

2 Corinthians 1

Sunday 12/11/2011

SEC: Introduction to Ministry and Suffering

Last week we started our first chapter. We had an introduction the week before, and then we took and started chapter one of 2 Corinthians. What we accomplished last week from the Bible was we really defined what ministry really is. We talk about ministry a lot, and we define ministry as people. But last week we got to the Bible's bedrock definition, and now you know what ministry is in the aspect of the fellowship of His sufferings.

Years ago, I had organized a tremendous mission endeavor with discipleship lessons. The very discipleship lessons that we use here to teach you, there were times when I took teams around the country. We went into a church from Sunday morning to Wednesday night and basically had a format where we taught those churches how to use the discipleship lessons. I would take 30 or 40 people with me. After a while, I trained other guys to do it, and we were doing it all across the country.

When the wall came down over in Russia and all the communist countries kind of reverted back to not being so hostile—in fact, they were wide open—we started taking teams over to places like Romania, and into Russia, and into Bulgaria, and all of those places that you have heard me talk about in church history. There were times literally when I had teams that were crossing over the Atlantic, one team coming back and another team going over. We would train those teams very acutely because they had to be ready for all of the problems that they might face, and they had to be able to deal with those.

I saw very early on that it was going to take a certain kind of person to be able to do that kind of ministry. This is not a place for people who whine a lot about things and get bent out of shape when things do not go right. Most of the time over there, if you go to what would be classified as probably a third-world country—maybe not now, but back then it was, especially coming out of the Com Block of the communist Cold War—things were very primitive, and it was a very tough time. You did not have all the best living conditions. You were living with people who did not have enough food for themselves, let alone feeding you. We would try to take just about everything along with us that we could to be as self-sufficient as we could.

SEC: Principles for Ministry: Adaptability and Endurance

I built those teams around five basic principles. I did not tell them this, but it is the same five basic principles I had built my Sunday School classes on, and that is what I had back then. It is the same principles that I carry through in building this church. It was five basic things that they had to show me they had before they could really go.

1. Adaptability
2. Dependability
3. Flexibility
4. Durability
5. Compatibility

They were thrust into situations that they had to use all of these qualities. This was no place to be your standard Baptist who has a mindset of, "It has to be this way, or I am not a very happy camper." I remember one in particular; we trained them very, very hard. It was much like a boot camp, even to the place that we took them on a 15-mile hike and on a weekend overnight. We treated them, had guys at that point who had just gotten out of the army that had set up a mock communist camp, and we put them through the whole deal. It was not, "I am your buddy, so it is going to be easy on you." It was everything short of waterboarding, I can guarantee you, and that may have happened too, to my knowledge about it.

One situation I remembered that happened really proved the whole point. I had a team that was deep in Bulgaria, and they were fixing to leave the next morning. They had to go about six or seven miles to the airport there and then fly out from there early in the morning. The night before, they found out that there was a labor strike that had come into effect, and there was absolutely no transportation anywhere in the city to get anywhere. This is the situation that I am talking about that you find yourself in. Europe does not run like America, and when they decide they are not going to go to work today, they are just not going to go to work.

Here I had a team of 35 people that were stuck six miles from the airport with all of their baggage and all their luggage and everything that they had. There was absolutely no way to get them there. The airlines could not help, the taxis did not work, the buses were out, and there was absolutely nowhere to get there. The team guy that was running it at that particular time—I was not on this team, but he was one of my key guys, and I had full confidence in him. Here is a group of 30-some people that are basically trapped now in Bulgaria. If they miss their flight, Lord knows when they are going to get home. To try to reschedule one person might be okay, but 30 or 35 people, that is not a good deal.

That team absolutely met together that night late, and they decided that they were going to take matters into their own hands, that they were not going to miss that flight. They all took their luggage and all their stuff in backpacks because of just situations that you might find yourself in. They got themselves packed up. They started out about one o'clock in the morning in the middle of the night, had a map of the city, followed the railroad tracks—35 of them, like 35 little beggars on the way out someplace, running away from home—and actually hoofed it all over six miles through all of the things that they had to get through to get to that airport, and they made that flight.

That is the kind of—I looked at that and I thought about that after it happened and looked back on it many, many years. That is exactly the epitome of those five words that I gave you. Most Baptists, if they found themselves in that situation, would just simply have a meltdown. When it comes to ministry and being put into the pressure of the ministry like we are talking about in 2 Corinthians, no meltdowns are allowed. I see that same element in much of what goes on here.

I bring up the last—and this is not by any stretch a very good comparison, but on the same level, it makes my point. Last time we got down to Restart, they had a project that they needed to have done that we knew nothing about. It was a feather in our cap to get it done and show them that we have the muscle to get it done, whatever needs to be done. So I just simply went in among the

teams. When you are in the military and you get an order, you may not like the order, you may not understand the order, but a lieutenant or a captain always does not have the time, nor will he take the time, to explain to you why he is giving you that order. You follow orders. That is exactly the way it has to be. I do not always have time to explain to you why I want you to do this, why I am pulling you off here and putting you over here. You do not have the luxury many times. Sometimes you do, many times you do not.

My point is this: I stripped some of the teams, got key people up there, and within a heartbeat, we had that project completely done. That is what I am talking about: the ability to be able to do that. In the middle of the week, I got a phone call in an emergency. There was another thing down there. "Can you get anybody to come down?" I made four or five phone calls. We had six or seven guys down there and some ladies down there, and we got that done during mid-morning, and it was done in about an hour and a half. So these are the kind of things that I am talking about. These are the things that you learn about ministry: that ministry, you have to be adaptable, you have to be dependable, you have to be flexible, you have to be durable, and you have to be compatible. You do not always get to pick the people you want to work with, and there is no room for petty problems that you may have because the job needs to get done, and the ministry needs to get accomplished.

In truth, in our study, we define what ministry is through the fellowship of God's suffering. I will tell you the truth: from this point on, our study of 2 Corinthians is all downhill from here. The last two weeks were the key. I gave you the introduction to it, and I defined in chapter 1 what the ministry was. The bottom line is, if you do not get that, if you have not got that, the rest of it is not going to do you a bit of good. Last week, we saw that the key to ministry is suffering. We saw that we understand the fellowship of God's suffering first. Then we understand that God takes us in our suffering and then breaks us and then makes us so that we can help others.

I want to read the key verses last week, even though we are going to have another set of verses today. I think it will kind of put it in a—bring the two together.

2 Corinthians 1:3-6

3 Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;

4 Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

5 For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

6 And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

We talked about that. We broke those verses down. We found that you help others get through their struggles by how God has helped you get through your struggles and learning the lessons of the mistakes that we make in life, the God of all mercies and comfort. I talked about how many

of us have made some bad choices in life, and even God will take those and help you if you are willing to learn from your mistakes. We talked about that this is really what I have talked about the week before about your constant redefining yourself. Defining yourself now should be fully clear in your mind that basically through your sufferings, when you learn from those and God breaks you of who you are to yourself, then He takes those sufferings and makes you able to help somebody else. In that suffering is where you define yourself.

You also want to remember our four-point formula that we are going to carry all through this:

6. Learn always to examine ourselves.
7. Learn to know ourselves.
8. Learn to take heed to yourselves.
9. Learn to prove yourself.

The first thing that somebody has to do to get to that point is identify your weaknesses. It does us no good to focus on our strengths and ignore our weaknesses. I would suggest you do the opposite: ignore your strengths and focus on your weaknesses. I have told you before a little three-point outline about how to deal with whatever weakness you may have in your life.

10. Identify it. You recognize what it is.
11. Isolate it. You get honest with yourself.
12. Annihilate it. You absolutely give it no place in your life and do whatever you have got to do and do not stop till it is dead and gone.

SEC: The Book of Job: A Definition of Suffering

Today we will look at another passage, as I said, and we will see another great theme about the trials that we go through and the aspect of understanding ministry. I want to read today for you 2 Corinthians 1, and we will pick it up in verse 7.

2 Corinthians 1:7-10

7 And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

10 Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Now Father, we ask you to take this today and give me the ability through your spirit to break it down so these good people can understand this great passage. Lord, help us to walk away today and as we leave this building, to really focus on those things that we need to understand and see how this applies to where we are at in our ministry and the suffering and all the things that we need to learn from in our lives to help us. We will be careful to give you now all the honor and

the praise. We pray your blessings today, Father, and all the things that have to transpire this next week, and we just look forward to your hand guiding it all and doing everything that needs to be done because you are a great God and these are our great people. We will thank you and praise you in Jesus' name for His sake we ask it. Amen.

When I think about suffering in the Bible, I do not know what you think about it, but when I think about suffering in the Bible, suffering for God, my mind always goes to the book of Job. I think that the book of Job is a great book that shows us and gives us a lot of insight into our suffering. It also, we talked about the fellowship of God's suffering, it is also one of the greatest books in the Bible that will put you in touch with that fellowship of God's suffering because it allows you to see in places in Job the actual suffering that Christ went through on that cross almost by an hour-by-hour basis.

The book of Job is not about ministry. There is very little, if anything in Job, about ministry directly. But it is a book that defines suffering for us. I always looked at 2 Corinthians as defining for me ministry and the ministry of suffering, but then Job defines that suffering for me through understanding like places in Job chapter 30, God's suffering.

You know the story of Job. I do not have to spend a lot of time recounting that story. Job is a man in the Old Testament that loses everything he has. He loses in seven days—you have heard me say this many, many times—he loses in seven days what you and I will never lose in a lifetime. He loses his family, everybody except his wife—he should have lost her, but he did not. He loses his family. He loses his house. He loses his ranch. He loses his farm. He loses all of his cattle. He loses all of his sheep. He loses every material possession he has. Then on top of that, he gets bad news from the doctor, and he loses his health.

As he is going through an agonizing time with his infirmity, add to that the grief of all that he has lost, and now he does not even have a house. The Bible says that he is sitting on an ash heap. I would suspect that that ash heap is probably left over from the burned-down house that he once lived in. He is sitting on an ash heap. He has got boils all over his body. The Bible says he is taking a piece of broken china plate pottery, and he is absolutely scraping the pus off those sores and those boils with what once were the dishes that he ate fine food on.

Then if that was not enough, then he has got three friends that show up. These three friends are where the little saying comes from, "With friends like these, who needs enemies?" These three friends accuse him falsely. He is already in deep grief. He is already in deep sorrow. He is already in deep suffering and misery and pain. Nothing anybody wants to hear is the fact that it is all your fault. That is what they do for him.

Yet when I look at that and I look at his life and study that book, I find that Job, in the particular circumstances that he is in, if you have ever really studied it, Job has no Bible. He has no prayer cards like you have. He has got nobody he can call to put on a prayer card. He has got no communication with anybody. As far as he knows, he is the only one who loves God and is standing for God. Everybody else has been dead. He has got no church. He has no Old Paths Baptist Church. He has got no place he can go for comfort. He has got no pastor he can call. If he had a pastor, he has got no way to call him. There is nothing, he has got nothing. He has got no

friends now. He has got no family now. He has got no church. He has got no Christian TV and radio, though that would help him. He has got none of those things. He cannot get a copy of The Purpose-Driven Life. He is in a real mess.

Yet when I study that story, and I look at that—and it is a story very dear to my heart, and I never in my life get too far away from that story—all Job had was his relationship with God. I do not know what that signals to you, but to me, it shows me a great truth. If it shows us anything at all today, it shows us that some of those things that I listed are very important. Your Bible is important, church is important, family is important, friends are important. But the reality of all that is, and here is what you have got to get from the book of Job: you can have all of those things and not have a relationship with God. You can have a Bible here today and still not have the right relationship with God. You can come to Old Paths Baptist Church, where I will pride myself on the preaching of the truth, and you can be as far from God today as a member of this church as you could ever get outside of losing your salvation. You could have Christian friends that pray for you, and still you have no relationship with God. You could have a Christian wife or a Christian husband that prays for you and wants you to be everything that God wants them to be, and yet you still have no relationship with God.

I have met over my lifetime many, many times, many of God's people know the book. The problem is they do not know the author of the book. They have never built that relationship. So we know now from 2 Corinthians chapter 1 about our relationship with God and His suffering. When you look at Job and you see his suffering, we get a better appreciation of God now taking those sufferings and building us through them because at that point, and you see this in the book of Job, Job's sufferings became God's suffering. Then in the book, we find that God's sufferings became Job's suffering.

The book of Job teaches three great truths, and I would suggest to you—and I hope this is not true, but I would suggest to you if you do not get anything else out of this message, and I hope that would not be true, that you would get home with at least these three things. It would be worth you coming for this. The book of Job teaches three great truths that we need to remember when we study chapter 1 and we look at the fellowship of His suffering and how it all fits together.

- 1.) God by Himself is enough.
- 2.) God will make you with the very things the devil tries to break you with.
- 3.) You are always better, you are always stronger, you are always wiser, and you are always closer to God after you go through the fire than you were before you went through it.

SEC: Understanding Hope and Learning from Mistakes

With that little introduction there, let us look at 2 Corinthians 1:7 here and look at some things here for a few minutes. He says,

2 Corinthians 1:7

And our hope of you is steadfast, knowing that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

Paul says here, and I want to explain a couple things here that will kind of help you a little bit. He says, "Our hope, and our hope of you." Let me explain this. In the New Testament, the word hope is always a sure thing. We think of the word hope like, "I hope I get this done." Somebody would say, "I hope the church does what they need to do." That is not the way the word hope is used in the New Testament. In the New Testament, the word hope, any time you find it—and this will help you every other place—the Bible says, Paul said that my hope is in Christ Jesus. He was not saying by that, "I hope that Christ is going to be there for me." He was basically saying, "I know He is going to be there for me because Christ is my only hope." Hope in the New Testament is always a sure thing, always a sure thing.

What Paul says, he is sure, he is sure that they are going to learn from their mistakes and that they are going to learn through ministry. He has confidence in this church. I am not sure what turned it around because I know in 1 Corinthians, you do not see any confidence in him at all. Now suddenly when we start to come to 2 Corinthians, and it is about a year apart of those books, now suddenly you see this great confidence, and he says, "I know, I know that in our hope of you is steadfast." He says, "I know." He says, "I am not hoping you do it." He says, "I know, I hope, I know you are going to do it. You are going to learn from your mistakes, and you are going to learn the ministry."

I say it again, learning from your mistakes is one of the key things that is a key commodity of your life. Most people never do that. A lot of reasons is pride. A lot of reasons is they do not care. But you have to be able to learn from your mistakes. I think the greatest example of not learning is just looking at history in general, our own country, the United States in general, and the mistakes of history. This country has never learned from its mistakes that it made. It did not learn the mistakes of World War I. At the end of World War I, they thought that was—they called it the war that was going to end all wars. They actually thought there would never be another war again. They put the League of Nations together, which now is called the United Nations, in 1919, and they actually really believed. They thought, everybody thought this, they thought there will never be another war again because the nations—well, they even took a verse out of Isaiah and put it on the United Nations about taking your swords and turning them into plowshares. That is a millennial verse. They actually thought that nations getting together could bring peace. How long did that last? About 20 minutes. There have been 386 wars and minor wars and major wars across this country since they were coming to being.

Because we did not learn the lesson of World War I, we got hoodwinked on December 7th. A few days ago, we celebrated the anniversary of Pearl Harbor. We did not learn the lessons in Korea, so we went back into Vietnam. We did not learn the lessons of Vietnam. We never learned from the Russians' defeat in Afghanistan, so we went in trying to do—we thought we could do what they could not do. Let me tell you something. When the Russians went into Afghanistan, they were the most brutal conquering force probably in the last thousand years that Afghans saw.

They poisoned all their water holes. They killed all their people. They annihilated them. They used gas. They just did everything in the world and could not defeat them. We think we are going to go over with harsh language, and we are going to win because we are arrogant. They do not call that nation the graveyard of the empires for nothing. We did not learn the lessons. We did not learn the lessons of what happened on 9/11. We never learned the lessons on dealing with Muslims. Let the British learn back in the—I can tell you how to end the Muslim uprising in 20 minutes, and every Muslim on this planet would absolutely do whatever you told them to do. It is so simple and so easy. The British learned it when they took over in the 1890s and finally took Jerusalem in 1917. But we do not learn from history. Because we do not learn from history, we are bound then to repeat the lessons. Because we do not learn from our mistakes in our personal life, the same process, we continue to make bad choices and bad mistakes.

Out of this passage comes a great concept out of this verse here. He says, "For we suffer for Christ, that we are consoled by Christ." That is a great verse. That is a great verse for ministry. No consolation, you see, from God without suffering. But by the same token, there is no suffering without God's consolation. God has got all the bases covered.

I think back at three guys I am going to mention; most of God's people have no clue who they are, and it is to your shame. I would not ask you to raise your hand, but I will ask this in a question form, and I am not asking you to identify yourself or not identify yourself. But how many have ever heard of a guy by the name of Watchman Nee? Richard Wurmbrand? Haralan Popoff? They are three of the greatest Christian martyrs in the 20th century.

Watchman Nee was in China. He was greatly influenced by a British—you might guess—a British missionary with a King James 1611 Authorized Version in his early years. He grew up in the 20s and up through World War II and was severely persecuted for his Christian belief. After World War II, when they went communist and all of those things, he is imprisoned in 1952. Nobody ever heard of him after he went into those Chinese prisons. Nobody knows when he died, how he died, but he was severely tortured. All during that time while he was persecuted for what he believed, he wrote some of the greatest material on a relationship with God, some of the greatest material on a prayer life, some of the greatest material on dealing with things in life. Where his main concerns were for this day was having his fingernails pulled out and his toes broken one at a time. Your biggest thing is your busy schedule of getting the kids from soccer games to this, and it folds you up like a broken accordion. There is the difference.

Richard Wurmbrand. He spent 14 years in a communist prison in Romania before the wall came down. I was in Romania in the end of the 80s after the wall came down, and I remember we had a revival at a big soccer field. There were probably 30,000 people there. Everybody wanted to hear Christ. Right there as I was standing there, the interpreter, the guy that I was living with, was a young kid and a nice kid. He was telling me over here was a big building about six stories high, maybe eight stories high, and all the windows were open, and the windows were packed with people trying to hear the guy preaching. He told me that that was the headquarters of the secret police. He told me that that was the place where Richard Wurmbrand was tortured and where hundreds of thousands of Christians were tortured. He says, "Now it is free, and Christianity is free, and the windows are open, and the very men who tortured Wurmbrand were

now standing there listening to the gospel being preached." One of the greatest books that he ever wrote was Tortured for Christ. He wrote a number of great books and great sermons, but nobody even knows who they are today.

Haralan Popoff spent 13 years in a Bulgarian prison, communist prison, severely tortured. Let me tell you, their works and their writings touched and helped so many struggling people by the hundreds of thousands. Their books and their writings, when you read them, almost have a supernatural side to them as far as their relationship to God. Their struggles helped others, all three of them, and a hundred thousand, maybe a million other people who nobody knows their name but held a relationship with Christ worth being tortured for. They suffered terribly at the hands of their enemies.

We quote Romans chapter 8 verse 18 when it says,

Romans 8:18

For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

We use it like a punchline. I guarantee you it meant a whole different world to them than it does to us. That is a great verse. It reminds me of Philippians chapter 4 verse 13 when it says,

Philippians 4:13

I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

All the new Bibles put in, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me." The language that your King James Bible is written in is the perfect English form and the perfect English structure where every sentence lends itself to the subject, the predicate, and everything the way it is supposed to be. The new Bibles destroy that. So when Philippians chapter 4 verse 13 says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," they take it and change that to, "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me," they destroy the doctrinal content. It is not Christ that comes down and strengthens you. It is the things that you do, the "which" for Christ. The "which" will always take it back to the former subject when you are reading any verse. You see it here. It says, "For I reckon that the sufferings," there is your subject, "of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which." Glory. Now the NIV says "that," and by putting that and taking out "which," they destroy the biblical doctrinal context. It is not safe where I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be. It is not the glory by itself. It is the suffering and the glory, the "which," the glory and the "which," the suffering go hand in hand that nobody ever gets that. True fellowship is not just getting God's glory. True fellowship is the "which," going through the sufferings that brings that glory. No suffering, no glory.

SEC: Pressed Out of Measure: Trusting God's Perspective

Now 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 deal with another great aspect here, and it deals with the aspect that something that you have got to learn sooner or later in ministry: you have got to decide who you are working for because a lot of things in the ministry you have a tendency to take personal.

People will say things that will hurt you. People will say things against your family. People will do things against your family. People will say things against you. They are all things that in a human form and a human nature we think we have to defend ourselves. What I am telling you right now, the way that you sidestep that and you deal with that is keeping one thing in the back of your mind: Who are you doing this for? Who are you working for? Are you working for yourself? Are you doing this for you? Then if you are, then you have a right to get upset. But if you are doing it for Him, then you do not have a right to get upset. That is the greatest single thing that I find in my own life that keeps me from taking things personal because you do not think it takes personal because you never forget. When somebody takes a cheap shot at you, somebody is out to hurt you, somebody is out to get you, you realize that they are not out to get you, they are out to get God. Because if they were just out to get me, it would scare me to death because I am just a mortal man, and you can get to me. But boy, you try to go after Him, you have got your hands full. I am in Christ. You want to get to me? You have got to go through Him. So you never forget who you are doing this for. You never forget who you are working for. Because 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 here deals with seeing those trials and sufferings that you are going to have to go through from God's standpoint. It is really the key to effective ministry: getting God's perspective.

He says in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9:

8 For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:

9 But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:

Exactly what Paul was going through here has never been recorded for us, not found in the book of Acts. I do not think it is found anywhere in the Bible. A lot of things are not. But exactly what he was going through and how bad it was, the details, just not recorded for us. But whatever it was, it was one of those situations where Paul thought that he was going to die any minute. It was a situation so bad that he says in 2 Corinthians 1:9, "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves." Most of us have never been in a situation where we thought that we were going to die simply because of what you were doing for the Lord. Most of us have never gotten there. When I read things like this and I read the story about Haralan Popoff and Richard Wurmbbrand and Watchman Nee, it really, when you get it, read it, it makes me feel so ashamed of myself of the things that bother me and mess me up that mean absolutely nothing. I hope at the judgment seat of Christ I am a long way down the line from those three guys. Because when God displays what their sufferings was and how they did not give up, and then He displays what my sufferings is and how quickly I did give up, I just better be removed down the line about a million people. But Paul had been in that situation many, many times.

Now there are two great principles that come out of this and two verses that help us see this suffering from yet another angle within this passage. We have already seen how that our suffering and what we go through is to help somebody else as God helps us. We have got that pretty down now, do we not? But now here is the other thing you want to look at. There are two

things here. 2 Corinthians 1:8 says that we were pressed out of measure above strength. Now 2 Corinthians 1:8 simply deals with an issue that you and I have to face all the time. He says that we were pressed out of measure above strength. That means beyond your control. Do you know in all of us that is the number one problem we have? Always wanting to be in control. We all want to have control of our lives, and we do not like when God—I know I do not—we do not like being in situations where we are not in control. That is a—that can be a good quality to a certain degree. I like people who are assertive. I like people who get things done. I like people that have a good self-confidence about them. I admire that in people. I think that that is a good character trait. Somebody who is confident in themselves and can get it done without somebody looking over their shoulder. I think that is an admirable thing. But it is like anything else in life. Your best qualities can also be your bad qualities if you do not have them in balance. Because you can take this control thing too far where you have got to be in control of everything. It will never work out when it comes to God. It just never will.

We want to be in control of all of our circumstances in life, and let us face it, giving up that control is very hard to do. I have seen God's people do that all their lives. I told you last week about a great character study in the Bible by Jacob in Genesis chapter 32. That is his basic issue. Genesis chapter 32 is about a man named Jacob. The name Jacob means schemer. He is somebody who absolutely takes control of everything in his life when God wants to do it another way. Jacob wants to do it his way because Jacob has an ulterior motive, and he has something he wants out of this for himself. It takes going to that wrestling match and God pinning him down and going through that great thing in Genesis chapter 32 before he came to the end of self. That is just the way we are.

I have seen God's people do it all their lives. I have seen it do it with their kids. I have seen it do it with their jobs. I have seen it do it with their money. I have seen it do it with everything in their life that they are saved, they are on their way to heaven. But you know what? "I do not want any adversity in my life. I do not want any trouble. I do not want to rock the boat. So I am just going to steer myself through life and go to church on Sunday and have a good relationship with God." It does not work that way.

I have seen pastors do that with their churches and their ministries. I have seen pastors take complete control of everything. They control everything and everybody. They will tell you who you can talk to and who you cannot. They will tell you who you can marry and who you cannot. They will even tell you who you should date and who you should not. I know a pastor that in his church, if the husband and wife were having a problem and the wife went to the pastor and said he is doing this, he will go in the house with some deacons, and he will remove the husband away from the house. Now, folks, I have got to just tell you something here. I know a pastor is the lead, and I know you have to lead with principles. But may I just say this to you? There are a lot of things in churches and a lot of things that go on in church. There are a lot of things that go on in people's lives. It is just none of the pastor's business.

I have people come in from time to time when some of you will hook up with somebody else, you know, that "love is in the air" thing. Everybody has an opinion about everything. You have this guy over here, and he is lonely, and he sees this gal over here, and she is lonely. So the two

of them start going on. The first thing you know, everybody is got an opinion about it. It is not a matter of time for somebody to come to me, "What do you think about so and so?" You know what I always tell them? I said, "I do not think it is any of my business. And I do not think it is any of your business either." Now, maybe that is a little harsh for some of you. I thought I would get more amens on that, but I did not. Well, thank you. Feel a little bit better.

But the truth of the matter is, my job, here is what it is. Real simple. My job is to preach the truth. That is my job. My job is every time I am up here, I preach the truth. I open up that book, and I give you—you may not like it, but it is the truth. Now, that is my job. That is all my job is. Your job is to take that truth and apply it to your life. Now, that is all it is. Now, if you do not want to do that, it is okay with me. I am not upset with you. I still love you. You are my buddy. We will go. We will do. But the bottom line is, that is where it ends for me. Now, if you come to me and you have got a problem and you have got an issue, you tell me what it is, I will tell you what the Bible says. But I am not going to tell you what you need to do because I am not the one who has got to do it. But I will lay out what the Word of God says. You do not come to me and do your own thing. I am still okay with that. I really am. You are not going to see me tapping somebody on the shoulder and saying, "Well, you know, I know you are dating so and so over here, and I do not think that that is a very good thing for you." You ask my opinion, I will tell you. You do not ask my opinion, it is none of my business. It is none of my business at all. You know what? You are who you are. I am here if you make the right choice for you, and I am here if you make the wrong choice for you. I would hope that you would make the right choice and apply the truth that I gave you. But not everybody is going to do that. But I do not—you do not have any control of that. You just do not. My job is to preach the truth and to put the truth out. It is your job to take that truth and apply it to your life.

Now, the only exception to that is if somebody in a position of leadership, deacon or a pastor, whatever. In the Bible, leadership is always held to a higher accountability. So that is a different thing. In the military, Bob would know this, and you and I talked about this. The military is basically divided in two sections. You have the professional soldiers. Then you have what they call the citizen soldiers. Professional soldiers are the guys that they make a career out of it. They are really—they are really—they are called professionals. They look at guys like us who went in and did our two-year, three-year, four-year and then leave. They look at them as citizen soldiers. It is a lot like the difference between an officer who goes to West Point and an officer who goes to Officer Candidates School. West Point takes four years, teaches you everything you need to know, and you come out an officer. OCS puts you out in 90 days as an officer. In the military itself, you have the professional ranks. That will be the guys that are going to make a career out of it, been in there 20, 30 years. Our guy Shane, he is a professional. He has made a life career out of it. He is a professional. He is a pro. The military within itself, they look at the other guys who just come and go. They know that they are coming and passing through and going, but they know they are going to be there for the next 20 years.

All churches are a lot that way too. You have your core of leadership who is going to be here forever. Then you have people who come and go. The military would be nothing. It would be nothing without the professionals. They always say that the sergeants are the backbone of the

military, and that is true. Most of them are professional guys. They used to say, when I was in, the greatest position to have would be a E-6 or E-7. Somebody would say, "Why is that?" He said, "Because you have all the authority of the general, but none of the responsibility." There is a lot of truth in that. Why? Because you are a professional. The younger guys are taught to look to the older guys, and the older guys lead the way. But there is a clear schism between the two of how they look at it. Officers will look at somebody who has never been to officer candidates school to not even consider them a real military guy, even though they are in the military. That is the way it is in ministry. You have your garden variety Christians who just come and go. God bless them. I love them. It is okay. But in any army, and it is truly in God's army, you have the cadre, you have the lifers, you have the people who are not going anywhere. They are going to stick, and they are going to stay. Your enlistment is not going to be up. You are not going to do your two years or three years or four years and then be told, "Take what you learned and go out to the private world and get your G.I. Bill and go to college and be something out there." You are not going to do that. You are going to stick in, stay in. You will go wherever they send you. You will do whatever they want you to do. You will fight wherever they tell you to fight. That is the professionals. That is just the way it is in God's place, too. Same thing.

I say all that to simply say this: Sometimes for God to make us and get us where He wants us to be, we have to be pressed out of measure. We have to get into situations where we cannot have any control of it. We have to get into circumstances that it is above our strength. We have to be put in a situation that is hopeless, situations that are helpless, a situation that if God does not come through, we are shot.

I heard a story one time, a little kid, they asked him to pray. Before he went to bed, Mom and Dad had been praying with him, when he was saying his prayers. Now they said, "Tonight, why do not you pray, Billy?" Billy said, "Oh, I would love to pray." They are down there all on their knees. Little Billy starts praying. He says, "Dear God," he says, "Bless Mommy." He says, "Bless Daddy and take care of my sister. And take care of all my friends and take care of my puppy and take care of Mom and Dad," over and over again, "take care of this and that." He is getting toward the end. He says, "Oh, yeah, Lord. And please take care of yourself because without you, we are shot." Boy, that is just about the way it is. But sometimes God has to put us in a situation that we are pressed out of measure. You know why? So you give up control of it to Him. So sometimes God puts you in a situation that is absolutely horrendous, absolutely unbelievable, absolutely think that there is no way out of this. Paul said they were in a place where they were pressed out of measure, that they had the sentence of death in them. Now, that is pretty crucial.

I always tell people the best situation you can ever be in. People talk to me about things that happen in their life and bad things. I tell them a couple of things. First of all, I say that the best situation you can find yourself in is this: You are on a railroad track, and your car stalled. Those stupid automatic door locks have jammed. The windows are up, and you stalled right on a railroad track. You look up there, and 400 feet from you is the Cannonball Express doing 60 miles an hour. You are much better to be in that scenario in the will of God than you are home in your bed with the covers tucked up around your neck out of the will of God.

I tell people, you know what? The position a Christian ought to be in, we talk about being out on a limb. That is where a Christian ought to live. You ought to be out on a limb out there in a big high tree that is about 500 feet off the ground. That limb is really shagging, and that tree is already dead. You look back, and the only thing you see there at that thing is the Lord Jesus Christ standing there, and you get kind of a tinge of, "Okay, it is going to be okay." Then you see He has got a hacksaw in His hand and a smile on His face. That is the best situation to be in. So sometimes we have to be pressed out of measure above strength so God can get us where He wants us to be.

Then the second thing found, it is found in 2 Corinthians 1:9, and this is the reason why again we go through a lot of tough times. He says in 2 Corinthians 1:9, "But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not, here it comes again, here is another one, trust in ourselves but in God, which," see that thing? Now all the NIV changed that "who" to "who" because they think it is God Himself that raised up the dead. When you study your Bible, it was not. It was not God Himself; it was Christ trusting in God who raised Him up, the "which." Christ trusted God to raise Him up from an impossible situation called death. Paul is trusting in God to raise him up from a situation that is eminent death. You and I are to take that verse and trust God realizing that it is our trust in God, the "which" that is going to get you through, that is going to keep you and I from coming, going to get you to come to the end of self.

You know my favorite trust verse in the Bible, and I am sure this is very familiar to all of you, but to me, it is my favorite one. It is in Proverbs chapter 3 verses 5 and 6 where it simply says,

Proverbs 3:5-6

5 Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

6 In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

That is a good tree limb verse. Easy to do, easy to quote when you are not facing an impossible situation in life. But I will tell you what, coming to the end of self and not trusting in ourselves, these are why He does what He does here and says what He says, being pressed out of measure, a sentence of death above strength. Then He says that He does it that we should not trust in ourselves but trust in the One who raised up His Son. Now this is what real brokenness is. I talked to you last week about being broken. This is what brokenness is. This is what redefining yourself is: coming to the place where you simply do not trust in yourself.

SEC: God's Deliverance: Past, Present, and Future

Let me give you one of the greatest Bible verses that you are ever going to get that forms really the heart of all we do in our relationship with Christ. We have talked about how that is the core. A couple of weeks ago on Thursday night, it was Nikki Brown, I do believe, that asked a question out of Hebrews chapter 11 verses 1 through 3 about faith. She wanted to understand how that passage really equated to faith and what it was all about from the Bible standpoint. I remember telling you that night that I did not get into it the way I am going to talk to you about it now because I knew this was coming, and I did not want to shoot all my rounds out of my clip. So I basically just gave you a passive answer knowing that I would get to it at a certain time. I

told you faith is not looking forward. Faith is not just blindly stepping out by faith and trusting God, rolling the dice so to speak, hoping it comes up seven. But faith in reality, it is basically built on your relationship with God in three areas, and you need to always keep before you these three areas, and they are found right here in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse 10.

The Bible tells us in 2 Corinthians 5:7 we are to walk by faith and not by sight. This is the key to that verse we are about to give you, found in 2 Corinthians 1:10. Just so we keep the context straight, remember now this 2 Corinthians 1:10 and the context of it is them being pressed out of measure (2 Corinthians 1:8), having a sentence of death on them (2 Corinthians 1:9), and then 2 Corinthians 1:8 despairing even of life. What I am about to show you is the key to what got them through. It is the key to what will get you through if from this day forth you will never forget what I am about to tell you. One of the greatest principles on your relationship with God that will help you in every circumstance and situation I could ever imagine.

2 Corinthians 1:10 says this:

Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us;

Three incredible aspects to what I talk about when I say our working relationship with Christ. Remember going back to Job now one last time: you can have the Bible, you can have a church, you can have a Christian wife, a Christian husband, you can have Christian friends, a Christian family. None of that guarantees you have a relationship with Jesus Christ. When faced with the terrible ordeals of the suffering in the ministry and in life, when you are at your darkest hour, when all looks hopeless, when all looks like it is going to go on forever and there is no end, and you are literally pressed out of measure, you remember three things. You simply keep these three things in your mind, and this is one of the greatest little three-point outlines you will ever get anywhere on this planet. Brother, this thing will preach.

He says in 2 Corinthians 1:10, "Who hath delivered us from such a great death." You see when you look at that, that is past, is it not? "Who hath delivered us?" That shows you that God saved you for a purpose. God delivered you from hell for a reason. You never want to lose, no matter how dark it gets, no matter how bad it gets, no matter what circumstance you are in, you never want to not look back and remember who delivered us from such a great death. In the past, God saved you for a purpose. He saved you for a reason, and if you are fulfilling that purpose in ministry, you have absolutely nothing to fear. You are part of the fellowship of His sufferings.

Then he says the next phrase, "who delivered us from such so great a death and then he says and doth deliver." That is present tense because He saved you for a purpose. Because the past was part of His plan, so is the present. Just as "who hath delivered us," He "doth deliver us" today because He saved you for His purpose, and you are doing His work, He will take care of you. Too many of God's people are looking at tomorrow's problems with the grace God gave them today.

You hold these three things in your life: "who hath delivered us," "who doth deliver us," and then the future aspect, the third thing, "in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us." If He was there

back then, He is here today, He will be here tomorrow. That is the three-point thing that will get you through. If you are suffering through the fellowship because of what you are doing right, when it gets pressed out of measure, when you have the sentence of death, when it looks like there is no way out, you simply draw back and remember He saved you for a purpose, and you are not done with that purpose that He says you are done. The same God that "hath delivered us" will deliver you today, and then "in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us," He is going to take care of you tomorrow.

In the Bible, my dear friend, this is called resting in the Lord. I am about to give you the greatest passage in the Old Testament on resting in the Lord. It is found in Psalm chapter 37, and this is another killer outline to preach. Psalm chapter 37 is the definitive passage on resting. Resting is the key to you getting the job done. It is like when you shoot a deer. It is like when you shoot anything. You have to have control. You get control of your breathing. You calm down. You do not get buck fever. You do not shake all over the place and miss the target by a mile. You stop. You hold the rifle strongly. You get a deep breath. You calm down. You take it. You align your sight with the back sight, and you squeeze the trigger. You do not jerk it, and you hit your target. In the middle of adversity, we know that it is put there to throw you off the mark. Do the exact same thing. Think of God in the context of your suffering: past, He saved you for a purpose; present, you are going through it right now that He is going to make you for the future. And then you rest. You rest. Your ability to rest is your ability to be functional in the midst of conflict. It is the ability as a leader or a pastor to have your whole world crashing down on your shoulders with a thousand issues, and yet nobody knows. Why? Because you realize that they are not my problems. They are God's problems. And you rest so you can do the job God has called you to do.

There are times that I have stepped in this pulpit, times that I have been there on Thursday night that my heart was so heavy, and I had such a weight on my shoulders and things that I had to deal with in people's lives and things that were going on that it would be any wonder how anybody could ever get up and stay focused and keep your mind on what you are doing and not just dribble off and babble like some madman. The key to it is resting in the Lord and realizing, "You know what, Lord, they are not my problems. They are your problems. And the same God has saved me back there and got me through today. You are going to deal with these things down here. So I am just going to go preach, and I am going to go teach," and you rest.

Here it is. Psalm 37:1-2:

1 Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.

2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.

Boy, does God have a power mower.

Now here comes your outline. Psalm 37:3, 4, 5, and 7.

- 1.) Trust in the LORD. (Psalm 37:3)
- 2.) Delight thyself also in the LORD. (Psalm 37:4)
- 3.) Commit thy way unto the LORD. (Psalm 37:5)

- 4.) Then rest in the LORD. (Psalm 37:7)

See that thing? There is your formula. Just that simple, based on past, present, and future. In other words, as my old father in the Lord used to say, "Never doubt in the darkness what God has given you in the light." Those three concepts are the key to your salvation and understanding your eternal security as a believer: past, present, and future.

Now I gave you the practical side. Now I am going to preach to you for about 30 seconds the doctrinal side. If this does not light your fire, your wick is wet. That is all I can tell you. He says in 2 Corinthians 1:10, "Who hath delivered us?" That is past. That tells me you and I at the time of salvation, we were delivered from the penalty of sin. Praise the Lord. He hath delivered me. In a practical application, He delivered me from my problems. In a doctrinal application, He delivered me. He delivered me from the penalty of sin. I am no longer going to hell. He took it from me. When He "hath delivered me," that is the day I got saved, and blessed God, He delivered me from the penalty of sin.

But then it says, "doth deliver us." That is present. That is today. Where in the past I was delivered from the penalty of sin, today, I am delivered from the power of sin. Sin has no more dominion over us. We have the victory in Christ Jesus. Why? Because in the past I was delivered from the penalty of sin, and today I stand here, and you stand here if you are saved, and we have been delivered from the power of sin. So past, He delivered me from the penalty of sin. Present, He delivered me from the power of sin.

But all the future. "He will yet deliver us." When I got saved, He delivered me from the penalty of sin. Today He delivers me from the power of sin. But bless God, when my Jesus comes back and takes me out of this mess, I will be delivered forever from the presence of sin. So He delivered me from the penalty. Today He delivers me from the power. When He comes for me, I will be delivered from the presence. I will tell you what, my friend, that is what gets you through. That is when your world comes crashing down around your shoulders. That is when you start to minister, and all hell breaks loose. You have everything coming at you, everything that you have got to prioritize that you cannot, and ministry goes to the back burner. These are the things that keep you.

SEC: Conclusion: Living a Victorious Christian Life

I am telling you what, with all of these things that I have given you, my advice to you and every man and woman in here is what I preached a couple of weeks ago about Ritterbird loudly. I say to you, "Play the man. Do the ministry. Suffer the suffering." You call this the fellowship of His suffering that makes you and me conformable unto His death. The Bible says that you and I are dead, and our life is hid with Christ, Colossians 3:3.

Have you ever been to a funeral? Ever been in that casket? Ever saw the body in there? You know that absolutely nothing you say, nothing you do, nothing that you would—any derogatory remarks, flip the casket over, do whatever you want to do. Cut their hands off, their feet off, their head off, and say whatever you want to say. In reality, nothing bothers a dead man. If you are saved this morning, you are dead to the things of this world. You are dead to what people say

about you. You are dead to what people try to do to you. You are dead to those things, and you are alive unto Christ Jesus. Why? Because you were delivered, and I was delivered from the penalty of sin, from the power of sin, and I am going to be delivered in some time from all of this sin that was around me today. It is going to be free from me. Sin has no power over me today. It has no more power over you today, unless we leave it.

My dear friend, this is the add-on to what we saw last week. This is now week by week. You are learning the process to have a victorious Christian life and to get yourself into ministry, realizing that it is going to come, it is going to happen. Maybe some of you are not willing to pay that price, but just stop and think where you would be today if some preacher somewhere in your life was not willing to pay the price. You would never have what you have got today. Out there right now, just like some of you are dependent on what I have been through in my life to help you, I guarantee you there is somebody down the road that is dependent on you to help them with what you are going to go through right now. Some of you will not do it. Your choice, your choice. The ministry is being redefined for all of us as the suffering, the rebuke, the ridicule you have to take to take the right kind of stand. I am finished. This week, let us get it done. I am going to give you about a five-minute break here. I need the guys to get the shave table set up.