



Theme: What is God Thinking?

Making Sense of Suffering and Grief

"Suffering"

We have a great new way for you to get these Meditation Moments each day directly to your phone. Just text **"med moments"** to **970-426-0700** to receive the **daily Meditation Moment** each morning and start your day grounded in faith and peace.

Weekly Memory Verse:

⁶I am worn out from sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears. – Psalm 6:6

Meditation Moments for Monday, October 19 – Read **Genesis 1:27-28 and Isaiah 56:10 to 57:2**. We will talk in this series about how a common explanation for suffering doesn't work for most people. When we say, "everything happens for a reason," or "it must be part of God's plan," we default to the idea that God wanted this hard thing to happen. If we believe God willed it, then we are also saying *God caused it or wanted the bad thing in our life*. The Isaiah passage did not blame God for suffering. It said Israel's failing, self-serving leaders, greedy for profit, let their "flock" come to harm. People, not God, caused suffering, "because of evil the righteous one passed away."



The prophet focused on the bad results of leaders' evil behavior. He promised God's continued presence, even at times of suffering, promising that the righteous "will find peace." In the ancient Hebrew poem [Job 42:4-6](#) we hear that God never gave the explanations Job first asked for. But Job found that God's presence meant more than any answers to his questions of "why." How can God's caring presence with you matter more than any abstract explanation?



Genesis 1 said the first humans were given responsibility by having “dominion” over the earth. The big idea is that God’s primary way of ruling and acting on our planet is through people. When God wants something done in the world, God calls us to do it. The story in [Genesis 3](#) reminds us that that the freedom to act also allowed humans to make bad choices. How do bad choices, personal or by a group of people, cause suffering?

Prayer: *O Lord, you are not a God who gives your children cancer or sends cars careening into one another. Even when we hurt because things like that happen, you stay with us. Thank you for your steadfast love. Amen.*

Tuesday, October 20 – Read **John 9:1-3** and **Luke 13:1-9**. People often asked Jesus to explain “why.” In John it was the case of a man born blind and in Luke about people unjustly killed by Roman soldiers. In neither case did his reply give a cosmic rationale for suffering. He just noted that evil often strikes randomly. No one was “singled out” for pain or loss. The open-ended parable in Luke 13:6-9 taught human responsibility to “bear fruit,” not passive acceptance of whatever happens as “God’s will.”



In John 9, Jesus didn’t try to sort out who or what was to blame for the man’s blindness. Instead, he urged the disciples to look forward to how God’s power could work in the man’s life. What difficulties and challenges are you facing? How can you open “the eyes of your heart” to recognize and respond to God’s power at work in and through you in responding to any type of suffering?



We could call the story Jesus told in Luke 13:6-9, after people asked about unfair killings, “The Unfinished Parable.” The gardener didn’t debate why the tree didn’t bear fruit. He just asked for one more year to help the tree. And Jesus never said if the tree bore fruit. Instead, in 13:5 he challenged his hearers to “change your hearts and lives,” making it clear what type of human “fruit-bearing” was on his mind. What about you—how will you finish Jesus’ unfinished parable in your life?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, I want my life to bear the kind of good fruit you are willing to grow in me. Keep me looking ahead, responsive to your guiding voice in my heart. Amen.*

Wednesday, October 21 – Read **Psalms 13:1-6**. People often call the Psalms the “prayer book” of the Bible. About 50 of those prayers were laments like this one, in which the psalmist expressed the feeling that God had forgotten all about him. In the vision of [Revelation 6:10](#), the Bible’s final book, martyred saints echoed Psalm 13 and asked, “Holy and true Master, how long?” Psalm 13, like virtually all laments, also returned to the heart stance that makes prayer possible at all: “I have trusted in your faithful love.”



Have you ever felt the level of pain and frustration reflected in the psalmist’s opening question: “How long will you forget me, LORD? Forever?” The Hebrew phrase about God “hiding his face” expressed an idea that God had withdrawn divine favor. Are there ways in which you are waiting (patiently or not) for God’s favor today? What choices and practices can help you sustain trust in God’s unfailing love as you wait?



Bible Scholar John Goldingay's wife Ann suffered 43 years of multiple sclerosis. He writes: "How long, how long, how long, how long? The psalm is written for someone facing a long haul. It dares to continue trusting Yahweh's commitment and expecting to celebrate Yahweh's deliverance... The foes think they are going to celebrate. The psalm dares the person praying to believe that it is he or she who is going to celebrate." Can you dare to believe that, in the end, you will celebrate with God?

Prayer: *Lord God, whether I've been brave enough to say it aloud or not, you know when my heart asks, "How long?" Thank you that your faithful love is always with me—that I never have to wait for that. Amen.*

Thursday, October 22 – Read **John 16:28 to 17:1**. On the night before he went to the cross, Jesus told his followers, "In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world." He did NOT say, "Now that you're my follower, you'll never have any trouble." Jesus began his prayer saying, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son." It would be easy to completely miss the fact that "the time has come" pointed to the cross the place God would "glorify" Jesus.



About twelve hours later, dying on the cross, in Luke 23:46, Jesus quoted Psalm 31:5, "Father, into your hands I entrust my life." Psalm 31 ended with, "All you who wait for the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage." Jesus trusted God even as he suffered a horrible execution. How can that shape our outlook on whatever suffering comes into our lives?



We often think "being good" should be a kind of "suffering insurance." The problem is that the overarching message of the Bible is not a promise that those who believe and do good will not suffer. The Bible is more accurately a book about people who refused to let go of their faith in the face of suffering. How do you react to Jesus' honest words: "In the world you have distress"? Can you let trusting his claim to have "overcome the world" encourage you?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, help me, even when I can't fully know the "why" of any suffering I face, to know the "who." You are with me, will sustain me and give me hope. Amen.*

Don't forget that tomorrow is our Fall Fest from 4-7 PM at our Aspen Campus. Invite anyone and everyone...more details at www.summitdurango.org/fallfest/

Friday, October 23 – Read **Acts 14:11-22**. It's not uncommon for us to think that, yes, Jesus trusted God through suffering—but he was God. I'm just human! The apostle Paul was just human. He and the very human Christians in the first churches he planted experienced suffering first-hand. A hostile mob, thinking they had killed Paul, dragged him out of Lystra! Instead of dashing for home, he went back to that city. With utter honesty, and likely a dash of holy defiance, he told the believers there, "If we are to enter God's kingdom, we must pass through many troubles."



Scholar William Barclay wrote in his commentary on Acts about Paul's teaching: "He offered them no easy way. He acted on the principle that Jesus had come 'not to make life easy but to make men [and women] great.'" In what ways does it seem to you that following Jesus today is easier than it was in Paul's day? In what ways is it still true that entering God's kingdom involves "many troubles"?



Pastor Lloyd John Ogilvie wrote in his commentary on Acts that after the stoning, "Raised up by their prayers, Paul strode back into the city and got Barnabas, and... they exhibited the raw courage to go right back into the jaws of the enemy in the cities of Antioch and Iconium." In what ways does living out your faith call for moral or physical courage? In what ways can you trust God to give you the necessary courage?

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, you sent Paul and Barnabas bravely traveling through hostile foreign territory. Often, you just ask me to be a good neighbor, or to be your presence in my workplace or school. Give me the courage to do whatever you need from me. Amen.*

Saturday, October 24 – Read **James 1:2-5** and **Romans 5:1-5**. We all will face suffering. It's part of being human. Some suffering may seem minor, but other events can strain the very fiber of our being. The greater the suffering, the more we face the urge to write God off with words like, "if God is so good, why didn't God prevent or fix this?" It can be easy to overlook the truth that pushing God away doesn't change the situation that has caused our suffering. We still have the hurt, but nothing to hold onto. Rejecting God removes the greatest source of hope, help, comfort, and strength we have. That's why Jesus' brother James urged Christians to meet life's tests as "occasions for joy."



The apostle Paul charted the spiritual growth process through which every Christ-follower can develop a character that meets challenges, with hopeful awareness that, if we face it with God, even suffering can produce inner growth. James and Paul remind us that God has the power to bend even bad things to good purposes in our lives. God can give us the wisdom to bring endurance and hope out of our hardest experiences. When have you experienced this in your life?



Neither apostle wrote through rose-colored glasses. They knew that our human nature does not view hard times as "occasions for joy," as something to "take pride" in. That's why they focused on God's wisdom and love as the divine gifts that can turn our hard times into occasions for growth. When has God given you wisdom to face a tough challenge, or surrounded you with love and support for the strength you needed? In what ways does God's ability to "grow you" through life's challenges help you view hard times differently?

Prayer: *Lord God, keep teaching me to view life your way. Help me learn how to value even the tough, painful times you can use to help me grow in endurance, character, and trust. Amen.*