

We live in an in between time. Some here are old enough to remember this. I quote, “On a typical Sunday morning in the period from 1955-58, **almost half of all Americans were attending church** – the highest percentage in U.S. history. During the 1950s, nationwide church membership grew at a faster rate than the population, from 57 percent of the U.S. population in 1950 to 63.3 percent in 1960.” Church membership in America is now at an all time low. Our society has become increasingly more secular. The further we mock God as a society, one’s politics takes the place of religion in general. When your politics become your god of choice, you will fight to the end for your cause. This is true because you know you are absolutely correct in your opinion and those not as smart as you are deliberately wrong. When government takes the place of god in your life, there is no end to the depravity that will occur. Politicians who live to ignore God or mock God will never lead the nation toward God’s righteous and holy ways. Their inner instincts arise only from their sinful nature. Christian politicians are not immune to this. None of us are immune to sin, no not one. I find the only answer to the rise of atheism and secularism in our country is for every believer in Jesus Christ to grow closer to God more than ever. We are living between the first coming of Jesus and His second coming. All the signs are pointing we are much closer than we think to the day that we will rise into the air to be with the Lord forever and ever. Amen. Let us pray.

Those who have chosen not to grow stronger in the Christian faith in the recent past will especially have a difficult time living in the present as a Christian. The hardships that are present combined with the more difficult days to come puts every believer’s faith to a crucial test or tests.

Friends, every Christian, no matter how old or how young, has doubts. We all have questions of why a good God would allow such atrocities to happen not only in our nation but throughout the world. When I hear of little children being harmed in the inner cities or anywhere, I wonder how long this can continue and why does God not put a stop to the suffering of the

most innocent, including the killing of the unborn. As a pastor I am privileged to listen to people in pain and there is an awful lot of pain out there. I read of pastors not only quitting the ministry but now call themselves non-Christians. Talk about a great fall. What is going on here?

Let's look to Jesus and the cross for some answers, especially as we think of suffering and sin.

1. The death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus means one day there will be no more sin and no more suffering. **This means all of suffering is temporary.** One day there will be no more sin. When you feel on the inside, "It should not be this way." Things like this ought not happen, whether it be the collapse of condo, a virus that plagues the world, and the list could go on. Inside of us something is pained every time we read of the suffering of this world. "It ought not be this way," we correctly think, and you are right, it ought not be this way.

In the twinkling of an eye sin and suffering will come to a sudden halt. You will hear a loud noise, the sound of the last trumpet and the call of the arch angel. Jesus steps in and everything will be made right; and everything means everything. God will be seen and worshipped for who He is. God will give rewards to those who diligently followed him. Those who have suffered much will receive more rewards in heaven. Everyone will give an account to God for every word and action on judgment day. Every wrong will be righted.

2. Jesus came to this earth to suffer and die on the cross in order to be raised from the dead and ascend back into heaven. The cross is the greatest sign representing Christianity. The cross represents the suffering Christians must go through to enter the Kingdom of God. Jesus came to suffer and die for us. The cross represents the resurrection when all will be made right, and all suffering will have been a distant memory. I do think this. We ought not ever be surprised by suffering. Some of the most mature believers I have ever known and are up there in years all have a look on their faces and it is the same look for those who have discerning eyes to see. My heart breaks when I recognize this look. "Pastor, I never thought in

my lifetime I would ever see this amount of sin, evil, and suffering.” Those who have this look have walked with God their entire lives and have a holy sense of God’s righteousness far more than us younger people. What they are feeling inside hurts them to have God so misunderstood by people, God mocked and ignored by an increasing number of people, the politics of our nation’s leaders being so divisive, and an atmosphere of hatred all across the land. These mature believers have an inner sense how much this sin, evil, and suffering bothers and offends the Lord God Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth. God is only holy, pure, righteous, and good, and God cannot participate in sin or evil. If these things offend us and keep us awake at night, the Lord God Almighty’s holiness is being offended 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

Right now, God is being patient. Please remember God chose to wipe out the entire human race because there was only one righteous family on the face of the earth. God had to protect Noah and his family so through his line the Messiah would be born who would save us from the sin of the world. Right now, God is being patient. His patience is so great. God is giving time for more people to repent. The Bible says when Jesus comes again it will be like the days of Noah where almost all were oblivious to the reality of God and God’s judgment.

3. **God sees all the sin and suffering and evil of this world.** None of it goes unnoticed by God. God has perfect vision, perfect hearing, and has never made a mistake. Why God allows these things to happen I do not know. The Bible tells us “that which is revealed belongs to us and that which is secret belongs to God.” God owes us no explanation for any and all of the problems in this world. Please do not waste your energy asking God “Why.” God will reveal the why to you when He brings you home and when Jesus comes again. Then we will have full understanding. Today we only see dimly.

4. One of the reasons God has us on this earth is to learn to rejoice in God when we suffer. God loves us so much that no matter what happens to us, God will bring good out of it. God is good. As you put your emphasis on God’s goodness the badness of this world will

not put you down or overcome you. Jesus says, "In this world, you will have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world." Jesus overcame and so can you and I this side of heaven. We can remain faithful unto God until that day our lives are taken by the Lord Jesus Christ. We never have to give up and fall away and reject God's grace that saves for all eternity. We never have to cave into unhealthy sinful addictions in order to stifle the pain within.

5. Some of the brightest believers I have ever known are those who have suffered the most in this world. When I say brightest, I mean they are aglow with the light of Christ. Jesus shines so brightly through them that you almost have to wear spiritual sunglasses to protect your eyes. They shine so brightly because they did not cave into self-pity. They shine so brightly because as they suffered, they grew closer to Christ instead of wasting their time wondering why God allowed such things to happen. Friends, God is always worthy of being believed in and loved and lived for even when you do not agree with God. When you have strong disagreements with God, guess who is wrong. It is not God.

6. **It is not a sin to have doubts. It is not a sin to question God.** It is not a sin to struggle with believing when things get so out of line. We live in a fallen world and before Jesus comes again it is only going to get worse. Sin and unbelief destroy everything it touches. Faith in Christ builds us up, holds us up, keeps us from despair, and one day God will make it all worth it. The greater the suffering here the greater the glory there.

7. I had an event in my life that made me question everything about God and the Christian faith that I ever learned. During those days I could not read the Bible nor pray. I thought lowly of all those people I used to think so highly of. These are some things that brought me back. a) reading the book *Trusting God*, by Jerry Bridges. In it he says, "*I sympathize with those who find it difficult to trust God in adversity. I have been there often enough myself to know something of the distress, the despair, and the darkness, that fills our souls when we wonder if God truly cares about our plight. The circumstances in which we must*

trust God often appear irrational and inexplicable. We are always coping with the unknown” (Jerry Bridges, *Trusting God Even When Life Hurts*, pg. 17). *“When we stop and think about it, we know in our heart of hearts that God does not make any mistakes in our lives or anywhere. God does know what He is doing. God is infinite in His wisdom. He always knows what is best for us and what is the best way to bring about that result”* (ibid pg. 118).

b) Not being able to read the Bible on my own I purchased my first One Year Bible. Having the readings picked out for me for each day for an entire year helped bring new life to my overly pained soul.

c) Reading good solid Christian books that are true to the word of God. I find it healthy to read biographies of other Christians who thrived in Christ in the hardest of places. Corrie ten Boom is my lifetime hero. Surviving a German concentration camp during World War II is no small thing. It is the closest place to hell on earth. None of us have ever experienced that type of daily horror. Every day the crematorium sent out smoke of those ladies who were sent to the crematorium. Corrie’s closest human relationship, that with her sister Betsy ended with Betsy’s death. I could tell you things about Ravensbruck that would make you lose your lunch that you have yet to eat.

At twelve years of age, I read that book seven times, in the seventh grade. That one book gave me the truths about God and suffering that I still cling to some 50 years later. I went back to the writings of Corrie and the Holy Spirit used her writings to pull me out of the pit. “There is no pit so deep that God’s love is not deeper still.” “The light of Christ is always brighter than the deepest darkness.” Yes, Corrie struggled and wrestled with God in the camp before she was able to give her bitterness in suffering over to God. She writes, “Don’t wrestle, just nestle.” Where there was no hope at all, Corrie held prayer meetings and Bible studies telling the women in the concentration camp that Jesus is our hope. She spoke of God’s love so

sincerely that women came to Christ in that hell camp. Self-pity is a disaster. Living by faith in Christ is the answer. Faith is the victory.

I learned at a very young age that believers are not immune to suffering at all. God will allow terrible things to happen for God's purposes that we will never understand. And in all of this God is good. God can never be bad. He is only good. I have also felt the Presence of God in amazing ways and those times of being bathed in the Presence of God makes it all worth it. Our first moment in heaven God will more than make up for all of our suffering here and it will all have been worth it. For pastors that quit the faith, I want to kick them in their spiritual rear and tell them to get over themselves. God knows a lot more than you do. Quit feeling sorry for yourself. Whenever we want God only on our terms we are bound to fall away. When by grace through faith we accept God always according to God's terms, we will only grow closer to God, overcome this world, and have heaven to look forward too. Amen and Amen.