

Several years ago, my dad and I took a group of teenagers to the Dominican Republic.

- It was cheaper to drive to Miami and fly from there, so we loaded up and started the long drive south. A couple of hours in, one of the teenagers asked, “Are we there yet? How much longer?”
- My dad looked at her and said, “About 30 minutes.” I looked over at him. I knew we still had hours to go. A couple of hours later, she asked again, “Are we there yet?” “About 30 minutes,” Dad said.
- And this kept happening every few hours. Finally, she figured out he was teasing her.
- It’s funny when you’re on a road trip.

That question can feel especially urgent when life is painful—when we’re grieving, facing illness, or watching someone we love suffer.

- We want to know: *Why is this happening? Where is God in it? Is there any purpose in this pain?*
- John 11 brings us into the home of two sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother, Lazarus. Jesus loved this family, but Lazarus became seriously ill. His sisters sent Jesus a message ... “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”
- When Jesus heard the news, he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it” (John 11:4).
- Jesus loved Lazarus. And still, Lazarus was sick. Jesus knew what was happening, and he said this suffering had a purpose: **it would become a setting in which God’s glory would be revealed through the Son.**

John 11:1-4 - Now a certain *man* was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was *that* Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. ³ Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”

⁴ When Jesus heard *that*, He said, “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

THE PURPOSE OF SUFFERING

John 11 does not tell us that every hardship will be resolved in the way Lazarus’s was, or that we will always understand the reason for our suffering.

- But it does show us that suffering is never beyond Jesus’ knowledge or authority.
- In this particular situation, Jesus declares that sickness and death will not have the final word; God will use what has happened to reveal the glory of his Son (John 11:4, 40).

Jesus says, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God” (John 11:4)

- Lazarus does die, so Jesus isn't saying he will avoid the grave. He is saying death will not be the final outcome. Through this painful situation, Jesus will reveal God's glory and show who he is.
- John also makes clear that Jesus' delay did not mean he had stopped loving this family: "Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus."
- So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer" (John 11:5–6).
 - The delay was painful, but Jesus was neither absent nor powerless.
 - He was leading events toward a greater revelation of his glory (John 11:14–15, 40).

We should be careful not to claim that we know why every person suffers.

- This passage gives us the purpose of *this* suffering, not an easy explanation for every hardship. But it does show that suffering is not beyond Jesus' knowledge or authority—and that even in sorrow, he is able to reveal his glory.

So what can believers hold on to when suffering remains and the outcome is still unknown? Jesus' words to Martha give us the next point: **the promise in suffering.**

Promise in Suffering

In this story, Jesus shows that suffering is not beyond his purpose or authority.

- But what can believers hold on to when the pain is still real and we don't know how things will turn out? As Jesus speaks with Martha, he gives her more than an explanation. He gives her a promise—and he tells her that the promise is found in him.
- After the sisters sent word that Lazarus was sick, Jesus stayed where he was for two more days. He told his disciples that Lazarus had died and that they were going to Bethany. The disciples were worried about returning to Judea, where people had recently tried to stone Jesus, but Jesus went anyway.

By the time Jesus arrived near Bethany, Lazarus had been in the tomb four days.

- Many people had come to comfort Mary and Martha. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him. Mary remained in the house.
- Martha had trusted Jesus to heal her brother, and now she stood before him in the middle of her grief. She said...

John 11:21-24 - ²¹ Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You."

John 11:23 - ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Then Jesus brings that future hope close: John 11:25

John 11:25 - **"I am the resurrection and the life"**

- Martha is looking ahead to the day when the dead will rise. Jesus tells her that resurrection is not only an event to anticipate—it is bound up with who he is. The believer's hope rests on Jesus, who has authority over death and gives life to those who trust him.

John 11:25 - ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. ²⁶ And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

John 11:25 - "I Am the Resurrection and the Life"

When Jesus says, "**I am the resurrection and the life**," he is telling Martha that her hope is not merely in a future event—her hope is in him. The resurrection is not something Jesus can only talk about or point toward. He has authority over death, and he is the giver of life.

Jesus is not saying believers will never die physically. Lazarus has died, and Jesus will soon call him out of the tomb. Jesus says, "**Though he may die, he shall live**" (John 11:25): physical death does not cancel the life he gives or prevent the future resurrection. And when he says the believer "shall never die," he is promising that death will never separate that person from the life found in him (John 11:25–26; Romans 8:38–39).

That is why Jesus asks Martha, "**Do you believe this?**" (John 11:26,). He is calling her—and us—not merely to believe that resurrection will happen someday, but to trust him as the One who gives life now and will raise his people in the end.

Jesus came to Bethany and saw Mary weeping, along with the people who had come to comfort her. Deeply moved, he went with them to Lazarus's tomb. It was a cave with a stone covering the entrance. Jesus told them to take the stone away. Martha hesitated, reminding him that Lazarus had been dead four days.

Jesus answered, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" They moved the stone. Then Jesus prayed to the Father and called out in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!"

Lazarus came out of the tomb, still wrapped in burial cloths. Jesus told the people, "Loose him, and let him go." Many who saw what Jesus did believed in him (John 11:38–45, NKJV).

"Lazarus's return to mortal life is a sign of Jesus' authority over death. But Jesus' promise reaches further: everyone who believes in him will share in the final resurrection." (John 11:25–26; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23)

We can trace the Promises of God through what Dane Ortlund calls 4 Phases of life for the Believer.

Bad – Good – Better – Best Ortlund, Dane. Finally Home: The Christian Hope of Heaven (p. 19).

Bad: Our need—sin separates us from God.

Good: Our present hope—through faith in Christ, we are forgiven and belong to him, even in a painful life.

Better: Our hope at death—believers are with Christ.

Best: Our final hope—Christ raises his people bodily, and God dwells with them in the renewed creation.

So the promise in suffering is not that every hardship will quickly end, or that we will understand every reason for it.

- The promise is that **Jesus is the resurrection and the life**.
- Those who belong to him may die, but death will not be their final home.
- Their story ends in resurrection and life with God in the renewed creation.

Bad: Life without Christ

Ortlund's first word is "**bad**."

- He doesn't mean that some people are worse than others, or that every moment of life is miserable. He means that every one of us begins life separated from God by sin. Our deepest problem is not simply that life is difficult; it is that we need to be made right with God.

The Bible says in **Romans 3:23**, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"

- Sin is not only the obvious wrong things we do. It is our failure to love God as he deserves, to trust him fully, and to live under his good authority.
- **Romans 3:10-11** - "There is none righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.
- **Isaiah 64:6** - But we are all like an unclean *thing*, And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags; We all fade as a leaf, And our iniquities, like the wind, Have taken us away.
- **Jeremiah 17:9** - "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

That means no one enters the world already trusting Christ—

- not even someone raised in a Christian home. Parents can teach their children about Jesus, bring them to church, and model faith for them, but each person must personally come to Christ.
- We are not made right with God by our family background, good behavior, or religious activity.

Jesus told Nicodemus, "**You must be born again**" (**John 3:7**).

- We are born physically once, but we need God to give us new spiritual life. Jesus explained that this new birth comes through the work of the Spirit (John 3:5–8). That is why the gospel is such good news: God does not leave us in our sin.

John 3:16-17 - For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁷ For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 3:18-19 - ¹⁸ "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

John 3:36 - He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

This matters when we hear Jesus' promise to Martha.

- The hope of resurrection is not a vague promise that everyone will be fine in the end. Jesus calls people to believe in him:
- John 11:25 - "...**He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live**"
- The first question, then, is not only, *"Where will I be when I die?"* It is, *"Have I trusted Jesus Christ?"*

Transition to Good: The good news is that the story does not have to stay in the "bad" phase. By grace, God gives new life to those who turn from sin and trust in Jesus Christ.

The Second Phases, as Orlund puts it – From Bad to Good

Good: Life Trusting in Christ

The second phase is **"good"—life trusting in Christ.**

- That doesn't mean life suddenly becomes easy. Christians still experience sickness, grief, disappointment, and death. "Good" means that through faith in Jesus, our relationship with God has changed: we are forgiven, welcomed into his family, and given a sure hope beyond this life.

How do we move from bad to good?

- Not by trying to become good enough to earn God's acceptance.
- We are saved by God's grace through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - **Ephesians 2:8-9** - For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast.
 - **Titus 3:5-6** - not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,
 - **1 Peter 2:24** - who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.
- Jesus bore our sin through his death and rose again, so everyone who trusts in him is forgiven and made right with God

Jesus described this change as... passing from death to life

- Passing from Death to life – John 5:24
- We are born into God's Family - From Slaves to Sons & Daughters –
- Translated from the Kingdom of Darkness to the Kingdom of His Dear Son!
- We are no long under condemnation – Romans 8:1

Friend, If you have never trusted Christ as Savior

- Repent and Believe (trust fully in Jesus) & Call upon His name for Salvation
- Don't wait – Today is the day of Salvation!

For those of us who have trusted Christ, the Christian life can be called **good**, even when it is painful.

- The Christian is not promised a trouble-free life; the Christian is promised that trouble cannot undo what Christ has done.
- Nothing can separate believers from God's love in Christ (Romans 8:35–39).

John 11:25 – So when Jesus says, “Whoever believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live,” he is speaking to those who belong to him (John 11:25, NKJV).

- Trusting Christ does not mean we never face death.
- It means death cannot take away the life Jesus gives.

Transition to Better: For the Christian, life with Christ now is good—but death does not end that relationship. Paul says that to depart and be with Christ is “far better” (Philippians 1:23, NKJV).

That bring us to the third phase...which is...

Better – Life with Christ (Intermediate Heaven)

For the believer, death is not a step into nothingness or separation from Jesus.

Philippians 1:20-23 - ²⁰ according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.

2 Corinthians 5:8 - We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

That is a real comfort when someone who trusts Christ dies.

- We grieve because death is an enemy and separation hurts. Yet we do not grieve as though our loved one has been lost or forgotten. Those who die in Christ are with Christ.
- Jesus promised the thief on the cross, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43, NKJV).

But “**better**” is not yet “**best**.”

- The believer's final hope is not to remain forever without a body. God made us as embodied people, and his promise is to raise his people bodily when Christ returns (1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–53).
- Being with Christ after death is wonderful, but it is the intermediate phase—the bridge between this life and the resurrection.

That distinction helps us hear Jesus' words to Martha.

- He does not promise that believers will never die physically. He promises, “He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John 11:25, NKJV).
- Death cannot cancel the life Jesus gives, and it cannot prevent the resurrection he has promised.

Transition to Best: Being with Christ after death is far better than life in this fallen world. But Scripture points us beyond that intermediate hope to the day Christ raises his people and makes all things new. That is **the best**.

To become a Christian is to go from **bad** to **good**. To die as a Christian is to go from **good** to **better**. But one day we will go from **better** to **best**. (Ortlund, *Finally Home*, p. 24)

Best – Life with Christ (Eternity: New Heaven and New Earth)

John 11:25 – ²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

- Being with Christ after death is far better than life in this fallen world, but it is not the end of the Christian story. Jesus will return, the dead in Christ will be raised, and God will bring his people into the fullness of life in his renewed creation (1 Corinthians 15:52–54; 1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

Two truths help us see the beauty of this final hope. As Randy Alcorn emphasizes in *Heaven*,

1. **God has not abandoned his original purpose: to dwell with mankind on earth.** From the beginning, God created people to live in his presence and care for the world he made (Genesis 1:26–28; 2:8–15). Sin brought separation, corruption, and death—but it did not cause God to give up on his design. In the end, John sees “a new heaven and a new earth,” and hears this promise: “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them” (Revelation 21:1–3, NKJV).
2. And **we will live and reign on the renewed earth in resurrected bodies with our resurrected Lord.** Our hope is not to remain forever as disembodied souls. God will raise his people bodily, making them fit for life in his renewed creation (1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 51–53). The risen Jesus will be with his people, and they “shall reign forever and ever” (Revelation 22:3–5, NKJV; see also Revelation 5:9–10).

John gives us a glimpse of what that life will be like: “There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain” (Revelation 21:4, NKJV).

- That is the **best**—not merely forgiven, and not only with Christ after death, but raised bodily, living in God’s presence, and sharing in the life of the renewed earth under the reign of Jesus.
- Lazarus’s return to mortal life was a sign pointing beyond itself. Jesus is “the resurrection and the life,” and all who believe in him will share in the resurrection he has promised (John 11:25–26; 1 Corinthians 15:20–23).

We are not home yet. But God has not abandoned his purpose: one day, his people will live with him on the renewed earth, in resurrected bodies, with the risen Christ.

Conclusion: What’s Just Around the Bend?

Imagine a friend tells you he’s about to inherit a vast fortune at the end of the week.

- You call to congratulate him, but he spends the whole conversation worried about how tight his budget is right now.

- You might think, *"I know this week is difficult—but do you realize what's just around the bend?"*

That illustration doesn't mean our pain is small or unreal.

- Mary and Martha grieved, and Jesus wept with them (John 11:33–35). Christians can grieve honestly. But our present suffering is not the whole story.
- For those who trust Jesus, **bad has become good**: we are forgiven and brought into God's family. When we die, it will be **better**: we will be with Christ.
- And when Jesus returns, it will be **best**: he will raise his people bodily, and they will live with him in the renewed creation, where death, sorrow, and pain are no more (Philippians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 15:52–54; Revelation 21:1–5).

So while we wait:

- **Trust Jesus** with your life and your future. He is "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25–26).
- **Bring your grief to him** honestly. Jesus understands sorrow, and he wept with those who mourned (John 11:33–35).
- **Live today in light of the home he promised**—loving others, serving faithfully, and sharing the hope of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:58).

We are not home yet.

- The road may be long, and some stretches are painful. But Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and he will bring his people home.
- **So, are we there yet? No—but in Christ, we know where we're going, and we know who will bring us home.**