

## I. Introduction

Good morning, it's good to be with you again this week. I want to start by thanking you for your participation and attention over these past weeks. It has been a privilege to bring this material to you and I pray that it will be helpful for you in times to come. This is my last class for this topic, next week Kent will pick up the last two classes on the topic of the Spiritual comforts that are ours.

Last week, we introduced the book we are using for the final four weeks of the class, *Suffering* by Paul David Tripp. Remember this book was written out of some very personal and intense suffering that he went through with a health challenge he experienced that really changed the trajectory of his life as he was experiencing it up to that point. From that, he wrote this book bringing lessons and observations from his experience with suffering and from counseling others who are suffering. We started with the topic of spiritual dynamics and dangers we might face in suffering by looking at what Tripp calls traps that we might find ourselves faced with in suffering. We began by looking at the awareness trap and the fear trap. This week we will cover the last four. The awareness trap occurs when we are suffering and look around and begin to compare ourselves to other's situations and think that they can't understand what we're going through and begin to despair. If we look horizontally only and do not look to our heavenly Father in our suffering, we can fall into this trap. This awareness trap really leads to all the others, and next we talked about the fear trap. The trap where, if we're not careful, we can begin to meditate on what we are aware of and that leads us to fear and lack of trust in the Lord during our suffering. This week we will cover the remaining four traps that Tripp has in his book, Envy, Doubt, Denial, and Discouragement.

## II. The Envy Trap

First the trap of envy. If we become aware and focus on the circumstances of those around us and compare perceived situations to our own, we can be tempted to be envious of what looks like a more providentially promising set of circumstances. Let's turn to Psalm 73. I want us to read this together aloud because it gives a great picture into what is happening in the heart during times of envy. **(Read Psalm 73 aloud)** We can see here that envy is natural, look at verse 13 and 14 **(read those again)**. We all want our decisions and investments of time and resources to mean something. When we don't reap what we think should be our rewards in a timeframe in which we expect them to happen, we can fall into the trap of envy. Especially, if we examine our lives and see those investments of spiritual resources and time and experience suffering and not blessing. We see from these two verses too, that envy makes us question our allegiance to God. We're suffering and we can be tempted to ask ourselves, "What has all this obedience to God been for? What has it gotten me?" But in those times, we need to remember that our actions are not downpayments for blessings now. Our obedience and allegiance to God should be coming from the spurring on of the Holy Spirit and those things that can be described as the fruit of the Spirit are happening because God has changed our hearts because the sacrifice of His son and our faith in Him. The thoughts of actions and obedience as downpayments are temptations to not trust in His goodness even in our suffering.

Envy can be wearisome, look at verse 16 **(read it)** But what was his fix to the wearisome task? Going into the sanctuary of God. Looking horizontally and envying those around you is a hard burden to carry. Worship and reminding yourself of the goodness of God will help lift that burden. Envy also forgets the relatively short time of the comforts of this life. Verses 18-20 make this clear. It can be hard to have an eternal perspective when we are suffering, and life is painful because we just want the suffering and pain to end now. When we get envious of those who, comparatively, look like they are living in ease, we need to remember that in terms of eternity, we are all here on this earth for a moment. Envy can make

us bitter, and if we are not careful, bitterness becomes the posture of our heart. So, we can't allow envy to let us underestimate the goodness of God. When we forget the goodness of God, the burden of suffering becomes hard to bear. And we must remind ourselves of God's goodness and help others remember God's goodness as well. And I don't mean just pithy sayings like, "Oh, God is good." But specific examples are helpful here. If you're suffering, it may be helpful to sit down and start writing. List out the ways that God has been good to you, your family, loved ones, friends, whoever you know. One of the foundational truths that we covered in the prior segment of this class is the overarching theme of Scripture of the goodness of God. Sometimes, we need reminders of that specifically in our own lives. We must not allow envy to tell us lies like what we see in the beginning of Psalm 73. If we find ourselves going down this road, we need to land, like Asaph, on verses 17 through the end of the chapter. We remember eternity and put things into perspective and then go back to the Lord and repeat to ourselves verse 25-28 (**read verse 25-28 again**)

### III. The Doubt Trap

The next trap is the doubt trap. The kind of doubt we are talking about here is a doubt that leads us to judge God and concluding that, because of our circumstances, God is not good. Doubt occurs because when we look around and are aware that our circumstances seem different than others, we start to believe the lies we are telling ourselves and the result is doubt. How do we fight this? First, we must fight it. Lies come from the father of lies. James 4:7 says, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." We must resist the lies of the devil by being aware of what we are telling ourselves in our heart that would question the character of God. The very next verse in James 4 tells us what we must do, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." And we, secondly, must count our blessings. Recount to ourselves the good things that God has done for us. In times when we

are suffering and find ourselves alone, we can find our minds slipping into focusing on the suffering. In those times, we must bring them before God and ask for the help of His Spirit to have a focus on the good things that He has done. Third, we must humbly bring our struggle before the Lord and ask for His help. The Lord is not surprised by our weaknesses. In Hebrews 4 we are reminded that we have a Savior who is able to sympathize with our weakness in verse 15. As a result, Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

The fourth way we can combat doubt is to get busy. I Peter was written believers in exile, in a time of suffering. Peter doesn't seek to console those in exile with sympathy, although that would be appropriate, Peter lovingly encourages the readers who are suffering in exile to not let their suffering define who they are and reminds them of what they are called to and how they should live as Christians in this present age. I would encourage you to read through I Peter with that view in mind and if you are suffering, see it as an encouragement. If we are interacting with those who are suffering, it is loving to remind and encourage them to not let the suffering define them. This is not saying to pretend that it doesn't exist, not to have sympathy, not to acknowledge that life is hard; but to remind those who are suffering of where their identity lies in Christ and what believers have been called to do. And in living our lives with a focus on who we are as children of God, it can work to strengthen our faith.

Fifth, we can encourage other doubters even while we are doubting ourselves. As we remind others who are doubting of who God is while we are doubting, we can gain encouragement and reminders to help us in our own times of suffering.

Sixth, determine to run to Jesus while we are doubting. Matthew 11:28-30 says, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am

gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your soul. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” The burden of doubt is heavy to bear if we are not taking it to our Savior. If we are suffering and find ourselves doubting the character of God, let us run to our Savior and take encouragement that he will give us rest.

#### IV. The Denial Trap

The next trap is the denial trap. We need to be careful that, when we are suffering, we do not lie to ourselves in such a way that we give peace to ourselves by imagining that the suffering isn't there, and everything will be ok. Having a view of life that everything will just magically work out isn't helpful, because we have no guarantee of that. Instead of trying to bring ourselves peace by telling a version of reality that is not true, we can cry out to God in our moment of need and find comfort. Why can we find comfort there? Let's look turn to Hebrews 4 and look at verses 14-16 in more detail. **(Read Hebrews 4:14-16)**

There are five things we can take away from this passage if we find we are slipping into denial and need to run to God in our time of need.

First, we see that we have an advocate. A high priest is someone who intercedes on other's behalf. Our advocate is one who can sympathize with our weaknesses. We don't have to deny what we're going through because our Savior can sympathize with what we are experiencing.

Second, we can hold fast because of His advocacy. When we have moments in our suffering where we find ourselves beginning to question, we know that we can hold fast because of who our advocate is. We need to rest in what God has revealed to us and not try and figure out things that God has not

revealed to us. We may not ever get an answer to why things are occurring, why we are suffering. But we do know that God is for us, and we can hold fast to our confession.

Third, our advocate can sympathize with our weaknesses. We feel weak when we suffer. Suffering can expose weaknesses. That is painful. We need to be encouraged that the knowledge that Jesus understands our humanness. He has first-hand knowledge of humanity because he was human. God took on the weakness of human flesh for us and is for us in our weakness.

Fourth, we need to remind ourselves that we can come to Him with confidence. Let us draw near to the throne with confidence. If everything in our lives seems to be shaken in suffering, we can have confidence that the one we are coming to in our weakness will never be shaken.

Fifth, there is mercy and grace for every moment of need. At some point, when we are suffering, we will be met by folks who are well-meaning in their attempt to help but sometimes it doesn't quite hit the mark. I'm sure some of all of us have experienced this. This should be a reminder to us to be aware of how and what we say and do to those who are suffering. But Hebrews 4:16 reminds us that we will have grace and mercy in time of need. That grace and mercy will be perfectly fit for the situation that we are in. Denial of reality doesn't do us any good. But acknowledging how we are suffering by bringing it to the throne of grace will result in comfort and encouragement because we receive grace and mercy from a Savior who perfectly knows what we are going through.

#### V. The Discouragement Trap

The final trap is discouragement. In moments of confusion, suffering, and weakness, it's tempting to give way to discouragement. Discouragement can be very powerful in taking strength and courage from you in times when you need it most. Discouragement can cause us to retreat into ourselves and it can be

very hard to get out of that the further we go into ourselves. Again, this is because if we keep our eyes horizontal and do not lift them and engage upwards, we tend to turn inwards.

Deuteronomy 1:19-33 is an example of the power of discouragement. Let's turn there. Moses is recounting the time to the people of when they first approached the land of promise and ten of the twelve spies brought back the report that indeed the land was good but the people in it were huge, and it seemed there was no way they would go in and conquer. Verse 28 tells us the result of this bad report, "Where are we going up? Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, "The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have seen the sons of Anakim there." Notice, "Our brothers have made our hearts melt..." That is a statement of discouragement. And the power of that discouragement, caused the Israelites to not trust in the promises of God, refuse to enter the promised land, and result in an entire generation to die in the wilderness before their children find themselves once again faced with entry into the promised land where, here, we find Moses reminding them of what happened to the prior generation.

Discouragement can be very powerful and can result in two things. One, discouragement can result in a lifestyle of complaint. If we are not careful to recognize discouragement, it will become the lens through which we start to see life. And when we begin to look at life through the lens of discouragement, leading to a lifestyle of complaint, what is happening is we are lodging a complaint vertically. We become like the Israelites in Deuteronomy 1:27 saying, "Because the Lord hated us he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us." We begin to critique the character and intentions of God. Discouragement can distort our view of God, and we need to be careful that we don't discard everything people are saying to us to try and encourage us in times of discouragement because we are viewing life through the wrong lens.

Second, discouragement can lead to moral paralysis. The example of the Israelites shows us this in that they did not trust in the promises of God and ended up doing the wrong thing. At times, it can be easier to complain than to praise. It can even feel pretty good to complain and call out to others all those things that are wrong in our life to commiserate. If discouragement becomes a lifestyle of complaint, we can be tempted to ask ourselves questions that start with phrases like, “What difference does it make it I...? or What good will it do if I...? Those things that are in our lives for the purpose of encouragement and reminders of who God is, prayer, fellowship, worship, etc., can seem to be purposeless and useless. None of this happens overnight. It occurs because, in our suffering, we have slowly seen the result of discouragement chip away at those things that we know are right and our defenses that we found in those things are weakened. Do you find yourself struggling to do those things that should bring encouragement? Has your trust been weakened because of suffering? Has the motivation of God’s presence been diminished? Ask yourself if discouragement has been chipping away at those things that you once held close and drew encouragement from.

So, I want to end with a note of encouragement, for all of us, whether we are suffering or find ourselves in times of discouragement, or any of the traps that we have discussed these past two weeks. Psalm 55:22, “Cast your burden on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never permit the righteous to be moved.” In our times of suffering, the Lord wants to hear from us and sustain us. He calls us to go to him and cast our burden on Him and he promises that we will not be moved. Not that we will never have burdens, but that in the times when we do, he tells us where to go and the promise that is ours when we do. We must be aware of when we are tempted to look around us, keep our eyes on the horizontal, leading us to turning our eyes inward and fixate on ourselves, which can turn into complaints vertically against the character of God. So, I pray that when we find ourselves in times of suffering, God would



give us eyes to see His goodness. Kent will take up that topic over the next two weeks as he closes out the class by discussing the Spiritual Comforts that are Ours in Suffering.

### Questions

1. Why does a horizontal focus result in envy?
2. How can Hebrews 4:14 help in times of suffering?
3. How can we recognize discouragement and take measures to prevent it from slowly taking control?