

# A Mind for Your Sovereign

*The Godly Mind*

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We are continuing a brief series that I have titled "The Godly Mind," and we started this two weeks ago. We took a break last week for the sake of our Communion service. Last week we saw a godly mind means that you have a mind for your Savior, a mind focused on Christ. We saw God's hatred of sin, Christ's love for your soul, God's forgiveness of your sins, God's reason for saving you and Christ's plan for future glory. And all of those things are truths that anchor our mind and position us in a way to think rightly about Christ, to think rightly about the fact that he has saved us from sin and out of love for our souls, and those things focus our mind and attention in a way that produces a godly mind, godly thinking, a godly way to think vertically about life. If you are a Christian, God's truth shapes you. It shapes your very character. Romans 6:17 says,

17 ... thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

Now think about what that verse is saying. You receive teaching that's committed to you through the word of God, you embrace it in your heart, and that heart embrace of the truth that has been committed to you produces obedience in your life. A godly mind shaped by truth produces obedience in the life of a Christian. Nothing will stir you to obedience, to duty and to delight like the implications of true salvation and tonight we are going to see two additional principles that will shape a godly mind and I'm just so delighted that you are here for them.

First of all, these two both start with the letter "P," and the first one that I want to talk about here this evening is a right view of the providence of God. The providence of God. You're not at Truth Community Church very long until you hear this word spoken either in private conversations or said from the pulpit. The providence of God generally speaking being the idea that God is at work in the details of absolutely everything that happens in the universe and in your personal life. He numbers the hair on your head. He knows and directs when a sparrow falls to the ground. He has established the stars and the sun in their orbit. At a macro level, at the micro level, God is in charge of absolutely everything that happens. There is nothing that has happened in your life before now or that will ever happen from this moment forward that isn't somehow designed by God as part of his plan for your life.

That's a wonderful truth and we've spoken about that at great length over different messages. I want to kind of focus and zero in on a particular application of that general truth as we remember that God is sovereign over all, and here's where I want to go with that thought here this evening and it's this: that God sees your secret life. God sees your secret life and knows it intimately. Psalm 139 says that before there is a word on your tongue, he knows it all. He sees what happens in secret. And where I want to take your thinking on this because this produces a godly mind, this produces a healthy fear of God when you remember this and practice it over time, God will either reward your obedience to his word or he will expose your sin for your disobedience.

It's going to come one way or the other and for that I'd invite you to turn to the Gospel of Matthew 6 just to give you a couple of places to hang your thoughts on, as if you were hanging your hat, I guess, on a hook by your front door. Matthew 6:4. We are looking at the fact, we're just remembering the fact that God sees your secret life and that has implications for the way that you think and live. It shapes your mind toward godliness when you understand it and apply it properly. In chapter 6, verse 3 of Matthew, Jesus said,

3 "... when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

In like manner he said in verse 6,

6 "... when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Now, Jesus here is speaking this way as a positive motivation to invite us to practice our godliness in private ways, without displaying our righteousness so that others will see it, to not approach our life and our Christian living in a manner that calls attention to ourselves. Rather than waving our checkbook as we put our support into the offering box, we just do it quietly. We look for a time when no one is looking and we do it that way. Rather than broadcasting our prayer life on social media as some people do, we are content to pray privately where no one sees, to put ourselves in a position where no one can see us praying because we realize that that's the kind of praying that God wants and we are confident as we do that, that we are not wasting our time. We are confident as we do that that we are positioning ourselves for the blessing of God because he sees in secret. God in perfect providence knows everything that is happening. He is directing it and as we obey him in secret, we have it settled in our mind that we are positioning ourselves for the reward of God even if no one knows about it. We don't even care about that.

Just by way of another tangent, maybe some of you have done this, I don't know of any of you that have and so if you've done this, I'm not trying to step on your toes. It is not a

good thing, people go on social media, they'll go on Facebook and say, "Pray for me. I'm doing such and such. I'm having this or that problem." And people will type out prayers in response to that, "Oh Lord Jesus, we just pray that you would put your hand upon dear Sarah in this time," and just do this whole flowery fulsome thing, announcing on Facebook what their supposed prayer is. Beloved, don't do that. That is a violation of Matthew 6. Jesus says pray in secret. Now why in the world would anyone pray that way except that they want other people to see how they're praying? This is the exact opposite of what Jesus says to do and the fact that this is popular on social media and it looks godly and it can get you "likes" for your comments, don't do that. It's more important for you to obey Christ than to have people compliment you for the flowery prayers that you composed on social media. Look at what it says there in verse 6, "when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, pray in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." I just think that this is really an important aspect in our modern 21<sup>st</sup> century culture that this is called out and rebuked. People shouldn't do that. Anyone who has read the Bible should know better than to make social media a platform for displaying their outward supposed godliness. That's not good.

Now with that said and bringing it back now that I've got that off my chest, bringing it back to what we are talking about here with the providence of God and remembering that God will either reward our obedience or he will expose our sin. God has perfect power to do that, doesn't he? And not only have we seen that in illustrations in our own life, just think from Scripture in the Bible about how this worked out and this works out in so many different ways. Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery. They thought they would never see him again but it was exposed in the end, wasn't it, when they had to all come down to Egypt and confess things to Joseph and it was all brought out to them. David sinned with Bathsheba, covered it up for about 18 months, but ultimately God brought it to light when he sent the prophet Nathan to him. Think about Haman engineering a plot against the Jews in the book of Esther seeking their total destruction and using his position with the king to bring the law of the land in support of his wicked schemes. What happened to Haman? He got exposed as Esther invited him to a banquet with the king, Esther pointed him out, the king did not like the fact that Haman was plotting to kill his chosen queen, and Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for someone else. God has a way of doing this.

Look over at Proverbs 10:9. This is a verse that has stood out to me early in my Christian life. It is a verse that probably not a week goes by where it doesn't come to my mind either in the way of personal application or seeing situations play out as I observe the world around me. Proverbs 10:9. You young people who are under the age of 18, I especially urge you and ask you to take note of this verse. Some of you just over the age of 18, 22, I'll include you in the exhortation as well. Why limit it chronologically? Young people, take this verse to heart. Take it as an absolute certainty of what will happen to you and let it shape the way that you think about life. Make it cause you to fear a secret pursuit of sin because of the consequences that it will no doubt bring to you. Proverbs 10:9. Are you looking at it, young people, with me?

9 He who walks in integrity walks securely, But he who perverts his ways will be found out.

The reason that that truth is there in Proverbs, the reason that we know that that will always be the outcome is because of the providence of God. Especially for those of us who are believers, we need to know and understand that if we pursue a path of sin, God will bring it to light. He does not tread lightly with the sins of his children and before you are ever faced with the temptation, my friends, it's not just the young people, you gray heads need to hear it too, don't you? I've got gray hair. I'm included in the exhortation here. We must have it settled in our mind as a principle of godliness and of right biblical thinking that if I pursue a path of sin, if I let myself go in this direction, it's going to come out and that's going to be painful. Now if you know that in advance, doesn't that serve to motivate you to turn another direction? It should. It helps, anyway. It doesn't guarantee that you'll always do what is right but at least your mind is conditioned in a way that leads you in a direction of godliness. Here's the point, I love to say this to people in this context talking about providence and Christian living. I love to say this: you can do one of two things with God's providence in the context that we're talking about here, you can either trust the providence of God to bless you for your secret obedience or you can trust it to expose you in shame if you sin in secret. Either way, God's providence is going to have its way.

Now, every one of us should be thinking, "Do you know what? I would rather be on the blessing side of that coin. I would rather be devoting myself to private obedience whether anyone sees it or not and just live my life even if it never brings a claim to me, to live in a way that positions me for the blessing of the providence of God that he who sees in secret will reward you." Now I ask you, my friends, why wouldn't you want that? Wouldn't you prefer the blessing of God to the discipline of God in your life? Well, the providence of God guarantees that he knows, he sees, he understands, and he has his ways of making things known in time.

Galatians 6:7 says,

7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.

You young people, I know I have a way of looking to my right and to the left of the auditorium when I say this. That's where you guys tend to sit. That's why I look over at you, but I know that there are young people off to my left as well. You know, just for the sake of the good of your life because we all as a church and I as a pastor would desire the blessing of God in your life, I ask you, I beg you to take these verses to heart and let them shape the way you think now in advance about the choices that will come your way. What you sow, you will reap and I would have you reap the blessing of God, not the discipline of God. Wouldn't you want that for your own life? Wouldn't you want to sow your life toward faith in Christ and a belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and not to reject the things that your parents have taught you? Not to reject what you've heard as you've sat under the teaching of God? Not to reject the invitation of Christ who says, "Come to

me and I will give you rest," a promise of complete, absolute, full forgiveness of your sins if you would only come to Christ, wouldn't you want that blessing rather than the dark alternative?

Wouldn't you want that? It's okay to nod your head yes, and I just invite you young people, I invite you. You know, I'm so glad, it's really an encouragement to me, to all of us I'm sure as we see our young people developing friendships within the context of the church. That's such a blessing to see. You know, we've got about 20, I think, that are preparing to sing for us in a couple of weeks in the youth choir on Sunday morning. It's awesome. It's great. But I'm also mindful of the fact that there is a certain element even within an environment like this of peer pressure and sometimes there is that temptation as a young person that you don't want to seem too enthusiastic for Christ lest you not be cool amongst your friends within the church. Oh, oh, oh, for the sake of God, I say it reverently, for God's sake, don't be like that. Even if none of your friends go with you, you step out for Christ and you show a loyalty and a commitment and a public manifestation of trust and belief and love in Christ and let him bless you for that even if you lose friends as a result. Don't fall into the trap of being in an environment like this and saying, "Well, we're just going to kind of be a little bit cool here and none of us are going to really go too much overboard with it." Well, that's no way to respond to Christ, is it? Is that any way to respond to the one who went to the cross to save your soul? We all need to hear that, don't we?

And you young people, the way you think now, the choices that you make now, you are laying the road upon which your life will be driven. You are pouring the asphalt upon which the car of your life will ride. Make choices in your mind, make choices now about fidelity to Christ, loyalty to him, obedience to his word, faith in Christ. Make those things now. Don't make the mistake of thinking, "Well, I'll sort this out later when I'm my parents' age. What are they now, like 95?" Don't think that way. Don't make that mistake of thinking you will be more inclined to faith and obedience later in your life. If you are inclined toward disobedience and indifference to Christ now, you're only going to get more hard in that as life goes on. So don't assume that you'll be more tender hearted than you are today.

And for the rest of you, I know you do this and I'm grateful for it, but just by way of reminder and encouragement, those of us that are further in life and we see the truth of what's being said here tonight, I just ask you and encourage you to pray for these young people by name and to make that a devoted part of your prayer life somehow, to pray that God would work in their lives, sanctify them in the truth, deliver them from evil, lead them not into temptation. Our young people should know that the adults in the church are behind them in prayer, shouldn't they? Well, none of that was in my notes.

Turn over to Psalm 1, if you would. Psalm 1:1 reinforces this on the positive side.

1 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! 2 But his

delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

Look at the blessing that comes from the one who gives his mind over to the word of God.

3 He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

The promise of God on a life devoted to a godly mind devoted to the word of God. That should be all the encouragement you need, young people, old people, those of you who classify yourself at some point in between. Here you have it, the word of God, the providence of God promising blessing on those who would give their minds over to it, give their lives over to it. You young people, you know, there is plenty of room for a godly young person to say, "I'm going to give my life over to the word of God. I'll give my life to it. Forget prosperity, forget other careers, I want to give my life to the word of God." Which one of you will step up and be that man? Blessing is all over it.

Verse 4,

4 The wicked are not so, But they are like chaff which the wind drives away. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

God won't allow the wicked to stand but what he does do, verse 6,

6 ... [He] knows the way of the righteous, But the way of the wicked will perish.

Do you know what God does? He blesses his people. He blesses his people when they are obedient, when they are faithful to his word, when they give themselves over to it. That's what God does. That's who he is and it is worthwhile to follow Christ no matter what it may seem like at the moment. It may seem like it's leading you into isolation and obscurity. Well, if Christ leads you into isolation and obscurity, you follow him with your head held high because in the end, he is no man's debtor. He will vindicate the multiple promises in his word to bless those who follow him.

So as we talk about this aspect of the godly mind, we just say recognize the providence of God. He exposes sin. He blesses us in his word. Position your life for your own sake, for the glory of Christ, position your life to know the providential blessing of God rather than his providential discipline. That's a far better way to live and it will frame a godly mind for you. It will frame your thinking and guide your life choices. That's the providence of God and the way it plays out in a godly mind, as I see it.

The second point tonight. By the way, the title of this message for those of you that take notes and I know some of you have very neat notebooks that you keep and I should do a better job of giving you message titles in advance, but the title of tonight's message is "A Mind for Your Sovereign." A mind for your Sovereign. All of the messages in this series are going to have the letter "S" in them. A mind for your Savior, tonight's message, a mind for your Sovereign, and a mind for his providence.

Now secondly, and I'm very excited to say these things to you tonight. Let's talk about the problems of life. The problems of life, point 2. How does a godly mind process the inevitable problems of life? Well, if you want to have a godly mind, you need to cultivate a biblical view toward the inevitable difficulties that life will bring to you. If you want to have a godly mind, you need to have a biblical view of the inevitability of problems in your life.

Now this is far more important than it may initially seem to be when it comes to godly thinking. I risk hyperbole here. I risk overstating what I'm about to say but hear me closely in what I am about to say. Nothing, nothing is more destructive to a Christian mind than the foolish notion that God never wants you to have any trouble in life. Nothing is more destructive to godly thinking than that presupposition, God doesn't want me to have trouble. That is foolish. That is unbiblical. It will destroy your thinking in life. Nothing will render you more ineffective when difficulty comes than – watch this, oh, this is so very important. You old people, you need to hear me tonight. That was just by way of contrast with the young people so they don't feel like I'm picking on them. Nothing will render you more ineffective when difficulty comes than to believe that God's plan for you must be to relieve you from all pain and remove all obstacles from your life. I'll say that again: nothing will render you more ineffective as a Christian than to think that God's plan is to relieve you immediately from all pain and remove all obstacles from your life. I've got a third way to say this: nothing will cause you – oh, please hear me – nothing will cause you to make more foolish and destructive decisions in your life than an assumption that trials and sadness mean that God is leading you somewhere else or plans to move you immediately to another location or field of service. That's foolishness. That's a wrong view. It's an ungodly way to think about the problems of life, as I'm going to show you here in a moment. I'm going to strip this down and make it as generic as I possibly can.

You know, after a few years in ministry informing what I'm about to say here, when someone comes to me and in essence says, "I have a problem in my life. God must be leading me to make changes." I know I have a virtually impossible task on my hand as a pastor because they are operating from presuppositions about life that are utterly wrong. Their immature mind is leading them to run away from problems rather than to persevere through them. Their approach is controlled by a badly misguided presupposition about the nature of problems in the Christian life. They have bought into the foolish first so-called spiritual law that Campus Crusade published and made essential to their whole approach to evangelism, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Now as a Christian, God does love you and God, in a sense you could say, does have a wonderful plan for your life because he's going to bring you to glory and see Christ face-to-face,

that's what's really wonderful. But if your sense is that God's wonderful plan for your life is for you to have ease and for him to just remove all of the obstacles like he's going before you like a piece of earthmoving equipment, to just plow away that makes it smooth for you, you've got it all wrong. You are thinking completely wrongly. You are thinking unbiblical about life and that unbiblical presupposition, you act upon your presuppositions, you live life from the things that you presuppose to be true and if you are presupposing the so-called truth that God doesn't want you to have any problems in your life, then you are going to think, 1. "Oh, I'm having problems. God must be angry with me"; or 2, "I'm having problems. God wants to move me someplace where I can be happy again." This is all wrong. We need to take demolition equipment to that way of thinking.

You're probably wondering, "I know he has no experience in construction and he doesn't even know how to hold a hammer, why is he talking in construction terms and illustrations tonight? That makes no sense." Well, let me clear that obstacle in your own thinking. I have a certain path that I walk every day and over the past two or three weeks, there has been a lot of road construction work going on in our neighborhood, concrete being broken up and all kinds of things like that, and so that's why it's on my mind. I see this every day and that helps you understand why the construction illustrations are right on the tip of my tongue, if that helps you at all. If it doesn't help, then let's just get back to what I was supposed to be saying in the first place.

What should we think about the problems of life? I have, I believe, four points for you here. What should we think about the problems of life? First of all, problems are to be expected. Problems are to be expected. We do not know the shape that they will come to us, the package in which they will occur, but problems are to be expected. Even deep, difficult, profound, chronic problems that seem to have no solution, this is to be an expected part of life. Generally speaking, looking at this in general, Job 5:7 says,

7 ... man is born for trouble, As sparks fly upward.

In John 16:33, if you prefer a New Testament reference, Jesus said, "In this world you have tribulation." Trouble in life is as natural as sparks from a fire of going up. Jesus says you'll have tribulation. This is a fundamental understanding about what to expect from the nature of life, beloved, to realize that this is going to happen.

Now, trials could come to us as a result of our own sin or misconduct and we deal with the consequences of that. You may suffer for a long time due to unwise decisions that you've made, but suffering doesn't necessarily mean that you've done anything wrong. Think of Job. God declared Job to be a blameless man and yet the depth and breadth of his problems were stunning, perhaps only exceeded by the sufferings of Christ himself. Hey, speaking of Christ and trouble, let's think about that one. What I'm saying here is that suffering does not necessarily mean that we've done anything wrong. Christ was sinless. There was perfect righteousness. There was the righteous man and he suffered. He groaned on the cross. He suffered for us.



So, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, we need to have a more mature perspective on what we expect out of life, especially as we go further along in it. Godly living, my friends, godly living will not exempt you from hardship. And stated another way, hardship is not a sign that you have been ungodly. You can't connect those two. You can't make assumptions about your own life or about the lives of others.

Job, I didn't write this reference down so it's foolish for me to go here. Let me approach it a different way. I remember when there were some deaths in our family and how difficult that time was and how black it was for me in the grieving process, and there at the start not understanding anything about grief or anything like that, you know, I'm trying to confess my way out of the blackness, confessing sin and just probing my heart to find sin that I could confess that would explain the difficult state of mind and the difficult circumstances in which I found myself in, and if only I could finally get to the point where I confessed the right sin, maybe I would push that button and the veil would go up and the sunshine would come back. Well, Job went through something similar as you read through that book, and he says, "Have I sinned?" The answer isn't always yes to that question. Sometimes we suffer, sometimes we are discouraged and there is no correlation to the fact that we've sinned in a way that brought that on. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God but we shouldn't think of a direct correspondence that this particular sin leads to this particular suffering. It doesn't work that way. We live in a fallen world and there are going to be times where we suffer and we have problems. It's absolutely liberating to realize that.

So rather than collapsing and saying, "Why is God doing this to me? How have I sinned?" That kind of foolish thinking, here's what you do when you understand this. You say, you just step back from it all, you disengage yourself from the difficulty and the emotions of it for a little while and you say, "Oh, this is a problem. And do you know what? I'm supposed to expect problems. Okay, I have a sense of the terrain on which I'm standing." This is to be expected. Family problem, vocational problem, educational problems, whatever the case may be. "Oh, this is a problem. Okay, I'm supposed to expect that." And not think that this is a sign that something has gone haywire.

Secondly, this one is tough. Problems are to be expected, secondly, beloved, problems are to be embraced. Problems are to be embraced. Scripture tells us not only to expect trials but to embrace them. Look at James 1:2. The shelves in my library are groaning at me to teach on James someday. It says,

2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Consider it joy. Recognize that God is at work producing something in your sanctification that will perfect you, mature you, and bring you to a completion that could not be accomplished in any other way and rejoice in that, embrace that. You see, we are all on the front end of the process, aren't we? We all have growing and maturing to do.

Well, God's vitamins, God's spiritual vitamins in the process that he gives us to digest, are often trials in order to produce that result. If you want a healthy body, you don't spit out the vitamins and reject them, you swallow them, you let them have their effect. And verse 12, tying back in with the idea of providence that we said earlier, verse 12, James 1:12,

12 Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial. These trials are to be embraced, accepted.

1 Peter 1, just after James. 1 Peter 1:6,

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Chapter 4 of 1 Peter, 4:12,

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

Do you see it? Don't act like this persecution, these difficulties are some kind of strange, unexpected, foreign element in your Christian life.

Verse 13,

13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.

Trials are to be expected. That's all we're saying. Trials, problems, are a reality to embrace.

Now, beloved, here's where I think this gets a little bit difficult. This is where, here you go, this is where you have to sit yourself down and become the most important preacher in your life. I'm not the most important preacher in your life. John MacArthur isn't. No human preacher is the most important preacher in your life. You are your most important preacher. You have to sit yourself down and give yourself a talking to and say, "Whatever my desire has been for ease and comfort, I have taken a wrong view of the Christian life." And you have to submit your mind to that. You have to embrace that. You have to think through that and say, "Do you know what? My finances may not be what I

hoped they would be, my family may not be what I hoped it to be, my health may not be what I hoped it to be, the profile that I have in life or in ministry may not be what I hoped it to be, and that's okay. I accept that because I believe in the work of God in my life, I believe in the providence of God, and I realize that problems are to be expected and God will use my disappointments and discouragements in order to accomplish a greater spiritual goal in the end." And you have to embrace that and the preacher cannot make you do that. You personally have to sit down by yourself and say, "I see this and I accept it," rather than buck against it. "I don't want life to be like that. I don't want life to be difficult." Well, you may not get a choice in the matter. God may have appointed you to have really lousy parents, or have a really difficult spouse, or have children that don't respond to you in love like you would like, or your finances to become a mess when you have made choices that didn't work out. Problems, hardships, and you look beyond the horizontal earthly temporal dimension of them and remember, "Oh yes, God is using these problems in my life to achieve spiritual purposes to conform me to the image of Christ. And do you know what? I would rather be like Christ than have a life of ease and I embrace that. I submit to it. God, thank you even for the trials because I know they are coming from your hand in your providence and I believe that you will achieve good purposes for me in the end." And you put your foot down in your mind, so to speak. You put your foot down and say, "I'm going to stand on that and I will not deviate from that thought because I understand that problems are to be embraced."

Thirdly here on the nature of problems, the problems of life. We've said that they are to be expected, they are to be embraced, thirdly, I've already been talking about this: problems achieve spiritual purposes in your life. The godly mind understands that God uses problems to shape us. There are many things that we could look at here, I'm going to limit it to four this evening. These are four inevitable purposes that God has at work for you in your problems, even if you can't see them now. You know, the truth of the matter is that you might not see the outworking of the spiritual purposes of your problems for decades; it may not be for 30 years before you can see a connection between the sorrow and the difficulty that you had at X point in time and the way that God used it at Y point in time, and you just accept that and you embrace it. You say, "God, I'm in your hand. I'm in the hands of a good and loving and gracious God and that's all that matters. And even if I don't see or understand the purpose in this, I trust the fact that God is going to work it out in the end. I embrace that." You have to think about life this way. You have to take the long view of life otherwise you are continually making hasty impulsive decisions trying to get out from the very thing that is probably the vehicle of God's blessing in your life over the long term. Yeah, you know, I mean, I speak with a sense of urgency here just because this is so important for you to think about life and approach life this way, all for your blessing and upbuilding, beloved.

What do trials do? What purposes do they serve? Well, first of all, I'll go to the word affliction now. Affliction. Problems. Trials. Struggles. We're using those all in an equivalent sense here. Affliction first of all does this: it sanctifies you and produces obedience in your life. Affliction sanctifies you and makes you more obedient in life. Psalm 119:67 says this,

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.

Affliction, God's discipline, has a way of teaching you to treasure obedience over sin; to prefer an approach to life that is submissive to his word, obedient and believing in him, and rejecting and turning away from sin. Affliction has a way of producing that in your life.

Now, I want to tell you looking at it from God's perspective, that production of obedience long-term in your life is far more important to the work of God and in the mind of God than your present happiness is. God cares more about a lifestyle and lifetime of obedience than he does the momentary inconvenience and difficulty and sorrow that produces it. Well, we just recognize that that's how God thinks and that's how God works and what he does, and we embrace it and we say, "Okay." And I look at my affliction and I say, "Whatever else I do in this affliction, the one thing that I want to come out of this is that I would be more obedient to my Master," because affliction sanctifies us and produces obedience in our lives.

Secondly, affliction prepares you for future ministry. This is a beautiful aspect of the work of God in the lives of his people. Look at 2 Corinthians 1. Affliction prepares you for future ministry, maybe not public ministry but in dealing with individuals and friends and family that come into your life. 2 Corinthians 1:3 says,

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

So God brings difficulty, sorrow and affliction into your life, you wrestle with it but you find the comfort of God in it. You persevere through that and you realize on the other side, "God has helped me. God has been faithful. My heart is at peace and a deeper peace than I knew before." Then with that established, God brings people into your life who are going through struggles, maybe not the same struggle you've had but struggles, and you say, "Ah, I know what to do here. I have a testimony that I can give. I can show them the way God uses affliction in the lives of people," and encourage them to persevere and not get discouraged. If we could step back from life, step back from our engagement and preoccupation with our own problems, if you and I could step back and maybe not be just a touch less selfish in our thinking about life, we could say, "Oh, do you know what? If this produces in me an ability to minister to the people of God or to share Christ evangelistically better than I otherwise could, then this is a good thing and I can embrace it as a result because God uses affliction to prepare us for future ministry."

Not only that, 2 Corinthians 4:16, affliction turns our minds toward heaven. Affliction turns our minds toward heaven. Chapter 4, verse 16,

16 Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. 17 For momentary, light

affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 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.

Trials, afflictions, struggles, difficulties, sorrows, teach you something in a practical way that you might not get any other way. Do you know what? This world ain't that great. This world has a lot of heartache in it and if we live long enough, we're going to see the inevitable decay of our own bodies. We are going to see loved ones die and move on and feel the separation and loss that that brings. Well, what that does is it weans you away from loving this world and saying, "Do you know what I'm really glad about is the fact that I'm going to heaven and that is going to be really really great! And that's where my heart is. That's what I love. That's what I'm living for. Not this life, the life to come. Not the passing affliction of now but the future unshakable glory of the kingdom of God yet to be revealed to me." And when that starts to happen, beloved, then you are developing a more godly mind. Your affections and what you love are being set on the things that really matter which is what God saved you for in the first place. Affliction turns our minds toward heaven.

Finally, affliction teaches us to depend on God's grace. It teaches us to depend on God's grace. Look at chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians, verse 7. Paul had his thorn in the flesh, whatever that was, and in the midst of his apostolic ministry, having received and being taken up to the third heaven he says in verse 2, affliction came. Verse 7,

7 Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself! 8 Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. 9 And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness."

God humbles you through affliction and makes you feel experientially, makes you know without denial that you are weak, and he does that and produces humility in your life, but he does this not to crush you but rather simply to have you stop trusting in your own strength, your own wisdom, and to look up to him for grace, and you are to embrace that. That's what Paul did. Verse 9,

Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. 10 Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.

You do not know the sufficiency of the grace of God until that's all you have to lean on, right? Those of you that have walked through Christ through some really serious difficulties, isn't that true? Didn't you find that to be the case in the depth of your sorrow? You found that when all of the lights seemed to go out, that in that moment of darkness

there was a ray of God's grace that illuminated the room of your life and gave you the strength and the courage and the joy to move on, right? You found that to be true. That's what Paul is saying.

So, fourth point, we said problems are to be expected, to be embraced, they achieve spiritual purposes, finally and quickly: problems achieve good purposes. Problems achieve good purposes. Remember what James said, we read earlier, "the testing of your faith produces endurance." What Peter said, chapter 1, verse 7, "the proof of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." And the ever familiar passage that we can always turn to, "we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to his purpose," Romans 8:28.

So beloved, in your problems, in your trials, you step back. I can't literally step back because I'm anchored to this pulpit mic tonight, I would if I could. You step back and you realize that Scripture teaches you as part of a godly mind to have a completely different perspective on life. The providence of God teaches you that you don't follow the desires of your flesh if they would lead you into sin, rather you cultivate a life of obedience knowing that God will bless that providentially in the end. It teaches you to think differently about problems, to think differently about all the glamour and everything that the world would call you to. You say, "No. No. No. No. I'm going to have a biblical view of life. I'm going to have scriptural expectations, and that means that I expect problems to come. And do you know what?" Just walk through this in your mind, beloved. "Do you know what? I expect that and I embrace it. It's going to be hard. There are going to be times when I cry and I'm frustrated and it seems like it's just going to break me, but I embrace that because I know that God is going to use the problems in my life to achieve good purposes in the end, to achieve spiritual purposes that are of far more transcendent value than having a life of ease here on earth would be." What good is a life of ease if you end up in hell at the end of it, right? Wouldn't you rather be in the hand of God who wisely and lovingly knows exactly what to bring to you at the point even if it causes you pain and you say, "Lord, I can accept that because I'm in your hand and I trust you completely, that if problems come, they will be as a result of your direction. I can accept that and I will trust you for good purposes that I can't see in the midst of them. So I bow, I submit, I worship. With Job I say, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The Lord gave, the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.'"

Let's bow together in prayer.

*Father, we understand that it's one thing to talk about these things in the relative comfort of a room like this when we are somewhat removed in the moment from the immediate press of the trials. We recognize that but, Father, this is your truth. This isn't dependent upon our circumstances. These things are true if we had never been born, O God. You have a magnificent way of dealing with your children and we praise you for it. Father, we can look back at some of the trials that we've brought you through and we can thank you for them in retrospect because we see that you have done exactly in our own lives by*

*our own direct experience what you said you would do, that you took these problems, you used them in our lives so that we could minister to others. You achieved good purposes. You comforted us and showed to us without fail that your grace was sufficient even when we were gasping for breath under the weight of them, and we thank you for that, O God.*

*I thank you for the way that you have done that in my life and I know, Lord, that for some, the problems of life right now are crushing and would seem to squeeze out the very last breath of life because of their weight. So many different situations represented even in this room. Father, while we have spoken by a word of exhortation here in what we've said this evening, we close with a word of prayer asking you to bring deep and profound comfort to each one walking through the deep waters of life right now. Father, as faces come to my mind, yet unexpressed, Lord, would you not do for each one here what you did for the Apostle Paul, to show the sufficiency of your grace in the circumstances? Would you not by your Spirit comfort and encourage and strengthen and perfect your children who find the way is rocky, and they often trip and stumble and, Father, as it were, bruise their spiritual shins along the way? Won't you be a loving God to them, a loving Father to pick them up, to brush them off, to encourage and help and strengthen them? This is why you saved us, Lord. You knew beforehand we would stumble and lose our way.*

*And for those that are here tonight that have lost their way, Father, we cry out and say, "God, find me! God, restore me! God, help me! God, bless me as I look to you with my sad and tattered heart." Father, for such a one as that, meet them with your grace. Reassure them of their love that they have from you, the love of Christ in their soul. Father, remind them deep in their hearts that the truth of Scripture that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ, nothing will pluck us out of his hand. And Father, may the assurance of your love and your goodness anchor us in hope, in joy, and with a spirit of a willing heart ready to persevere through the trials that you have appointed for us at this season of our lives. Bless each one in this way.*

*And God, I do lift up our young people before you, those that are sitting under the sound of my voice here. Father, thank you for them. Perhaps they come simply because their parents do. Perhaps they come because they are genuinely interested. Either way, Father, we thank you that they are here. They are an important part of our church. They are an important part of the life of our body and we are so glad that they are here, God. And we pray from a perspective of those of us that have lived for a while in Christ and known the blessing of that, who know the joy of the forgiveness of sin, know the goodness of God irrefutably established in our lives, Father, we desire that for them as well. Have mercy on them, Father. Lead them not into temptation but deliver them from evil. Father, draw their hearts to your word. Where they struggle with understanding, Father, help them, then. Use your Spirit to help them, to open their eyes, to bring light to their darkened soul.*

*And Father, thank you for the ones, the young ones that are with us and they are in Christ and they have given public testimony of that and they are seeking to walk with you. And Father, would you just protect them and build a wall around them that they*

*might be a citadel of strength throughout their lives of faithfulness to Christ. Father, we have so many sweethearted and young men and young women in our church, tenderhearted, sensitive to sin, struggling sometimes but, Father, ever looking to you. Hearts tender, hearts not hard toward sin. Hearts wrestling against it. Father, we ask you to meet them quickly with your blessing, to strengthen them along the way, that they might know in their own lives by their own experience the immutable goodness of Christ toward them and that they could look back on their life when it is said and done and say, "The Lord blessed me all the way." Won't you do that, Lord? We're only asking you to do what you are by nature: good, kind, gracious. That's what we ask for each one here as we close this time in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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