



Theme: What Was God Thinking?
"Suffering"

Jeff Huber, October 3-4, 2026, at Summit Church, Durango

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

SLIDE Suffering

Earlier this year I was meeting with a young man who was new to faith and trying to figure out a few things when it comes to God. He came to me and he started the conversation with, "I think me and God have issues. Do you ever have issues with God?" I asked him if he wanted a list or if he wanted to share his first. He told me that His sister had died recently of cancer and he had lost his job and well-meaning Christians kept telling him it was part of God's plan and he just needed to pray. I shared with him something that I often share with you and that is that I don't believe God gives people cancer or causes bad things to happen to us, but we live in a world that has sin and is imperfect and it means there is brokenness between US and God and us and others and sometimes within ourselves. God has given us free will and that means we frail, fragile, human beings are mortal and sometimes life

isn't fair.

He then looked at me right in the eye and he said the words that inspired this whole series of sermons, or at least a title. He said with an exasperation in his voice, "What was God thinking?" I have had this variation of questions asked me more times than I can count on my hands and feet. Most common question I get from people is, "If God is all good and God is all powerful, then why is there evil?" These lead to a deeper question that really is at the heart of all of this.

SLIDE What does God do in our world?

When we experience suffering, where is God? Does God allow suffering or is it part of God's plan? We're going to be wrestling with these questions and many others over the course of the next six weeks as we look at what the scriptures teach us about these important questions. We're going to wrestle with the problem of unanswered prayers and where is God when bad things are happening. I have connected with many families over the past few months around suicide so we're going to do a sermon that wrestles with the pain that is left behind when this comes into a family's life. We're going to wrap up just before Thanksgiving by looking at the holiday humdrums and why it is that we struggle so much around the holidays. Each week we're going to end with where we find hope during these questions because these are a reality of what it means to be human and I would suggest our faith is meant to give us the ultimate hope as we wrestle with these questions honestly.

Over the course of my 35 years of ministry, I have met with families who have experienced murder as a part of domestic violence. There are no right words to say in those moments except that I love you, yet there are still deep questions of why in these moments that we must wrestle with. I have done funerals for infants and children that were stillborn. I have done funerals for youth that were in my youth

group, and I have done tragic funerals for people who have lost loved ones to substance abuse and cancer. There are not just questions but there is anger and a depth of sadness that we're not sure how we're going to endure. I can say that because I've lost a child and I've buried a parent and several other family members including my cousin who is my age just a few years ago after he had a stroke.

We get prayer requests daily of people struggling with cancer or a stroke or dementia for Parkinson's or Lou Gehrig's disease. Most recently I visited with a family whose matriarch has Lewy Body Dementia which is just cruel as diseases go. People lose a job or a marriage and there are questions. Our Parkinson's support group here at Summit was devastated by the loss of a national leader who spoke on how to live with Parkinson's and how to keep moving forward. He took his own life at the age of 60 with two young children at home and it leaves us wrestling with questions.

Christians who have a deep faith ask these questions if we're honest. Why did this happen to me? Did God do this to me? Is this part of God's will for my life? That doesn't consider the things we read on social media about earthquakes and hurricanes and tsunamis and school shootings. What do we do with the violence in Ukraine and in the Middle East? We visited this last week with one of my wife's brothers and his girlfriend is from Syria and talked about what it was like to be Christian and persecuted as she walked home and saw body parts on the side of the road where a bomb had landed. She and her family found asylum here, but she wondered why it is we Americans don't appreciate what we have considering the human suffering she has seen up close.

While it's easy to focus on all those tough situations, they also can see blessing and goodness in our daily lives. We see people serving others and giving selflessly when there is a tragedy, but when that

tragedy happens to us, it feels like the only thing, and it overwhelms us and sometimes consumes us.

Just so we're clear, these questions are not unique to us in 2026. The people in the Bible asked these questions. The psalms are directly in the middle of your Bible, and they were the worship book and the poetry book of the early church and of the Jewish people. It was what Jesus would have used to worship. Almost half of those psalms have some sort of complaint or lament in them, like psalm 13.

BIBLE

- ¹ **O Lord, how long will you forget me? Forever?
How long will you look the other way?**
- ² **How long must I struggle with anguish in my soul,
with sorrow in my heart every day?**

Jesus hangs from the cross and utters these words from Psalm 22.

BIBLE

- ¹ **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?**
- ² **Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.
Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.**

We can think intellectually that God has not abandoned us but emotionally we get overwhelmed, much like Jesus. When I talked to this young man that I started the sermon with, he was someone who had spiritual questionings and wanderings. He came to our church because of some of these crises going on and when I asked him about his religious experience he told me a story that I've heard many times before. I hear about grandparents who took them to vacation Bible school or them going to worship with parents as a child or going to youth group with a friend. When I asked them why they stopped attending, the number one answer I get is this one. "I cannot reconcile

a God of love and mercy and grace with the suffering I have experienced, or I have seen others deal with.”

SLIDE Theodicy

There was a course I had to take in Graduate School when I was in training to be a pastor it was called theodicy and tragedy. Theo means God and Deceit means justice. Where is God's justice in the world that we see around us today? Most of us have an idea of God that we got as a child and that is helpful for a time, but sometimes it's challenging when dealing with this particular question. We think of God as somebody on high who is moving everything around like pieces on a chess board. The idea is that God is in control of everything and manipulating all the things that happens in our lives. God determines where the king lives and where the queen moves and how the bishops moved diagonally and the horses move in a funny I-shaped pattern. Rooks our little castles that can only move one way or another on the board and then of course there are other puny pawns which is us.

GRAPHIC Chessboard

What I hope for us as a church and followers of Jesus is that we would think carefully about what we say and how we say it. Do we really think God is controlling every single weather pattern and making things happen because God wanted it to happen? Does God manipulate every single thing in our lives? Sometimes we buy into this idea when it comes to good things. I remember the story about a television preacher who was trying to find a parking space the day before Christmas Eve to do some last-minute shopping for his family and one opened right in front of the store and it must have been God's will. Do we really think that God is preparing a parking place for us when down the road there is a serious accident and four people are killed right before Christmas? Why didn't God prevent that tragedy from befalling a family? Was God too busy preparing your parking space?

Ultimately, we can thank God for everything because God is the one who created all things and brought us into being to live on this planet and to exist. But I don't think that means that God is moving us around on a chess board sacrificing pawns for the king and the queen. I want to tell you that you are not a pawn. God knows your name and made you to love you, not to cause you pain and suffering. I also realize that some Christians do believe in what we might call hyper Calvinism or predestination which means that God has planned out every single thing that happens in the world. We could make a case for that if we pull out scriptures from specific places but the overarching theme of the Bible I think is that God operates differently.

What we find in the scriptures is many different things that God did not want to have happen but did anyway because of humans. God gives us things like the 10 commandments and one of them is not to murder so when someone does commit a murder are we going to say that's God's will when God told us that's not what God wants? That doesn't make any sense to me and I'm guessing to many of you who have come to me with these kinds of questions.

We don't feel like everything is predetermined because most of us feel like we get to make decisions and have some agency in the world. God can nudge us or guide us, and I do believe that sometimes God puts things in our paths to block us, but in general God has given us freedom to live and to make choices. I have often reminded you of many phrases that we sometimes say when bad things happen that I hope we will avoid saying. I must confess that I have said these things at times, but I also know what kind of pain they caused me when I was going through tough situations, and the pain I've seen it cause others. I have seen people pushed away from faith and give up on faith because of things said by well-meaning Christians who haven't thought it through.

I visited with someone recently who joined our church who left faith for two decades because someone said to them, “everything happens for a reason,” when their child died. I was at the park just outside of Columbine high school shortly after the shootings there in Littleton because I had students from my youth group in class. I sat outside and met with students and a rabbi and several other pastors as memorials were built to students who lost their lives on that horrific day. I listened to so-called Christians over the next few days and weeks saying mean things about students who died in those shootings, asking us to pray for the hidden sins of victims they must have committed, which is why God took them. We end up giving people the message that God wanted their child to die and as a result pushing people away from the source of hope we have when these moments of deep suffering happen in our lives.

I think of the many people I have met with who have had people say to them in the midst of deep tragedy that it must be part of God's plan and watched as they walked away from faith because they wanted no part of a God that would give their child cancer or take their family member in a car accident. We say things like, “God must have needed another angel,” acting like somehow parents didn't need that child just as much in their lives. It's like we're saying God is collecting a menagerie of children, and this is another place where we get things mixed up in our head because the Bible never says that when we die, we become angels.

I want to remind you of something I tell you often which is that when you are not sure what to say, it means you have nothing to say, so don't say anything, except maybe to acknowledge you don't understand how it all works either. It's not our job to answer everybody's questions and it's the wrong time to do it in the midst of crisis and suffering. If we can avoid blaming God for the suffering it might actually help people down the road because it gives them a

source to turn to when there is pain and hurt. Our task should be to help people find comfort and peace in God and not to force upon them the theological thoughts that we have which we've never really given much deep thought to in the first place.

When we were in the process of preparing for adoption with our kids more than 20 years ago, we had to take several courses offered by the state that were very helpful. They don't really prepare you for everything, but they try. We met many people on that journey. I'll never forget a woman who asked me what I did and when I told her I was a pastor she just shook her head and started to walk away. I asked her if I had said something wrong and she told me that when she and her husband were unable to conceive a child they had been told by several friends who had children of their own that it must be part of God's plan. I don't think that's a helpful thing to say or a truthful thing to say in those moments. I told her I thought her friends probably felt guilty and didn't know what to say but I was sorry that she heard that because I don't believe that.

I realize that in the Old Testament they talk about God closing a womb because that's how they understood things but today, we have all kinds of fertility treatments when people are unable to conceive. At a time when people didn't understand fertility, that was the only viable explanation. This situation begs several interesting questions. If you're going for fertility treatments does that mean you're going against God's will? Or are we taking advantage of the tools God gives us to be able to address the physiology of infertility.

On several occasions as a youth pastor, I had to report child abuse that was happening to a student and begin the process of having them removed from their home to a safe environment. I will never forget meeting with a young woman who had been routinely abused by her stepfather so that she slept with the baseball bat. We also discovered

that her mother was being physically abused, and she didn't seem to know about the sexual abuse happening to her daughter. When she told someone at her church that her husband had been hitting her, she was told to pray over it because God's plan is for marriages to stay together, and there must be some plan that God has for her and her daughter who need provision by a man. The person even read scripture to them to back up their claim.

My mother told me that when I became a pastor, I couldn't say the words pissed and ticked, but I was both and almost in a rage of anger when I heard them tell me what Christians had said to them. What I know is that it becomes very easy for us to misuse the Bible when it comes to suffering. One of the reasons I talk about this topic often and I'm doing this whole series is to help us be thoughtful and thinking followers of Jesus who don't just make assumptions. God is not in the business of killing children or adults, or abusing those who are vulnerable, or causing suffering by sending disease or war or natural disasters or watching over 9 million people die each year from hunger and hunger-related diseases globally, 3.1 million of whom are children.

GRAPHIC The Will of God

One of the required reading books for me in seminary was Leslie Weatherhead's book that should be required reading for every follower of Jesus. He was a missionary to India and then became a pastor of one of the largest churches in London during World War 2. He tells many powerful stories in the book but one of the opening stories is about him serving in India and meeting with a man in his church whose wife had died of malaria. It was what led Pastor Leslie to write this book when the man said to him, "It must have been the will of God."

He asked the gentleman a question. "What if I told you that someone snuck into your house at night and injected malaria into your wife and that's what caused her to die?"

The man responded like many of us and said, "I think that person should be arrested and put in prison!"

Pastor Leslie said quietly and with much compassion, "Isn't that what you just accused God of doing? Do you think that's how God operates?"

I don't think any of us would say that this is how we think God works so then we are left with asking how does God work and what do we do with suffering in the world? If we take God out of the equation, we come up with the same explanations for the different reasons they are suffering. Let's remind ourselves of how we think about these things logically.

SLIDE Suffering caused by humans

Most of the suffering we experience on this planet comes from other people. There are many ways that humans treat each other which are not God's will and that's clear because Jesus tells us what God's will is for us and how we relate to each other and even to the creation. He gives us the great commandments in each of the gospels, and we find it in the Hebrew Bible in the book of Leviticus. Matthew 22 reads.

BIBLE

³⁷ Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."

It's not that complex. He gives us it another way in the Sermon on the mount in Matthew 6, what we call "the Golden Rule."

BIBLE

¹² "Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you. This is the essence of all that is taught in the law and the prophets.

We find it captured from the Hebrew prophet Micah, chapter 6.

BIBLE

**⁸ No, O people, the Lord has told you what is good,
and this is what he requires of you:
to do what is right, to love mercy,
and to walk humbly with your God.**

If something happens that is the opposite of these things then we cannot say that's the will of God, but we can say this is what human beings do to each other. Noah and the Ark capture this struggle for humans and how God feels about us when we mistreat one another. We can get worked up about whether the ark was real or the archaeological findings that seemed to have found the ark, and those discussions are important for many. But I like to remind people that the Hebrew Bible and our entire scriptures are not meant to be science books, but they are meant to be faith books, and they teach us about God. We can easily miss the point of Genesis 6 to 9 that teach us about humans and how God feels when we do horrible things. All ancient cultures that we know of have some sort of flood story, but the biblical story of Noah and the flood is very different. We read these words from Genesis 6 as the story begins.

BIBLE

⁵ The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. ⁶ So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart.

It's important to remember that much of these stories in genesis are written in Hebrew poetry and they use things like prophetic hyperbole where they make big sweeping statements to make a point. Clearly not everything was evil because eventually Wheeler Noah and his family are not, but the point is that God's heart is broken. You find

that God gets specific a few verses later when Genesis mentions that violence was the main issue. Notice that this violence was not God's will, but it was against what he wanted because God was heartbroken by what human beings are doing to each other.

One of the main things we learn in this story is that evil and suffering don't happen because God wants them to or makes them happen, but God is grieved when those things do happen. We find people doing what God does not want them to do and then God comes along to pick up the pieces and offer healing and peace. God longs to redeem the pain that we have inflicted on each other, but it is not what God wants to have suffering and hurt in pain and having us do things to each other that are evil. Genesis 1 reminds us of what God expects.

BIBLE

^{28a} **Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it...”**

God is asking us as humans to be responsible for each other and for our neighbors and for the earth and all living creatures. We were reminded in this story that when God wants to take care of something on the earth, he sends people, you and me. He expects us to be stewards of this creation. Genesis 2 describes why we struggle with this as humans when we read about the first humans being placed in a garden and being told they can have anything except for what's on this one tree. They do what every good human and especially toddlers do when you tell them they can't have something. They get obsessed by it until they eventually take a bite.

This is another place where I wonder what God was thinking because if God didn't really want us to have the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil then why did God place it in the garden in the first place? Part of our human condition is that we want what we want and we want it now. If you don't believe me then just sit on

Florida Road and watch people drive at the speed limit! When people do drive the speed limit, we get mad at them because we all know it's not really 35 miles an hour but 38 or 42 depending on your day and how late you are running. My wife and I were in Atlanta for part of our trip last week and I had to put my game face on as I drove on a highway that had nine lanes of traffic on each side. It was a bit frightening at first and even though the speed limit was 70 in most spots, even going 75 or 80 wasn't fast enough for many people because it was all about them. I could give you many more examples, but you get the point.

There's something in us that likes to push the envelope and do the thing that we know we're not supposed to do. The serpent whispers in the ear of the first humans and tells them, "God didn't really mean that fruit. You can have just one bite. What will it really hurt?" We have all heard that voice in our ear. It's tantalizing to eat the fruit of revenge or lust or pride or arrogance or greed. We think if we eat the fruit of hate then we will be satisfied but instead we are consumed by more hate. We find that paradise is lost and this is our story.

So much of human suffering is not what God wants to happen, but what God is pleading for us not to do to each other. God gives us freedom and this is a terrifying thing because we have the freedom to do amazing and miraculous things and the freedom to cause great harm. God made us in God's image, to have the power to create and to destroy. Freedom means we have the choice to do the right thing or the wrong thing. We can do good or do evil. We can bless or we can curse. What will we use our power for? We don't always get to determine everything that happens, but we do get to choose how to respond so our choices can determine whether we offer love and grace and healing, or revenge and hatred.

When we don't do what we know we are supposed to do or we do

something that we know will cause pain, we call that sin. Jesus told us to love God and to love others as we love ourselves and when we do things which separate us from God and from others and from ourselves, sin is what describes that broken relationship. Most of us can understand this reasoning but then we come to another area of suffering that we struggle with and that is natural disasters.

SLIDE Suffering caused by creation

When I was six years old, I was in the middle of my first earthquake that I can remember as we lived in the area around Los Angeles. It was a large enough earthquake that knocked me out of bed and for good part of my younger years I lived in parts of California where earthquakes were just part of life. When you're 6 you do wonder if it's an act of God and the truth is that insurance companies still call it that today! We can understand why ancient peoples would also call this an act of God or the gods at work because they didn't understand how the world worked.

We learned early on in school in California that without earthquakes we couldn't exist as humans because they allow the earth to release pressure as the plates of the earth move and shift. This planet on which we live is not our permanent home and so it has broken parts to it as well. I remember going on a mission trip over spring break when I was in college in boulder and we went to Mexico City after the large earthquake which killed thousands of people. It was heartbreaking and a reminder of how fragile life can be.

We were in North Alabama visiting my wife's brother and his wife when the hurricane hit the Gulf Coast and affected many of their friends living in the Panhandle of Florida. We received strong winds and rain from the end of the hurricane but nothing like those on the coast. There was much destruction and two people did die which is horrible but years ago it would have been much worse. What we know is that

weather systems like hurricanes and tornadoes are an inevitable part of the weather patterns which bring life to our earth and move water to where it needs to be, even though we sometimes experience drought that may be partly our fault if we're honest.

Natural disasters kill approximately 10,000 to 20,000 people per year globally on average over the last decade, though totals can vary significantly depending on the year and major single events. What's interesting is that annual deaths from natural disasters have fallen by more than 90% per 100,000 people over the last century due to better early warning systems, weather forecasting, and stronger infrastructure. The people who are most affected by these natural disasters today in terms of death and destruction are the poor and those in developing nations where they don't have the ability to have those early warning systems and better buildings.

What we do know is that when we put our minds to it we can reduce the number of people who die from natural disasters or from famine and lack of food. You can see in both of these charts the decline in deaths from natural disaster and the decline in people dying due to famine related diseases.

GRAPHIC Death from Disaster

GRAPHIC Rates of people dying due to famine

You responded as a congregation to the devastating flooding in northern New Mexico on the Navajo Nation with food and blankets and cleaning supplies changed the lives of many families in those communities. Why did you do that? Why not just think it's God's will and let nature run its course, survival of the fittest? We do that because we know it is not God's will for people to experience that devastating flooding or for people to die in those conditions. We do it because God asks us to love others as we would want to be loved and cared for and because there is an invitation for us to bring the Kingdom of God here

and now and we have been made stewards of this creation. We are blessed to be a blessing and not just simply hold it in and we become the answer to people's prayers.

SLIDE Suffering caused by disease

Another place that is challenging when it comes to suffering is our bodies when we feel like they betray us. Again, we know how this works and we understand that mutations happen in our body constantly which enable us to change and adapt as a species but also can lead to things going haywire. Cancer and viruses can overwhelm us, but we also know that without them we can't survive as a human species. Trillions of viruses live inside and on the human body—outnumbering human cells—and the vast majority are either harmless or actively beneficial.

When we do experience sickness, we don't just throw up our hands and say it must be the will of God, but we go to a doctor, and we undergo cancer treatments or we get vaccines to prevent those viruses from causing damage in our bodies. When Jesus saw people that were sick, he didn't tell them it was the will of God and to suffer through it. Instead, he healed them and he offered them comfort and peace. It's one of the reasons I talk about those of you in the healthcare professions as healers and doing the work of Jesus and the world.

The truth is that none of us knows how long we have because we are mortal, frail, fragile human beings, and sometimes life isn't fair. I was visiting recently with someone in Hospice and one of the family members talked about losing apparent and then a niece and then a friend and it became clear that loss felt overwhelming for them in that moment. Part of what they remembered was to be grateful for the moments that we have because we don't know how long we have. None of us knows how long we have.

This week one of my friends who's a pastor asked me to send him

this document that our church worked on last year. It's an emergency envelope document of what to do if something happens to Pastor Jeff suddenly like death or an accident that incapacitates me. It is pastor appreciation month so it's a good time to appreciate life if you're a pastor, but nothing is more sobering than preparing a document on what people will do if you die.

GRAPHIC (Use top half of Emergency Envelope for Lead Pastor doc)

I have a file folder I've created for my family that includes not just my will but steps to take if something happens to Jeff. One of the things I have learned is that we are all interim and have a term limit. None of us knows how long we have and so we should savor every moment of every day. I tell my wife and my daughter regularly that if anything happens to me, I am just grateful for the time I've had with them and getting to serve God. My life verse has guided me in this way and it's a scripture I have carried with me since my great grandmother became my nanny and taught me this from Psalm 119. She lived to be 100, and she ate bacon almost every day!

BIBLE

²⁴ **This is the day the Lord has made.**

We will rejoice and be glad in it.

The average life expectancy at birth in the United States is 79.0 years, according to data from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

- Both Sexes: 79.0 years
- Females: 81.4 years
- Males: 76.5 years

GRAPHIC Ethel Caterham 116

The oldest verified living person in the world is Ethel Caterham

from the United Kingdom, who turned 117 years old on August 21, 2026. She is the last surviving person born in the 1900s decade and the last surviving subject of King Edward the VII. She also survived COVID at the age of 110 and said the key to her longevity is never arguing with anyone and listening more than talking.

The largest killer in the world is cardiovascular disease and yet we still eat French fries and don't take care of our bodies the way we should. We are more overweight than at any other time in our nation's history and yet we still get around 79 years on average. I think about Ethel not arguing and listening more than talking and I was thinking about the choice we make every day. We can either be angry with God that our bodies are not perfect, or we can be grateful for the time that we have, recognizing that as the psalmist says, "we are fearfully and wonderfully made."

What we understand as people of faith is that God also has another message for us. This life is not all there is. This is just a preface to the great adventure as CS Lewis calls it. There will be a day when death is swallowed up in victory and sickness, and illness will be no more. He makes us this promise and then demonstrates it with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Suffering and pain and sorrow and even death will not have the final word. As people of faith, we live our lives as people of hope.

Part of the trip my wife and I took to the southeast to visit her brothers also included some time in the Great Smoky Mountains which we had never been to before. The colors were not at full peak, but we did get to see a beautiful sunset, and it was evident that the seasons were beginning to turn and fall is coming. It was both beautiful and a reminder that every day comes and goes and every season comes and goes.

GRAPHIC Great Smoky Mountains Fall Sunset

GRAPHIC Fall of Freddy the Leaf

One of my favorite books is this one that you may have read to your children but if you haven't, I would recommend it. It is a book about the reality of grief and loss which comes to all of us because leaves will fall to the ground and eventually those leaves become sustenance and nutrients for the new season. But first there is winter which can feel cold and lonely. I'm reminded that our lives mirror this movement and we can either live with regrets because we haven't been grateful or we can turn our hearts to God and know that we will never be alone, even when we take our last breath.

We had two of our long-time members die this last week while they were in Hospice. Ruth shock died before I was able to get home and see her, but I was able to spend some time with Al Phelps on Friday where we did an anointing and shared in communion even though he wasn't responsive. AL's family gave me permission to share his story because he decided to get baptized late in life while he was in a final battle with cancer. We baptized him here in the sanctuary and I found myself thinking about him because we're baptizing a baby this weekend in this space as well.

GRAPHIC Al Phelps Baptism

Al had a spiritual renewal late in his life and in part it was because of cancer and that journey. We had several great conversations and prayed together before his baptism and one of the things the family found so helpful as we met together at Hospice House was time, they spent with him remembering moments and being grateful. They also talked about how grateful they were for AL's faith and how we knew we would see him again. As we sat together towards the end of his life, I found myself thinking about these words by Paul David Tripp.

SLIDE “Your suffering is more powerfully shaped by what’s in your heart than by what’s in your body or in the world

around you.” — Paul David Tripp

What I know is that we will all experience suffering and loss in life. It's part of what it means to be human. There is no way for me to really preach this sermon without talking about our experience of walking through a dark time when our son died just over 10 years ago. I asked many of the questions that we have talked about during this series of sermons. I wish I could tell you that I was full of faith the entire time but there were moments where I wondered if there was a God and there were many times when I was angry with God. I kept remembering what I have often told you as a congregation that it's OK to be angry with God because anger is an important part of any good relationship. Anger brings friction and friction brings traction and traction means you're going somewhere and so being angry is an important part of grief and faith.

Both Psalm 13 and Psalm 22 that we read earlier are both psalms of lament, but they're psalms of complaint and anger towards God.

How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me?

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish? My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, but I find no rest.

I have said these words more times than I can count not just as I was walking through my own sadness but as I've walked with many of you. I found myself living the scripture memory verse we have for this week which is from Psalm 6. Let's say it together because sometimes it's good to be honest about how we feel.

BIBLE

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

As I was wrestling with the questions and having these scriptures come to my mind, I found myself not being able to listen to Christian radio which I typically did when I was driving around. I would listen to classic music and some other things but then one day I flipped on my satellite radio to the Christian station, and a song came on that was brand new and I had never heard before. It named much of how I was feeling and gave me a hope to hold on to. Ryan Stevenson wrote this song and just released a 10-year anniversary edition. His inspiration came from several real-life experiences:

- His work as a Paramedic: Spending years as a paramedic exposed him to human fragility, trauma, and suffering, including witnessing a friend's daughter struggle with severe addiction and seeing families affected by the economic recession.
- Personal Hardships: He drew from deep personal grief, including his mother's long battle with cancer, a twin miscarriage experienced by his wife, career setbacks, and his own struggles with doubt and depression.
- A Message of Faith: He wanted to write a hymn-like song to act as an anchor, assuring listeners that God is attentive and present even in the middle of chaos.

I thought you might like to hear it as we close today's message.

VIDEO Ryan Stevenson – Eye of the Storm (Feat Gabe Real)
(IF Ryan doesn't play and sing)

What I've learned as a pastor is that we will always have this issue of suffering in our lives and the invitation from God is to show up and walk alongside people both through actions and even through a song like this one. The 10th anniversary edition has clips of all different kinds

of people singing who have been through all different kinds of hardships and finding hope in the gospel message and in one another. When we see disasters, we respond as people of faith, and we become the answer to people's prayers.

A mentor of mine share these words in a message I heard him speak and he wasn't sure where the words came from but I found them powerful and as I've shared them, I've heard from many of you that you find them powerful so I thought I would end with these today.

SLIDE Suffering is not God's desire for us, but it occurs in the process of life. Suffering is not given to teach us something, but through it we may learn. Suffering is not given to teach others something, but through it they may learn. Suffering is not given to punish us, but sometimes it is the consequences of our sin and poor judgment.

SLIDE Suffering does not occur because our faith is weak, but through it our faith may be strengthened. God does not depend on human suffering to achieve God's purposes, but sometimes through suffering God's purposes are achieved. Suffering can either destroy us, or it can add meaning to our life.

I believe God has created a magnificent universe and a planet that supports life. I believe God walks with us through the imperfect world an imperfect action of humans, both through joy and sorrow. God works through us to be instruments of his healing and grace. I don't believe that God causes our suffering or wants us to suffer. I do believe that ultimately, God brings all things together to work together for good and to accomplish God's purposes. We don't blame God because then we lose our source of hope and strength. Instead, there is an invitation to be grateful. Let's pray. You might whisper these words.

SLIDE Prayer

Thank you, God, for everything...

Help me to see the needs in the world around me...

May I be an instrument of your healing...

Pointing people to hope in You and your son Jesus.

In Jesus' Name. Amen

October 17-18 Order

1. Countdown
2. Ryan welcomes people, inviting them to stand in body or spirit.
3. Song – “God So Loved Us”
4. Song – “Rest on Us”
5. Jeff welcomes and shares:
 - A. QR Code
 - B. Connect Card
 - C. Invites people to greet each other
6. Sermon Video Intro
7. Sermon
8. Song – “Eye of the Storm” by Ryan Stevenson, sung by Ryan Woodard
9. Prayer by Jeff
10. Med Moments
11. Offering (when people are suffering)
12. (At 9 AM Sunday Only – Baptism of Charlotte Maruchi)
13. Song – “It Is Well”
14. Prayer and Lord’s Prayer
15. Care Ministers
16. The Bridge
17. Fall Fest Friday from 4-7 PM
18. Closing Prayer