glory of each other so that we can enjoy one another in this world that's coming. Because we don't have the capacities to enjoy right now what we are promised. We enjoy them a little bit, but there is coming a day when all of you broken people who grew up in homes that were totally ill equipped to help you get ready to enjoy beauty, enjoy greatness, enjoy righteousness or just simply enjoy period, that will all be fixed and you will have emotional capacities in you that will send you flying because of what you will see in Christ mainly and reflected from Him in each other. We will be revealed. That's the second promise.

Now for the third promise. The ultimate design of this futility that we're in right now is hope. Verse 20, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope." So whenever you feel overwhelmed by the futility of whatever, your job, your marriage, your children, your health, don't let those two words at the end go. We're here in hope. We've been forgiven, we've been accepted, we've been loved, we've been justified, we've been promised eternal life, but right now there's so much futility, so much breaks, so much goes wrong, even when you're walking in obedience. I don't have the slightest doubt that Matt Chandler is smack dab in the center of God's will for his life. And he gets his, and so will you, in one form or another. Maybe I should put in a little parenthesis here to make clear what I'm assuming when I quoted Beau back there. When it says that Christ became a curse for us in Galatians 3:13, you might think, "Well then, the curse is lifted, and we shouldn't die. Because death is what God promised in response to sin, and my sins have been covered by Jesus. So therefore I don't die. So what's with death?" My answer to that really good, difficult question is, "My death and my suffering, your death (as a Christian) and your suffering is no longer God's curse. God is no longer punishing, God is no longer in wrath, God is no longer opposed to you. God is 100% for everyone who is in Christ by faith alone, not 99.9% for you and 0.1% mad at you and He'll give you a disease with that 0.1%. That's not the way to think. In Christ Jesus, we are justified, accepted, forgiven and loved so that God never has wrath for us. He never is punitive; He only is purifying. So death and suffering become purifying and passage on to glory. Matt feels this thing and has to deal with this treatment starting on Tuesday, and how sick will he get? We prayed that he would not. But if he does, how easy it is to think that God's cursing him. I had a man come up to me one New Years Eve whose baby had just died and his wife was holding him there in the hospital room when I walked in, and I prayed with them and cried with them. We went out in the hall and he said, "Can I just ask you a question? Is it possible for a family to be cursed?" So much stuff had happened. So that parenthesis right there is to clarify that dying was originally given by God on the

Earth as a curse. What I'm saying is that now, in Christ, He pulls the stinger out of that thing. And it is no longer curse; it is doorway to paradise. And the suffering becomes used by God in fatherly care and discipline to purify (Hebrews 12). I hope you can make that distinction in your own experience and for Matt.

The fourth promise is that all of creation, not just the children of God, will be freed from this misery in which the creation presently finds itself. Verse 21, "The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." This is amazing. The creation itself will be freed and brought into your glory. Don't think that because this creation is so big that you were made for it. You weren't. It was made for you. God will first redeem His children, give them new bodies, new emotions, new capacities for sensing pleasures a thousand times greater than the biggest sexual pleasure you have ever thought possible, and then He will make the world new in a suitable way to make us belong there. It doesn't work the other way around where He's got this new world and He's like, "Now what can I do with My humans to make this work?" No, you are His focus. And the creation is going to come into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. That is staggering, especially when you think of the Hubble telescope and what it's bringing to us and what's out there for us. It will be our playground. What God has in plan for you believers is coming very soon, and it's beyond anything you can dream.

I get really mad when I hear people say, "You're so heavenly minded you're no earthly good." I want to say, "NOBODY has been too heavenly minded." You can be of no earthly good, that's for sure, but it's not because you're too heavenly minded. When you have that kind of hope, 2 Peter says, you purify yourself as He is pure and you become dangerous, radical, holy, loving, self-sacrificing servants on the planet until it comes, because you've got nothing to lose. The people that are wasting their lives, the people that are bad for this world are the people who think because they don't believe in heaven, they don't believe in the age to come, they don't believe in a new heaven and a new Earth, they've got to have it now and it's called retirement or it's called iPod or it's called 52" screen or it's called surround sound or it's called new car or it's called figures and body building. It's whatever your idol happens to be to make heaven come now because you don't believe it exists out there. But if you believe it's out there, if you really are sold on this picture of the future, you will become so humble, so sacrificial and you will go to the hardest places in the world, the hardest places in Texas, the hardest relationships in this church and you'll throw yourself into that mess for healing and redemption and for service, because you've got an inheritance coming. That's the fourth promise.

The fifth promise is that the miseries of the universe are not death throws but birth pains. Look at verse 22. "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." Paul looks out at volcanoes and tsunamis and cancer and tumors and groaning and screaming and pain everywhere, and he says, "Like a mom in labor." If you're in the hospital and you hear a scream across the hall, it makes a huge difference whether you're in the maternity unit or the oncology unit. You might say, "No it doesn't, because pain is pain." Well, that's true. In one sense, pain is pain, but every mom and every dying cancer patient knows pain is not just pain. There's pain that brings life, and there's pain that issues death. And Paul is looking at the whole world here in verse 22 and he's saying, "I'll give you an interpretation of what I see. Birth pains." God is going somewhere with this. God is going to bring a new heaven and a new Earth, and this present suffering is like a woman in labor, and what she's going to give birth to is that. All of your sufferings, including your death, are birth pains. You're going right into life. That's the fifth promise.

The last one is that God cares about your body, big time. Although, it may not feel like it in times of terrible pain. I haven't know a lot in my life, so I'd rather read to you stories of people who have walked through much deeper waters than I have and how they bore witness to the faithfulness of God and how He met them in it. But I have to testify to what I see. Verse 23, "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." When I came to Bethlehem 30 years ago in 1980, I think it was my fourth sermon I preached to my new flock of about 300 folks. I preached a sermon called Christ and Cancer, and I took it

from that verse, Romans 8:23. I said to them, as I'm saying to you now, "Folks, I'm preaching this sermon on Christ and cancer so that you will know what to expect when I walk into the hospital room and you've been told hard news. 'Will my pastor say, 'You know, if you had enough faith, you wouldn't be here.' Or will he say, 'I'm with you in your groaning as long as it takes to help you keep the faith. Trust Jesus and either be healed by His miracle now or enter into the final healing in the age to come. I'm with you. You're groaning, and I'm going to groan with you!' And I just want you to know, before you get cancer, that's what I think about you."

So let me close with a couple of practical words to you as a church. First of all, pray for Matt's healing. I'm a lover of the sovereignty of God. I believe God rules everything and governs everything. I don't know how I find meaning in the horrors of my life and others' lives if I didn't believe God had purposes in what He was doing. Some people take that to an extreme and say, "So Matt's got cancer? That's just that. *Que será, será*. God is sovereign. Deal with it." Instead, we should gather together, fast, pray and ask God to take it away. That's no compromise of the sovereignty of God. Say, "God, heal him!" That's what I'm praying, and I invite you to pray that way. I told Matt yesterday that I'm going to say that to you. I told him, "I'm going to invite your church now that they should pray for your healing, until you tell them to stop." And I'm basing that on 2 Corinthians 12 where Paul has the thorn in the flesh. He prays, "God, please take it away. It hurts. The thorns hurt." He prays again, "Please take it away." It doesn't happen. "Please take it away." And Jesus says, "My grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness." I said, "Matt, when God says that to you, you tell your people to stop." And until then, don't stop. Also, ask God for enough faith. Matt and I believe that there's such thing as a gift of faith, just as there's a gift of miracles and a gift of healing. These exist, and some of you may have that gift for him. Don't badger him with it, okay? I got cancer one time, and it wasn't as serious as his and oh man, they would come out of the woodwork with how you're supposed to get well. Don't do that to him. He's surrounded by wise people who know how to counsel him. But love him like crazy in praying, "God, take it away. Keep him on the planet, ministering in power increasingly, with greater humility, through his brokenness, as long as possible. 40 years is what we'd like, maybe." He's the age of one of my sons. That's one of the reasons I feel affection for him I think. That's what I would pray for a son of mine.

One or two things more. Keep your eyes on the cross. I've talked so far about the big global picture of suffering. Whatever else you know about suffering or don't understand about suffering, you know this: God, in Christ, took it on. Didn't He? God, in Christ, suffered more than you will ever suffer. The meaning of the cross, the meaning of the lashes, the pulling of the beard, the spitting on His face, the spearing in His side, the laughter, the mockery, the meaning of all that was to say, "You don't have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with your weaknesses" (Hebrews 4:15). So keep your eye square on the redemptive work of Christ for you on the cross because right there sovereignty and suffering meet like nowhere else.

The last thing I would say is when God undertakes to do a great thing, He breaks people. Do you remember Gideon? He took 10,000 soldiers to go up against the enemy, and God said, "Too many." And He whittled it down to 300. So your pastor is too healthy. Things are going too well here. "I have a great work to do here. I'm going to use broken people." You've got a broken pastor, a wounded pastor now. We pray that he gets well, but he's wounded. That's no accident. As remarkable as the growth of this church is and as remarkable as the faithfulness of this church seems to be, I will pray for you that, through this and because of this, spectacular impact for the glory of our great Christ will come, on this area and around the world. Keep yourself very humble in that, or He'll have to break you again and somebody else is going to have to be broken. Because that's the way God does it. A wounded shepherd is the best shepherd. A wounded shepherd can't be uppity and strut around and start to swagger and go, "I've got this thing under control here. We've got this great church." That's just over. And now that it's over, what an amazing thing God may be pleased to do.

Let me pray with you as I close today. "Father in heaven, I pray now that You'll touch Matt with a healing hand. Even in this moment I ask it, go in there and whatever remnants of this thing that are still there, kill it. Grow his brain back with fullness, keep his personality and his intellect whole, we pray. And keep him humble. And then for those who may be feeling resentful that Matt's getting all the attention while they are hurting, I pray that we would love each other well in this church and that everybody who is hurting would be cared for. Lord, don't let us waste what Matt is going through. May the church and those of us from outside profit profoundly from what You are doing even as we already have. Bless this church I ask in Jesus' name. Amen."

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