

Making Sense of Suffering

¹ For this reason I, Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus on behalf of you Gentiles—² assuming that you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace that was given to me for you,³ how the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written briefly.⁴ When you read this, you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ,⁵ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit.⁶ This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power.⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things,¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord,¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.¹³ So I ask you not to lose heart over what I am suffering for you, which is your glory.

Paul takes a little detour in this passage to help his readers make sense of his imprisonment. He is worried they'll misinterpret it in a way that would undermine their sure hope in Christ.

1) What are some of the ways we interpret the hard things we experience or watch others go through? Why?

To protect them from these dangerous errors, Paul reorients on what God's purpose is in the world – the redemption of a people of all tribes and nations for himself and make us his children and heirs. But we often put words in his mouth and expect him to be accomplishing our purposes rather than his.

- 2) Why do we reduce God's intentions to something less than what he has promised?
- 3) What are some of the things that are included in God's saving purpose, things he has actually promised us? Why does understanding what God is accomplishing help us interpret suffering well?
- 4) What do we lose when we shift off God's actual intentions to our weaker, lesser ones?

Our future hope should shape our life now in profound ways. It reinterprets everything. The good things in our lives are gifts; these talents, capacities, etc. are not our rewards to hoard, but a stewardship given to us serve and love others. The suffering and hardship of our lives are grounds to be reminded of grace as receive needed help and care from others and are grounded in the truth that we must be upheld by God's mercy.

- 5) How can we help each other suffer well?
- 6) What form is suffering taking in your life right now and how can we pray and care for you?

Other things to pray about:

- What can we praise God for?
- What sin do you need to confess?
- What cares or burdens can we help carry?