TAMPA LIFE CHURCH

BIBLE STUDY



THE STEWARDSHIP OF SUFFERING

When God Uses Pain to Prepare You for Purpose

Based on a message delivered at Tampa Life Church by Brother McFarland, missionary to Northern Ireland

INTRODUCTION

The Question Beneath Every Story

Every believer eventually asks the same question, whispered in seasons of pain, disappointment, betrayal, sickness, or unanswered prayer: Lord, why am I going through this? It is not a question reserved for new believers or weak faith. It has echoed through the lives of God's people since the beginning of human history.

"Lord... why am I going through this?"

Scripture answers with an unexpected pattern. Abraham waited decades for the promised son. Moses spent forty years in the wilderness before leading Israel out of Egypt. David was anointed king as a young shepherd, yet years passed before he ever wore a crown. Joseph received a dream long before its fulfillment, with betrayal, slavery, and imprisonment standing between the promise and the palace. Even Jesus entered His greatest victory by first walking through Gethsemane and the cross. God often accomplishes His greatest work in us before He accomplishes His greatest work through us.

This study draws from Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 1 and the life of Joseph to explore a concept that is both practical and profound: the stewardship of suffering. God entrusts His people with seasons of suffering, not to destroy them but to transform them. The comfort He gives is not only meant to help us survive, it is meant to prepare us to strengthen others who will one day walk the same road. God's greatest blessing is not that we never walk through the valley. It is that we never walk through it alone.

REFLECT

What is the question you keep asking God right now? Write it down honestly, then ask Him a second question: “Lord, what are You preparing me for through this?”

01

SECTION 01

The Father of Mercies and the God of All Comfort

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

> *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; 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. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."*
>
> **2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-5 (KJV)**

Paul opens his letter not with complaint but with worship, lifting the eyes of his readers toward the character of God before he ever mentions affliction. He calls Him "the Father of mercies" and "the God of all comfort," titles that reveal God's very nature, not an occasional mood. And Paul writes this as a man who has endured persecution, imprisonment, beatings, and sleepless nights for the gospel. This is not theology from a comfortable place. It is a testimony forged in the middle of overwhelming affliction.

The comfort Paul describes is richer than our modern idea of comfort as ease or the absence of pain. The Greek word pictures someone coming alongside another person to strengthen and sustain them. God did not keep Daniel out of the lions' den, He preserved him inside it. He did not keep the three Hebrew men out of the fiery furnace, He walked with them in the flames. He did not remove Paul's thorn, He answered, "My grace is sufficient for thee." God's greatest miracle is not always changing our circumstances. Often it is sustaining us while they remain unchanged.

God's comfort is not the end of suffering. It is the preparation for stewardship.

Paul reveals why God comforts us at all: "that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." God's comfort is never meant to terminate with us. It is meant to flow through us. Every experience of His grace becomes preparation for someone else's future. In God's Kingdom, comfort is not simply a blessing to be enjoyed, it is a stewardship to be shared.

REFLECT

Think of a season of pain God has already carried you through. What comfort did you receive in it, and who around you right now needs that same comfort passed on to them?

02

SECTION 02

Every Promise Comes With a Process

Genesis 37:5-11

> *“And Joseph dreamed a dream, and he told it his brethren: and they hated him yet the more. And he said unto them, Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed. And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying.”*
>
> **GENESIS 37:5-11 (KJV)**

Joseph’s story is one of the clearest pictures of the stewardship of suffering in all of Scripture. We remember the palace, but we forget the prison. We celebrate the fulfilled dream while overlooking the years of silence that stood between the promise and its realization, and it was precisely in those hidden years that God did His greatest work. Before God elevated Joseph’s position, He transformed his character. Before Joseph was entrusted with authority over a nation, he had to become a man who could carry that authority without being destroyed by it.

At seventeen, Joseph received a genuine, God-given dream, but the promise was only the beginning of the journey. God showed him the destination without showing him the road. Every divine promise is paired with a divine process, because God is never merely fulfilling His word, He is shaping the servant who will carry it. The promise may come suddenly, but the preparation almost never does.

Before God ever gave Joseph the promise, He was already the architect of the process.

None of Joseph’s hardships could cancel God’s purpose. His brothers could throw him into a pit, but they could not throw him out of God’s plan. Slave traders could carry him into Egypt, but they could not carry him beyond God’s reach. What feels like delay from our side is often protection from His. God is not delaying the promise, He is developing the person who will carry it.

REFLECT

What promise has God given you that you are still waiting on? What might the process be quietly preparing in you before it arrives?

03

SECTION 03

The Process Is Designed to Transform Your Character

Genesis 39:2-4

> *"And the LORD was with Joseph, and he was a prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian. And his master saw that the LORD was with him, and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him."*
>
> **GENESIS 39:2-4 (KJV)**

We naturally focus on the dramatic locations of Joseph's life, the pit, Potiphar's house, the prison, the palace, but none of those places were God's real target. God's greatest work was never the changing of Joseph's address. It was the changing of Joseph's heart. We ask, "Where is God taking me?" God asks, "Who are you becoming while I take you there?"

Scripture repeats one phrase through every chapter of Joseph's descent: "the LORD was with Joseph." That declaration appears while he is a slave, and again while he sits unjustly in prison. God's presence was never dependent on Joseph's circumstances, and neither is His presence dependent on ours. Joseph was just as much in the will of God inside an Egyptian prison as he later was inside Pharaoh's palace.

Joseph did not become faithful because he was promoted. He was promoted because he had already become faithful in obscurity, in another man's household, where no one else was watching. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). Before He entrusts His servants with influence, God patiently teaches them humility. Before He grants authority, He develops compassion. Nothing corrupts like power, so the process cannot be rushed.

Nothing corrupts like power.

REFLECT

Where has God asked you to be faithful in something small, unnoticed, or unfair right now? How might that be preparing you for something greater?

04

SECTION 04

The Hidden Assignment Inside Your Pain

Genesis 40:5-8

> *"And Joseph came in unto them in the morning, and looked upon them, and, behold, they were sad. And he asked Pharaoh's officers, saying, Wherefore look ye so sadly to day? And they said unto him, We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter of it. And Joseph said unto them, Do not interpretations belong to God? tell me them, I pray you."*
>
> **GENESIS 40:5-8 (KJV)**

This is easy to read past, but it may be the single most important moment in Joseph's story. He was the one who had been betrayed. He was the one falsely accused. He was the one sitting in prison with no idea if he would ever be released. Yet instead of being consumed by his own pain, he noticed someone else's. That is the clearest evidence that the process had already been transforming his heart long before his circumstances ever changed.

Pain has a way of turning our attention inward until our own struggles become the only thing we can see. God never intends for suffering to imprison the heart. He uses it to expand our capacity to love, understand, and minister to others. Immaturity asks, "Who sees my pain?" Maturity begins asking, "Whose pain have I failed to notice?"

Whose pain have I failed to notice?

Joseph did not know that one compassionate question, "Wherefore look ye so sadly to day?", would eventually place him before Pharaoh. He was not chasing a promotion. He was simply caring for two men who were hurting. That is how God often opens the next door of our calling, through our willingness to serve others while we are still waiting on our own breakthrough.

REFLECT

Who around you is "looking sad today" that your own suffering has trained you to notice? Write one specific way you can check on them this week.

05

SECTION 05

Gethsemane: Where Suffering Becomes Submission

Luke 22:39-44

> *“And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly.”*
>
> **LUKE 22:39-44 (KJV)**

Joseph’s story points beyond itself to Someone who suffered far more deeply. Before Jesus was ever nailed to the cross, before the crown of thorns, there was a garden where the greatest battle was fought. Many believers think of Calvary as the place where Christ surrendered, but the surrender actually began in Gethsemane. The cross was the public demonstration of a decision already settled in prayer.

Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Jesus did not pretend the cup was easy to drink. His sweat fell “as it were great drops of blood.” Faith is not measured by the absence of emotion but by the presence of surrender. And notice what the Father did, and did not do. He did not remove the cup. He did not cancel the cross. He sent an angel to strengthen Him for what still lay ahead. God’s first response to suffering is not always deliverance from it. Sometimes it is grace to endure it.

The greatest stewardship God entrusts to His people may be the stewardship of their own will. Every day we choose whether our lives will be governed by fear or by faith, by self-preservation or by obedience. Calvary could only happen because Gethsemane had already settled the question of surrender.

REFLECT

Is there a “cup” you are asking God to remove right now? Write your own version of “not my will, but thine, be done” as a prayer over that specific situation.

06

SECTION 06

Promotion Comes After Transformation

Genesis 41:38-41

> *“And Pharaoh said unto his servants, Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is? Thou shalt be over my house, and according unto thy word shall all my people be ruled. See, I have set thee over all the land of Egypt.”*
>
> **GENESIS 41:38-41 (KJV)**

Every process eventually reaches a moment of fulfillment. For Joseph, it arrived suddenly. One moment he was a forgotten prisoner. Hours later he stood before Pharaoh clothed with authority. But heaven knew this moment had been more than twenty years in the making. Before Pharaoh ever recognized Joseph’s wisdom, he recognized God’s presence: “a man in whom the Spirit of God is.”

Years earlier Joseph spoke freely about his own dreams. Now, standing before the most powerful man in Egypt, he says, “It is not in me: God shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (Genesis 41:16). That is a transformed man. Pride has given way to humility. Self-confidence has been replaced by God-confidence. When Joseph later stood before the very brothers who betrayed him, he could say, “Ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good” (Genesis 50:20). He does not deny what was done to him. He simply sees a greater reality standing over it.

The palace did not change Joseph into a godly man. It revealed that God had already made him one.

Promotion was never God’s reward for Joseph’s perseverance. It was the natural result of a process that had already completed its work. The Kingdom of God does not operate by the world’s system of promotion. Heaven rewards faithfulness, not visibility. God is not searching for impressive people to place in positions of influence. He is shaping faithful servants whose hearts increasingly resemble His own.

REFLECT

Where in your life is God more interested in your character than your position right now? What would it look like to trust His timing on the promotion itself?

07

SECTION 07

Learning to Steward Your Pain

Romans 5:3-5

> *“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”*
>
> **ROMANS 5:3-5 (KJV)**

What do you do while you are still hurting? It is one thing to look back years later and recognize God’s faithfulness. It is another thing to trust Him while the wound is still fresh and the prayers remain unanswered. Paul is not writing to believers who have already escaped every hardship. He is teaching Christians how to steward their pain before they fully understand God’s purpose for it.

Paul traces a chain: tribulation produces patience, patience produces proven character, and character produces a hope that will not disappoint. We cannot always choose whether suffering enters our lives, but we can choose how we respond once it arrives. We may allow pain to make us bitter, or we may surrender it to God and let Him make us better.

The stewardship of suffering is really the stewardship of pain.

One of the greatest dangers in prolonged suffering is burying our pain instead of bringing it honestly before God. David poured out his heart in the Psalms. Jeremiah wept openly. Even Jesus expressed His sorrow in Gethsemane. God cannot heal a wound we refuse to acknowledge before Him. Buried pain quietly controls our lives. Stewarded pain is surrendered to God and gradually transformed into wisdom, compassion, and deeper dependence on His grace.

REFLECT

Is there pain you have been burying instead of stewarding? Write one honest sentence to God about it right now, no polishing required.

08

SECTION 08

Learning to Walk on the Storm

Matthew 14:22-33

> *"And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus."*
>
> **MATTHEW 14:22-33 (KJV)**

We naturally assume that if God truly hears our prayers, every difficult circumstance should disappear. Scripture reveals something deeper. Sometimes He calms the storm. Other times He teaches His people to walk through the storm without being overcome by it. The waves that seem uncontrollable to us have never once been uncontrollable to Him.

Peter walked on water as long as his eyes stayed fixed on Jesus. "When he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid." The storm had not grown stronger. Only his focus had shifted. And when he began to sink, "immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him." Even Peter's moment of failure became another opportunity to experience the mercy of Christ.

Sometimes the miracle is that the storm stops. Other times, the greater miracle is that the child of God keeps walking in obedience while the storm still rages.

REFLECT

What storm are you currently in the middle of? Where has your focus shifted from Jesus to the wind and the waves, and what would it look like to fix your eyes back on Him today?

09

SECTION 09

The God Who Finishes What He Starts

Philippians 1:6

> *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.”*
> **PHILIPPIANS 1:6 (KJV)**

Every journey with God eventually reaches a moment where faith must answer one question: can I trust Him with the chapters I do not yet understand? Joseph lived inside unfinished chapters for over twenty years. David lived through them while fleeing Saul. Paul wrote from unfinished chapters inside Roman prisons. It is within those seasons that faith is refined and confidence in God’s character grows stronger than confidence in our own understanding.

Paul places his confidence entirely in the character of God, not in human determination. The same hands that started the process remain faithfully guiding it to completion. Heaven is often accomplishing its greatest work while appearing remarkably quiet. While Joseph remained imprisoned, God was arranging kingdoms. While David wandered through caves, God was preparing a throne. The silence of God has never been evidence of the absence of God.

The God who was present in the valley is the same God waiting for us on the mountaintop.

REFLECT

What unfinished chapter of your life are you currently living inside? Write a short prayer of confidence, not that you understand it yet, but that God who began the work in you is faithful to finish it.

CONCLUSION

The Best Chapter Is Still Being Written

The stewardship of suffering is ultimately not a lesson about pain, it is a lesson about God. Joseph's pit became a palace. Gethsemane led to an empty tomb. Storms became classrooms of faith. In every chapter, the same truth emerged: God's greatest work often happens before we can recognize it. If you are walking through a difficult season today, your story is not finished. The same God who walked with Joseph in the prison and strengthened Jesus in Gethsemane is walking with you today.

Trust the process. Steward the pain. Remain faithful.

As this study closes, the focus shifts from Joseph, Paul, Peter, and Jesus to your own life. There are seasons when prayers seem delayed and the path ahead feels uncertain. In those moments it is tempting to believe God has become distant. Scripture declares the opposite. The Lord who guided Joseph through the pit, strengthened Paul through affliction, and sustained Jesus through Gethsemane is the same Lord who walks beside His children today. His methods have not changed because His character has never changed.

Perhaps the most important question is no longer "Why is this happening to me?" but "Lord, what are You accomplishing within me through this season?" That question reflects a heart that has begun to understand the stewardship of suffering. The goal was never to produce a stronger version of yourself. God's desire is to conform you to the image of His Son, and every lesson in patience, every moment of dependence, and every experience of His sustaining grace is another step in that transformation.

Your suffering is not your identity. Your process is not your destination. Christ is your hope, and the best chapter of your story is still being written.

REFLECT

As you close this study, what is one truth from these pages you want to carry with you into your next hard season? Write it as a promise to yourself and to God.