



St Barnabas Cray

Why Does God Allow Suffering? Finding His Presence

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - The Reality of a Broken World

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:2 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We begin this week confronting an uncomfortable truth: we live in a broken world where suffering is not an exception but an expectation. Notice how Scripture doesn't say 'if' you pass through waters or walk through fire—it says 'when.' This isn't divine cruelty; it's divine honesty about the reality of life in a fallen world. The brokenness around us stems from humanity's collective choices, from nations that choose weapons over welfare to individuals whose decisions create ripples of pain. Yet here lies the profound difference for those who follow Christ: we don't walk through these trials alone. The guarantee isn't that we'll avoid the deep waters or escape the flames entirely. Rather,

the promise is presence—God's unwavering companionship in the midst of our darkest moments. This transforms everything. Suffering without God's presence is merely endurance; suffering with His presence becomes a pathway to deeper faith and intimacy with our Creator. When we focus solely on the pain, we miss seeing Him within it. But when we acknowledge both the reality of our broken world and the certainty of His presence, we discover that even our deepest wounds can become places where His love touches us most tenderly.

Reflection Question

Where in your life do you most need to shift your focus from the pain itself to God's presence within that pain?

From Sunday's Sermon

"If our focus is on the pain, if our focus is on the suffering, then we lose out on his presence. The more we focus on the pain, the more we see the suffering, the less we see him inside of it."

Today's Application

Today, identify one area of ongoing difficulty in your life—whether it's a strained relationship, health concerns, financial pressure, or emotional struggle. Instead of asking 'Why is this happening?' begin asking 'Where is God in this?' Create a simple daily practice: each morning, before tackling your challenges, pause and invite Jesus to walk through that specific difficulty with you. Throughout the day, when the weight of your circumstances feels heavy, remind yourself: 'I am not carrying this alone.' Begin keeping a small journal where you record moments—however brief—when you sense God's presence in your struggles. This isn't about denying the reality of pain but training your spiritual eyes to see the One who promises never to leave you. At work, when stress mounts, breathe a simple prayer: 'Jesus, you're here with me.' In difficult conversations, remember you're not navigating alone. This practice of acknowledging His presence doesn't minimise your pain; it transforms how you carry it.

Morning Prayer

Father, I confess that I often feel overwhelmed by the brokenness around me and within me. Help me to see beyond the immediate pain to Your faithful presence. When the waters feel too deep and the flames too hot, remind me that You have promised to be with me. Teach me to look for You in the midst of my struggles, not just in their resolution. Give me eyes to see Your love even in the darkest valleys. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Resting in His Presence

Evening Reflection

As this day draws to a close, reflect on the moments when you remembered that you weren't walking alone. Perhaps there were times when the old patterns returned—when you felt the full weight of your circumstances pressing down without the comfort of His presence. That's alright; learning to see God in our pain is a lifelong journey, not a one-day transformation. The beautiful truth is that even when we forget Him, He never forgets us. Even when we cannot sense His presence, He remains faithful to His promise. Tonight, rest in the assurance that tomorrow's challenges—whatever they may be—will not find you unaccompanied. The same God who promises to be with you in the waters and flames is the God who watches over you as you sleep. His presence isn't dependent on your ability to feel it; it rests on His unchanging character and unfailing love.

Evening Reflection

What evidence of God's faithfulness can you identify from today, even in small ways?

Evening Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for walking with me through this day. Forgive me for the moments when I forgot You were there. As I rest tonight, help me to trust that Your presence surrounds me even in sleep. Prepare my heart for tomorrow's journey. Amen.

Tuesday - The Fellowship of His Sufferings

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. (1 Peter 4:16 NIV)

Devotional Thought

Today we must distinguish between different types of suffering, for not all pain serves the same purpose in God's economy. There is suffering that comes from our own poor choices—the consequences of sin that we must own and learn from. But there is another kind of suffering: the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, where we share in something of what Jesus experienced for the sake of love, truth, and righteousness. When we suffer as Christians—facing rejection for our faith, experiencing hardship because we choose integrity over compromise, or bearing burdens for others as Christ did—we participate in something sacred. This isn't masochistic; it's redemptive. Such suffering shapes us into His likeness and deepens our understanding of His heart. It also serves a profound purpose: it makes us heavenly-minded. When we taste the bitterness of this broken world, our hearts naturally long for the restoration and wholeness that only heaven can provide. Pain has a way of clarifying our priorities and sharpening our focus on what truly matters. The temporary nature of earthly suffering becomes a powerful reminder of the eternal weight of glory that awaits us.

Reflection Question

How has suffering in your life drawn you closer to Christ and made you more aware of your need for heaven?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Something it does to us, it's that it makes us heavenly conscious. It makes our focus laser sharp on heaven... Nothing can distract me from that focus. I want to be with Jesus."

Today's Application

Examine the current struggles in your life and honestly categorise them. Which difficulties stem from your own choices or sin patterns? These require repentance and wisdom to change course. Which hardships seem to come simply from living faithfully in a broken world? These deserve a different response—not shame, but recognition of their sacred nature. For the consequences of your own choices, take concrete steps toward change today. Make that apology, establish that boundary, or seek help for that persistent struggle. For the suffering that comes from following Christ, choose to embrace it as fellowship with Him. If you're facing criticism for your values, rejection for your faith, or hardship because you've chosen the narrow path, thank God that He has deemed you worthy to share in Christ's sufferings. Let this pain fuel your longing for heaven and deepen your compassion for others who suffer. Most importantly, let both types of suffering drive you to your knees in prayer and dependence on God's grace.

Morning Prayer

Jesus, help me to understand the different sources of suffering in my life. For the pain that comes from my own sin, grant me repentance and wisdom. For the hardship that comes from following You, give me grace to bear it with dignity and joy. Use all my suffering to make me more like You and more longing for our eternal home. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Shaped by Sacred Suffering

Evening Reflection

Tonight, consider how your perspective on suffering may be shifting. Perhaps you're beginning to see that not all pain is purposeless, that some of your deepest struggles have been invitations into deeper intimacy with Christ. This doesn't make the pain less real or the tears less valid. Rather, it infuses your suffering with meaning and hope. As you reflect on today, notice how even small acts of faithfulness in the midst of difficulty—choosing kindness when you felt hurt, extending forgiveness when wronged, or maintaining hope when circumstances seemed bleak—connected you to the heart of Christ. These moments of fellowship with His sufferings are precious to God and transformative for your soul. Rest tonight knowing that no tear you've shed in faithfulness has been wasted.

Evening Reflection

In what ways has today's suffering, whether small or significant, offered you an opportunity to share in Christ's heart for others?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank You that even my pain can be sacred when it draws me closer to Your Son. Help me to see the difference between suffering that comes from sin and suffering that comes from love. Grant me rest tonight and courage for tomorrow. Amen.

Wednesday - Seeing Through a Glass Dimly

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (1 Corinthians 13:12 NIV)

Devotional Thought

One of the most humbling aspects of suffering is how it exposes the limitations of our understanding. We see only fragments of the larger story God is writing, like viewing one side of a coin and assuming that's all there is. Our perspective is necessarily limited—we can only see now,

only understand in part. This partial vision often intensifies our pain because we cannot comprehend the purpose behind our struggles. Yet this limitation is precisely where faith must flourish. When we acknowledge that we don't have all the answers, we create space for trust to grow. The God who sees the beginning from the end, who knows every thread in the tapestry of our lives, asks us to trust His goodness even when we cannot trace His hand. This isn't blind faith but informed trust—based on His character, His promises, and His demonstrated love throughout history and in our own lives. The mystery of suffering becomes not a wall that blocks our faith but a doorway that invites us into deeper dependence on the One who knows all things. Our incomplete understanding becomes an opportunity to lean more fully into His complete wisdom and unfailing love.

Reflection Question

What aspects of your current struggles are you trying to understand or control that you might need to surrender to God's greater wisdom?

From Sunday's Sermon

"We see things imperfectly... All that I know now is partial and incomplete. I do not know the entire story... So when I'm going through that... I put my trust in God, that God, for you to have allowed this to happen to me, you must have a plan."

Today's Application

Today, practice the discipline of holy surrender. Make a list of the questions about your suffering that keep you awake at night—the 'whys' that circle endlessly in your mind. For each question, write beside it: 'I don't need to understand this fully to trust God completely.' Then, in a concrete act of surrender, place this list in your Bible as a bookmark at 1 Corinthians 13:12. Each time you see it, let it remind you that your partial understanding doesn't diminish God's perfect plan. In conversations today, resist the urge to have all the answers about suffering—your own or others'. Instead, offer the gift of presence and the honesty of saying, 'I don't understand this either, but I'm choosing to trust God's goodness.' Practice responding to your own anxious thoughts with this phrase: 'I see in part, but God sees completely.' When facing decisions related to your struggles,

ask not 'What will eliminate my pain?' but 'What response honours God even when I don't understand?' This shift from demanding answers to offering trust is one of faith's most mature expressions.

Morning Prayer

Lord, I confess my desire to understand everything, to have all the pieces of my life make perfect sense. Help me to embrace the mystery and trust Your wisdom when my own runs short. Teach me to rest in Your perfect knowledge when my understanding fails. Give me peace in the midst of unanswered questions. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Peace of Partial Understanding

Evening Reflection

As you end this day, notice how it feels to release the burden of needing to understand everything. There's a strange peace that comes from acknowledging our limitations—not as defeat, but as an invitation to rest in Someone greater than ourselves. Today's struggles may not make more sense tonight than they did this morning, but perhaps you've discovered that making sense of everything isn't your responsibility. Your job is faithfulness; God's job is sovereignty. In releasing your need to see the complete picture, you've made room for trust to grow in the spaces where understanding fails. This is the beginning of mature faith—not faith that has all the answers, but faith that trusts the One who does. Let this truth settle into your heart as you prepare for rest.

Evening Reflection

How has releasing your need to understand everything changed your relationship with God today?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank You for being bigger than my understanding and wiser than my questions. Help me to sleep peacefully tonight, knowing that what I cannot comprehend, You hold perfectly in Your hands. Amen.

Thursday - All Things Work Together

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.
(Romans 8:28 NIV)

Devotional Thought

Today we encounter one of Scripture's most challenging yet comforting promises: that all things—not just the pleasant things, not merely the things we understand, but all things—work together for good for those who love God. This doesn't mean that all things are good in themselves; evil remains evil, pain remains painful, and loss remains devastating. Rather, it means that God's redemptive power is so great that He can weave even the darkest threads into a tapestry of beauty and purpose. This promise requires us to take a longer view, to trust that the God who knew us before we were born also knows the end of our story. He permitted our struggles not because He delights in our pain, but because He sees how even our deepest wounds can become sources of healing for others, how our greatest weaknesses can become showcases for His strength. Consider how a skilled musician can take a broken instrument and create haunting, beautiful melodies that a perfect instrument could never produce. Our brokenness, in God's hands, becomes the very means by which His grace is most clearly displayed. This doesn't minimise our pain, but it infuses it with hope and purpose.

Reflection Question

Looking back on past difficulties, where can you now see God's hand working good from what seemed only harmful at the time?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Your pain and suffering is not purposeless. There is a purpose behind that pain. There is a purpose behind that suffering. It may not look like it, it may not feel like it, but believe me when I say there is a purpose behind it."

Today's Application

Today, begin creating what you might call a 'Romans 8:28 journal.' Divide a page into two columns. In the left column, write down current struggles where you cannot yet see God's good purpose. In the right column, record past difficulties where you can now identify ways God brought good from pain—perhaps through lessons learned, compassion developed, relationships deepened, or character strengthened. This isn't an exercise in false optimism but in faith-filled remembering. As you go through today, actively look for small ways God might be working good even in your current struggles. Perhaps your illness has deepened your prayer life, your job loss has opened new opportunities, or your relational conflict has revealed areas needing growth. Share your testimony with someone who is struggling—let them know how God has brought good from your past pain. This isn't about offering easy answers but about providing hope that God's redemptive power is real and active. Most importantly, when facing new difficulties today, remind yourself: 'This too can serve God's good purposes in my life.'

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, I choose to believe that You are working good even in the circumstances that cause me pain. Help me to trust Your redemptive power when I cannot see Your purpose. Use my struggles to bring glory to Your name and blessing to others. Give me eyes to see Your goodness even in difficulty. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Weaving Beauty from Brokenness

Evening Reflection

Tonight, reflect on the ways you've begun to see God's redemptive work more clearly. Perhaps you've remembered how past struggles shaped you in positive ways you'd forgotten, or maybe you've caught glimpses of how current difficulties might be serving purposes beyond your immediate understanding. This growing awareness doesn't erase the reality of pain, but it does transform how we carry it. When we believe that our struggles serve a greater purpose, we can endure them with hope rather than mere resignation. Your pain is not random; it's not wasted. In God's economy, nothing that touches His children's lives falls outside His redemptive reach. As you prepare for sleep, entrust tomorrow's unknowns to the God who specialises in bringing beauty from

ashes and joy from mourning.

Evening Reflection

What evidence from today suggests that God is indeed working good purposes even in your current struggles?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank You for the glimpses of Your redemptive work I've seen today. Help me to trust that You're weaving beauty from my brokenness, even when I cannot see the pattern. Grant me rest in Your sovereignty. Amen.

Friday - Learning to Carry Together

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2 NIV)

Devotional Thought

As we conclude this week's journey through suffering, we discover a profound truth: we were never meant to carry our pain alone. Just as a heavy burden becomes lighter when shared between two

people, our spiritual and emotional loads become more bearable when we allow others—and ultimately Christ—to help us carry them. The image of lifting a weight alone versus lifting it with help illustrates perfectly how isolation intensifies suffering while community transforms it. When we insist on bearing our struggles in solitude, we rob ourselves of the comfort God intends to provide through His body, the church, and through His own presence. But when we humble ourselves to accept help, to share our burdens, and to lean on others, we discover that what seemed impossible to endure alone becomes manageable together. This principle extends beyond human relationships to our relationship with God Himself. Christ invites us to cast all our cares upon Him because He cares for us. He doesn't promise to remove every burden, but He does promise to help us carry what we cannot bear alone. The key is releasing our grip on independence and learning the grace of interdependence—with our community and with our Saviour.

Reflection Question

What burdens have you been trying to carry alone that you need to share with others or surrender more fully to Christ?

From Sunday's Sermon

"The more you hold on to it by yourself, the longer, the more painful it is. But the moment you release it to the one who is able to do all things, who can carry your pain and suffering... When you do it alone, it becomes a burden. When you do it alone, it becomes a problem... when you give it to Jesus, when you allow Jesus to walk with you."

Today's Application

Today, take concrete steps to stop carrying your burdens alone. First, identify one struggle you've been handling in isolation and prayerfully consider who in your life might be trusted to share this load—a mature friend, family member, pastor, or counsellor. Reach out to that person today, not necessarily seeking solutions but simply sharing the weight. Second, practice the spiritual discipline of burden-casting. Take your heaviest concern and literally pray through the process of handing it to Jesus. Visualise placing it in His capable hands. Throughout the day, when you catch yourself picking up that burden again, consciously return it to Him with a simple prayer: 'Jesus, I'm giving

this back to You.' Third, look for opportunities to help carry someone else's burden. Offer practical help, a listening ear, or simply your presence to someone who is struggling. As you help lighten another's load, you'll discover the beautiful reciprocity of Christian community. Finally, if you've been reluctant to seek professional help for ongoing struggles, consider whether pride is preventing you from accessing the assistance God may be providing through trained counsellors or medical professionals.

Morning Prayer

Jesus, forgive me for trying to carry burdens You never intended me to bear alone. Help me to humble myself to receive help from others and to fully surrender my struggles to You. Show me how to be a burden-bearer for others as well. Teach me the grace of interdependence. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Lightness of Shared Loads

Evening Reflection

As this week draws to a close, you may notice something remarkable: the burdens that felt crushing at the beginning of the week may feel more manageable tonight. This isn't because your circumstances have necessarily changed, but because you've learned the secret of shared suffering and divine companionship. You've discovered that acknowledging God's presence in pain transforms everything, that surrendering your need to understand releases you into peace, and that sharing your struggles lightens their weight. Most importantly, you've been reminded that your pain has purpose, even when that purpose remains hidden. The God who walks with you through fire and flood is the same God who can use your deepest wounds to bring healing to others and glory to His name. Carry these truths with you beyond this week, returning to them whenever suffering threatens to overwhelm you again.

Evening Reflection

How has this week changed your perspective on suffering, and what will you do differently the next time you face significant pain?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank You for walking with me through this week of difficult truths and comforting promises. Help me to remember that I never suffer alone, that my pain has purpose, and that You are always working good from what seems only harmful. Keep these truths alive in my heart. Amen.