

What God taught me in 2020  
“How to Prepare for Suffering”

Good Morning. My name is John and I want to welcome you this morning. Whether you are here on campus or watching the transmission this morning, I want to say that we are glad you are here. Also, I want to wish everyone a “Happy New Year in 2024!”

The year 2023 is finally behind us. Last year in January, we had no idea what was going to happen in 2023. It was a year filled with so many uncertainties, but it was what God had ordained. So, this morning I want to go over, “What God taught us in 2023.” Last year, I didn’t even know if I’d be alive this year. If you remember, the doctor gave me a serious health prognosis. Little did we know the dark days that my family would go through. Yet, as we look back at God’s faithfulness, we can see that we were able to mature and grow spiritually even in the midst of what happened to us last year.

This morning, would you please open your Bibles to *1 Thessalonians 2:13-16*.

The book of 1 Thessalonians was written about 51 A.D. The Apostle Paul had visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey as recorded in *Acts 17:1-9*. Paul preached about how the Old Testament prophecies pointed to Jesus the Messiah. Many Jews believed and also many gentile men and women believed in the message of salvation. But persecution broke out in Thessalonica and the new believers suffered greatly for their faith in Jesus the Messiah. The believers sent Paul and Silas to Berea for their safety even though they themselves would suffer greatly because of the Gospel.

So we have the first letter of Paul to the Thessalonian believers. He expressed his concern for them as many were new believers and he did not want them to be discouraged and stray from the faith. He gives them

hope in the resurrected Jesus and he would one day return as he had promised.

Let's now read *1 Thessalonians 2:13-16*

***13 And we also thank God constantly for this, that we you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.***

***14 For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,***

***15 Who killed bot the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind.***

***16 By hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved – so as always to be filled up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!***

Here the Apostle Paul is encouraging the believers in Thessalonica that their suffering is nothing new. Even the believers in Judea had suffered for their faith in the Messiah Jesus Christ. But he encourages them that God himself will take care of those who are persecuting them. In the first part of this passage, he gives a small glimpse into why their faith was strong even in the midst their suffering.

In verse 13, the Apostle Paul writes: ***And we also thank God constantly for this, that we you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.***

The Apostle Paul tells us that the believers in Thessalonica stayed strong because of their faith in the Word of God. He is thankful that they didn't just hear a message from a human speaker, but that message was actually from God. They had anchored their faith in God's Word so that when they experienced suffering, they had a solid foundation for which

to continue living their daily lives with a hope of the future return to Jesus.

With that in mind, I would like to look at a Bible character in the Old Testament who went through great suffering. His name is Job. Many theologians believe that the story of Job took place sometime after the Great Flood in Genesis 6-9 and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Job was from the “*Land of Uz*” which theologians believe it would be the area of modern day Arabia, the area from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf, from Jordan to the Arabian Sea.

In Job 1:2-5, it describes Job as a wealthy man with several employees and a large family. In the Middle East, wealth was not measured by how much money one had in the bank, but by the amount of livestock, land, and servants one had.

Job 1:6 though most of the book of Job describes the great suffering that Job experienced. First there is a conversation between Almighty God and the accuser, Satan himself. God mentioned to the accuser about a man who is upright and full of integrity. The accuser tells God that Job only is a man of integrity because of all the blessings that he has been given. So in an intriguing story in chapters 1 and 2, God gives the accuser permission to test him except to take his life to prove that Job is an upright man, a man of complete integrity.

So within a matter of minutes the testing of his faith took place.

### Scene 1

While Job was at home and business was as usual, a messenger came to tell him that a group of people raided and stole all the work animals (the 500 team of oxen and 500 female donkeys) and killed all the workers. The messenger had escaped to tell his master.

## Scene 2

While the first messenger was telling Job what had happened, a second messenger came to tell him some strange news. Fire from heaven had fallen and killed all his 7,000 sheep and shepherds. The messenger was the only one who survived and came to tell Job what had happened.

## Scene 3

While the second messenger was telling about the strange fire that fell from heaven and killed the sheep and shepherds, a third messenger came and told Job that another group of people had raided his property and stole all his 3,000 camels and killed all of the workers.

## Scene 4

And to add to his shock, another messenger arrived at his house to tell him that a strong windstorm had suddenly passed through the house of his oldest son. The storm made the house to collapse and that all of his children had died.

So within just a few moments, Job lost his wealth, his servants, and his family. And within the middle eastern culture, he had lost face because of his sudden loss of his wealth and family. To understand this will help us understand why Jobs friends accused him of some hidden sin in his life for the cause of his great loss.

While Job was sitting in a daze and in tremendous grief, the Bible tells us something about his character. In Job 1:22 the Bible says: ***In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God.***

Then in chapter 2, we see that Job lost his health. In verse 6 the Bible says that the accuser stuck him with boils from head to foot. The suffering and misery that he was experiencing even caused his wife to question him: Job 2:8 says: ***Are you still trying to maintain your integrity? Curse God and die.***

Job's wife said, enough is enough! We have lost face, we have lost our family and everything.

Then three of Job's friends arrived and for several chapters we see that they were not of any help and encouragement to him. The Bible says this; ***No one said a word to Job, for they saw that his suffering was too great for words.***

Why did Job not just curse God and die? Why did he maintain his integrity? What had he done to prepare himself so that he stayed true to God when tragedy and suffering arrived?

Let's look in Job 1:1. There we see a glimpse in the life of Job before suffering arrived.

Job 1:1 says: ***There once was a man named Job who lived in the land of Uz. He was blameless – a man of complete integrity. He feared God and stayed away from evil.***

First the Bible says that Job was a man of complete integrity. Integrity is manifested in three areas of our lives: moral, fiscal (the administration of finances or wealth, and doctrinal (belief in God). In a society that was self-centered that eventually brought the scattering of languages from the Tower of Babel, Job showed his integrity morally, the way he administered his wealth, and his belief in the Almighty God.

In the book *Becoming a Person of Influence*, the author states that integrity is developed in the small moments of life. So when you think about moral integrity, it is in the small moments of life that a man shows respect and honor for a woman, or a woman shows respect for herself in the way she conducts herself and life.

In the matter of fiscal integrity, it is the small moments in life when a person pays their bills, honors their commitments, is honest in their business dealings and does not look to do shady deals or dishonest

business transactions. He or she is a grateful administer of the stewardship that God has given.

In the matter of doctrinal integrity, it is the small moments of life when a person is true to the scriptures and is not swept away with all kinds of wind of doctrines. This expresses itself in our daily actions, the music we sing, and the theology we live.

Secondly, the Bible says that Job feared God. He was not scared of God as we understand the word “fear” today. Job had a respect for God, the creator of the universe. He offered a substitutionary sacrifice to God early in the mornings in case his family had cursed and dishonored God Almighty. He understood the meaning of a substitutionary atonement for sins.

Thirdly, the Bible says that Job stayed away from evil.

He had formed these small habits in his life so that when tragedy and suffering arrived, he was not shaken in his faith in God.

Have you ever been there? Tragedy and suffering have arrived in your life and house and you are in this daze, a numbness that comes to your body, and eventually fall into depression and doubt? Have you lost your health, your wealth, your family? Maybe you are suffering some type of bullying, a toxic work environment, or even a loss of job. Maybe you have lost a child, a parent, or a loved one. Have you been or are you now in the same place where Job was?

I have been there. Several years ago, in the matter of one week, there were a set of circumstances that God allowed into our lives that would change our lives and family. One was the day we found out that our family needs would not allow us to live anymore in Paraguay. We would need to find some other place to live and serve the Lord. It was one of the reasons that God brought us here to Ecuador.

There were two other major events that took place this same week that left us in a daze. I remember sitting at a table with my wife, just numb, not knowing what to say. With tears in our eyes, the only thing that I remember was praying: God, your Word says that you will never leave us or forsake us. And with my hands just gestured upward to heaven. Nothing made sense at the time. We had no idea the reason for such a trial that God had just allowed in our lives.

During the days that followed, all I could do was just sit and stare into space. Have you ever been there? You're completely numb. You think, "what just happened?" "What could I have done to have avoided this?" "What's going on?" The daze turned to depression. Not a fun place to be. Doubt in yourself, in God, in your fellow believers. It was a dark road and valley that I did not chose nor desire. Yet, there I was. God has stripped me bare of all my pride, my ambitions, and self-worth. It was just me and God and nothing else.

During one of those moments, I remember asking the question, "If God removes everything from my life, is He still worthy of my worship and praise?" What a deep question! Because, if He is not worthy, then why not just abandon God and do my own thing. That's kind of what Job's wife told Job. But if He is worthy of my worship, even in my vulnerability and emptiness, then I will continue on.

As I thought on that moment, the words of Job came to my mind and I prayed these words; "though He slay me, yet I will trust him."

To be honest, humanly speaking, I would never want to experience what we experienced several years ago. Yet, it was that very suffering that God used to prune me, to take off some very rough edges, and bring me closer to Himself and make me more like Jesus.

So, how do you prepare yourself for suffering? Then how do you react when suffering arrives in your life?

First, take a piece of paper or make a note in the messages of your phone and write these few things down. How do you prepare for suffering: Let's look at Job 1:1 and take a few lessons from Job.

- 1) Be faithful in the little things (integrity)
- 2) Fear God
- 3) Flee evil

What evil should I flee? *Galatians 5:19-21*

*19: When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures*

*20: Idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outburst of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division*

*21: Envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these.*

Then how do you react when suffering comes?

John Piper, a pastor and theologian from north America uses this acronym: Write this down and apply it to your life during times of suffering.

A –

P –

T –

A –

T –

A – admit that you can do nothing without God.

P – pray that God will help me

T – trust a specific Bible verse and apply it to your life

A – act in reliance to God's word that God will honor His word

T – thank Him



For some of you who are experiencing bullying or a toxic work environment, you may claim this Bible promise:

***Psalm 27:1-2: The LORD is my light and my salvation; so why should I be afraid. (2) The LORD is my fortress, protecting me from danger, so why should I tremble?***

For those who have lost loved ones:

***Psalm 23: The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need. (2) He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me besides peaceful streams. (3) He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. (4) Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and staff protect and comfort me.***

For those who are going through financial suffering:

***Philippians 4:19: And this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus.***

For those who need help:

***Psalm 121:1-2: I look up to the mountains, does my help come from there? (2) My help comes from the LORD, who made the heaven and earth!***

For those who need safety:

***Psalm 91:1-2: Those who live in the shelter of the Most High will find rest in the shadow of the Almighty. (2) This I declare about the LORD; He alone is my refuge, my place of safety; he is my God, and I trust him.***

For those going through very difficult times:

***Isaiah 43:2-3: When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty; you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up.***

***The flames will not consume you. (2) For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.***

The year 2024 is right before us. There will be many things that we will experience, both good and bad. But let me assure you that God will be faithful to you in 2024 as He was in 2023, and every year since your birth.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father  
There is no shadow of turning with Thee  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not  
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

Great is Thy faithfulness  
Great is Thy faithfulness  
Morning by morning new mercies I see  
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

Let's pray.