



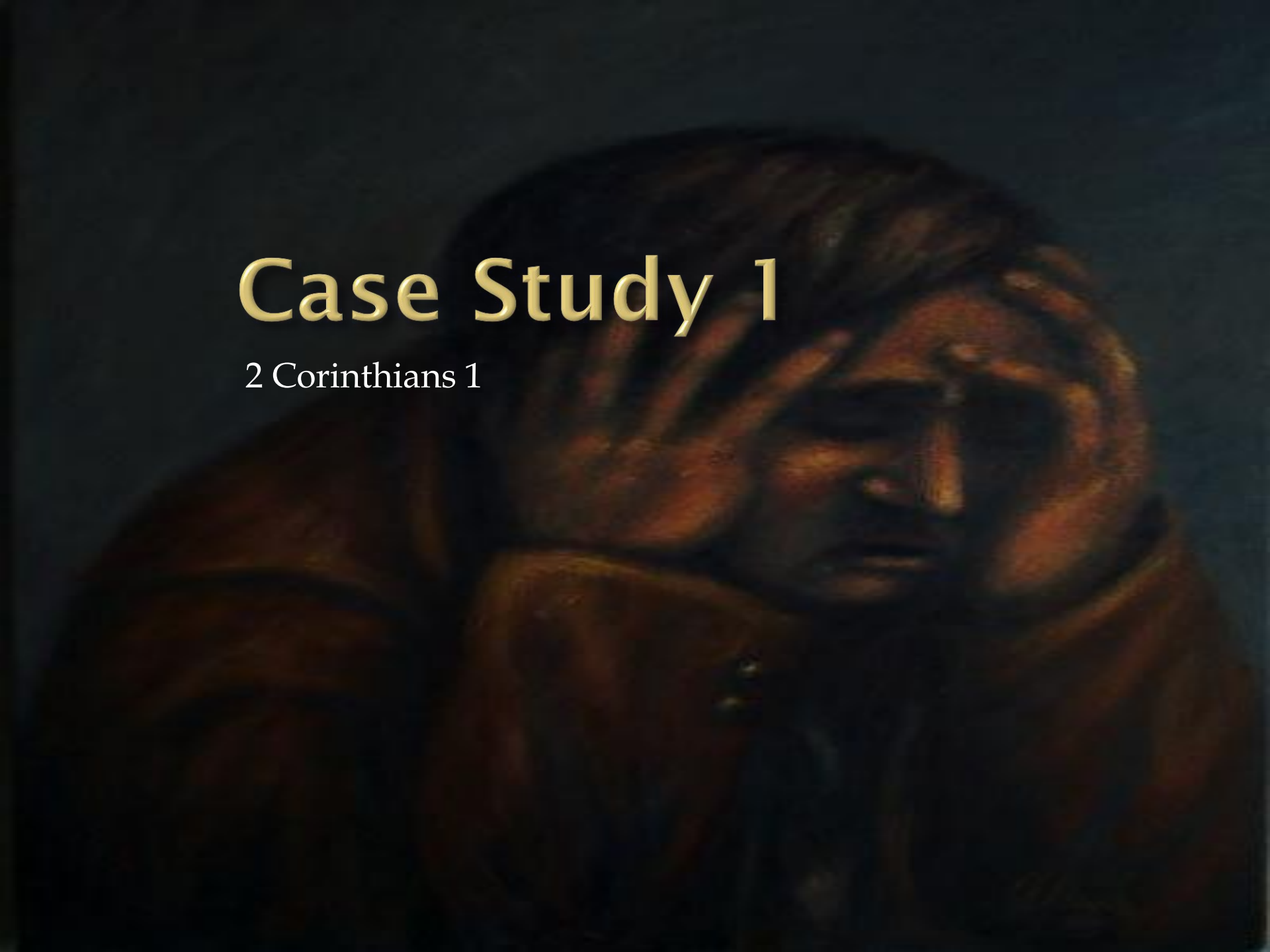
SUFFERING IS GOD'S
SERVANT

Community That Suffers Well ...

- ▣ If you don't know what to say to fix it, it is probably because you won't fix it with something you say
- ▣ Don't say you know how someone else feels
- ▣ Use Psalm 88
- ▣ Point to a suffering Jesus – his suffering was far worse than anything any human has gone through (be careful here, they will think theirs is worse)
- ▣ Be willing to tell your own story – but be careful how you do it

Case Study 1

2 Corinthians 1



Paul and Suffering

Are they (false apostles) servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. 2 Co 11:23-28

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who
comforts us in all our affliction,

so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any
affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are
comforted by God.

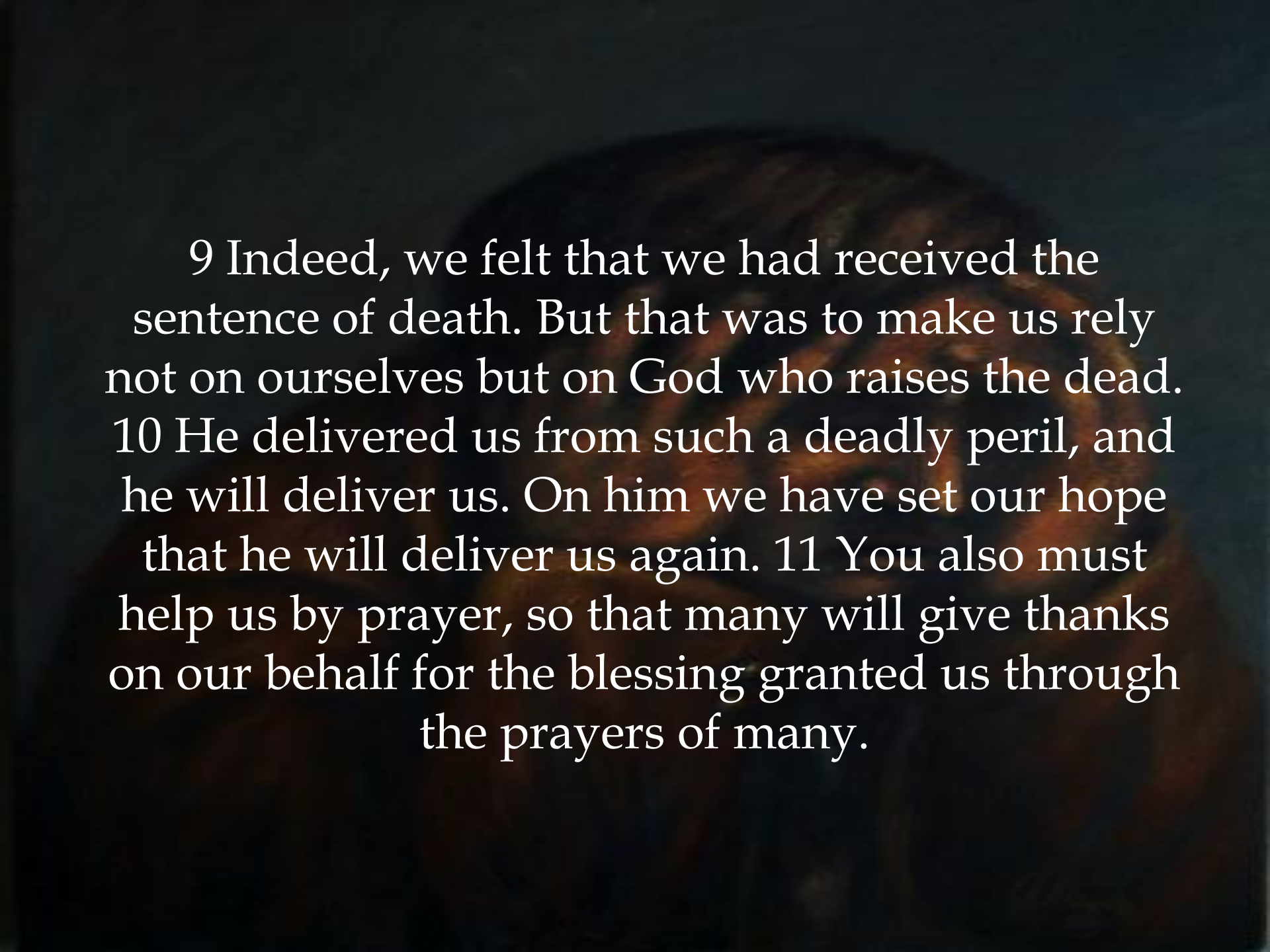
For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so
through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation;
and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you
experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings
that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we
know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also
share in our comfort.

Dark Days – V8-11

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia.

For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength (utterly, unbearably crushed RSV) that we despaired (total unavailability of an exit) of life itself (renounced all hope of survival).



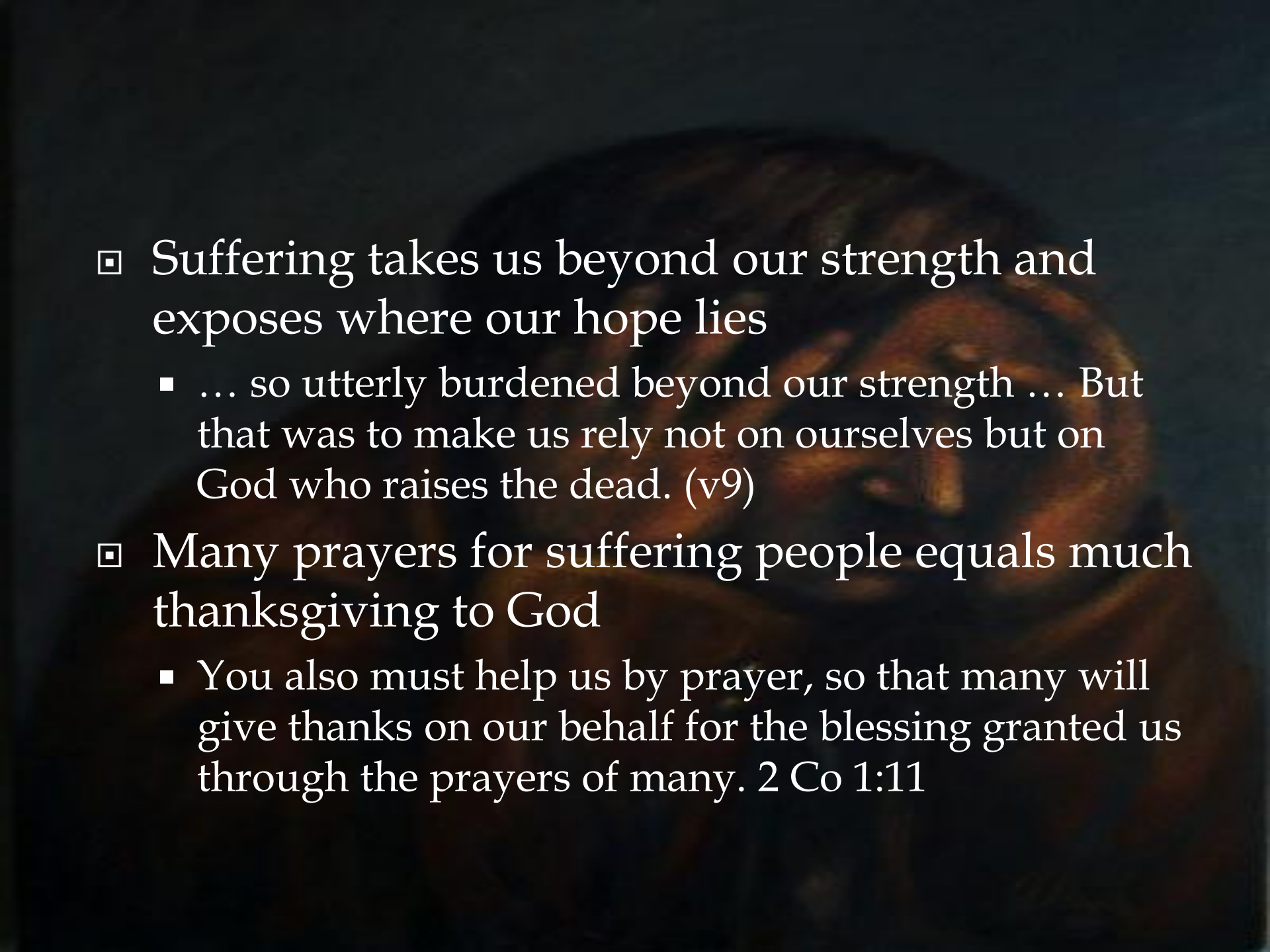
9 Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 10 He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. 11 You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many.

Joni Eareckson Tada



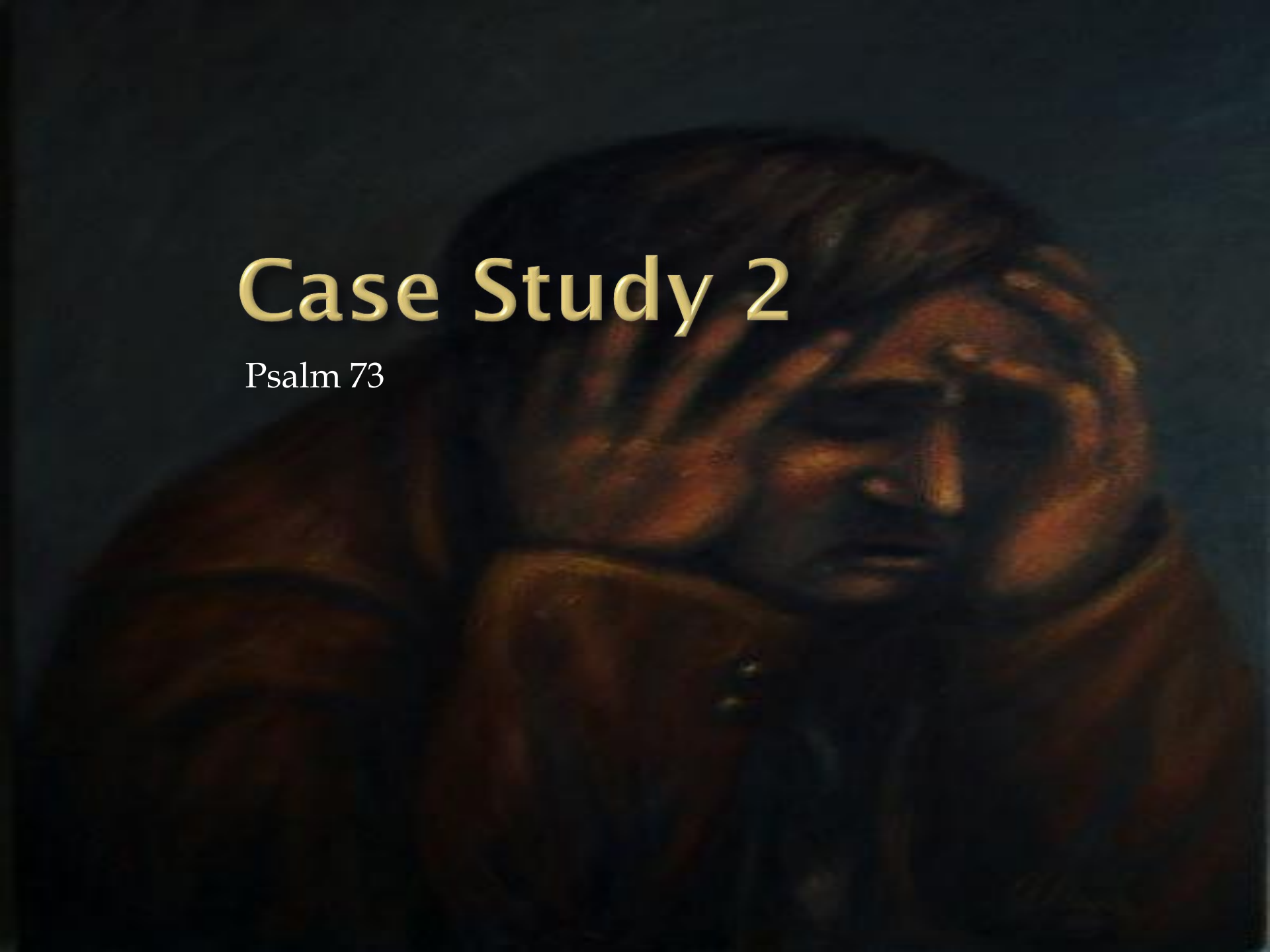
Suffering and 2 Corinthians 1

- ▣ God is the source of true compassion
 - ... the Father of mercies and God of all comfort ... comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 2 Co 1:3-4
- ▣ God wants us to share in Jesus' suffering
 - Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-13
 - Suffering does not mean that God's plan has failed. It is the plan. Suffering is a sign that we are in the family of Christ ... we suffer because we carry his name.
- ▣ Our suffering does not belong to us but to the Lord
 - Releases our strangle hold on it and the way it tends to identify us

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- ▣ Suffering takes us beyond our strength and exposes where our hope lies
 - ... so utterly burdened beyond our strength ... But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (v9)
 - ▣ Many prayers for suffering people equals much thanksgiving to God
 - You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. 2 Co 1:11

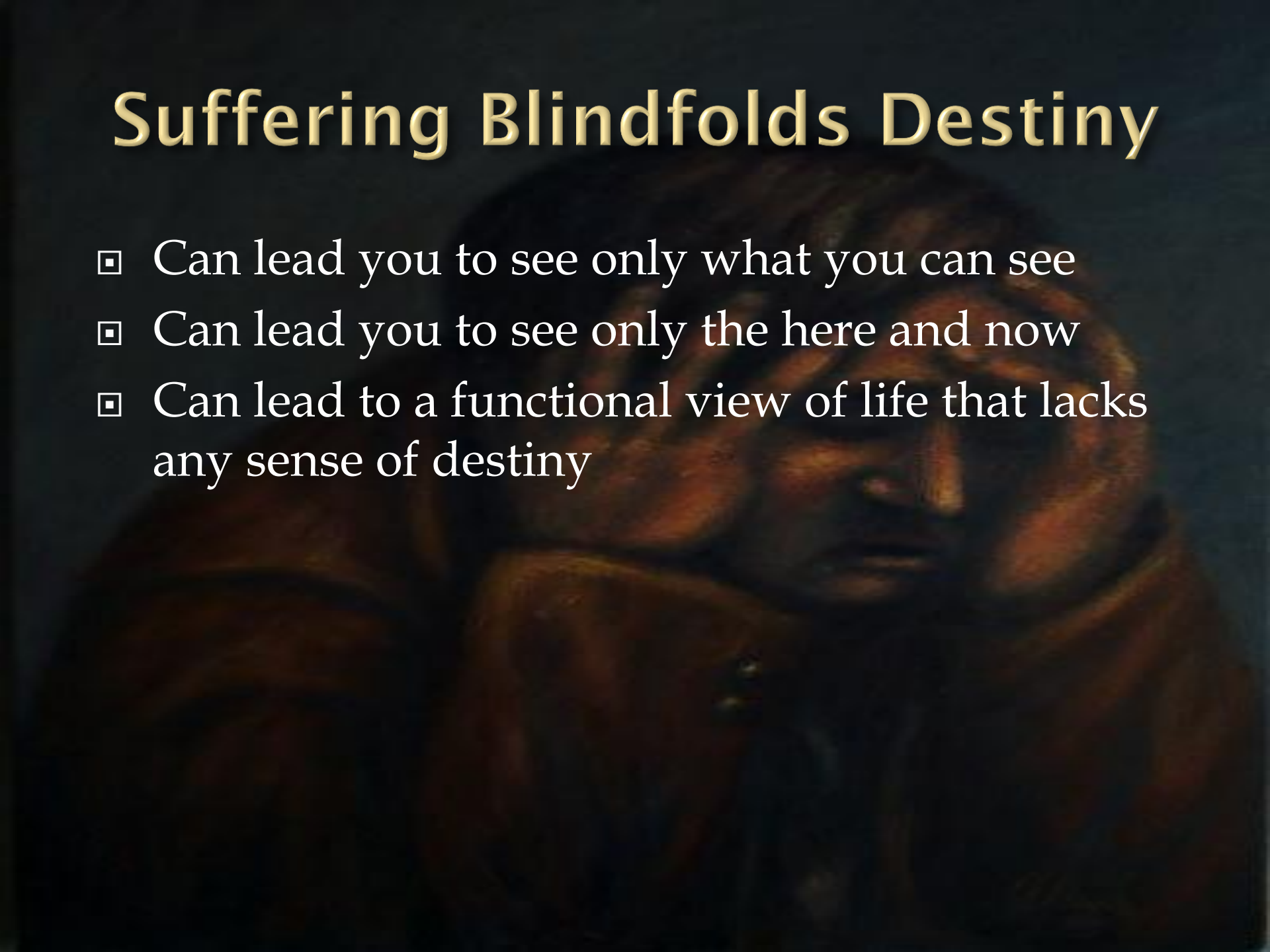
Case Study 2

Psalm 73



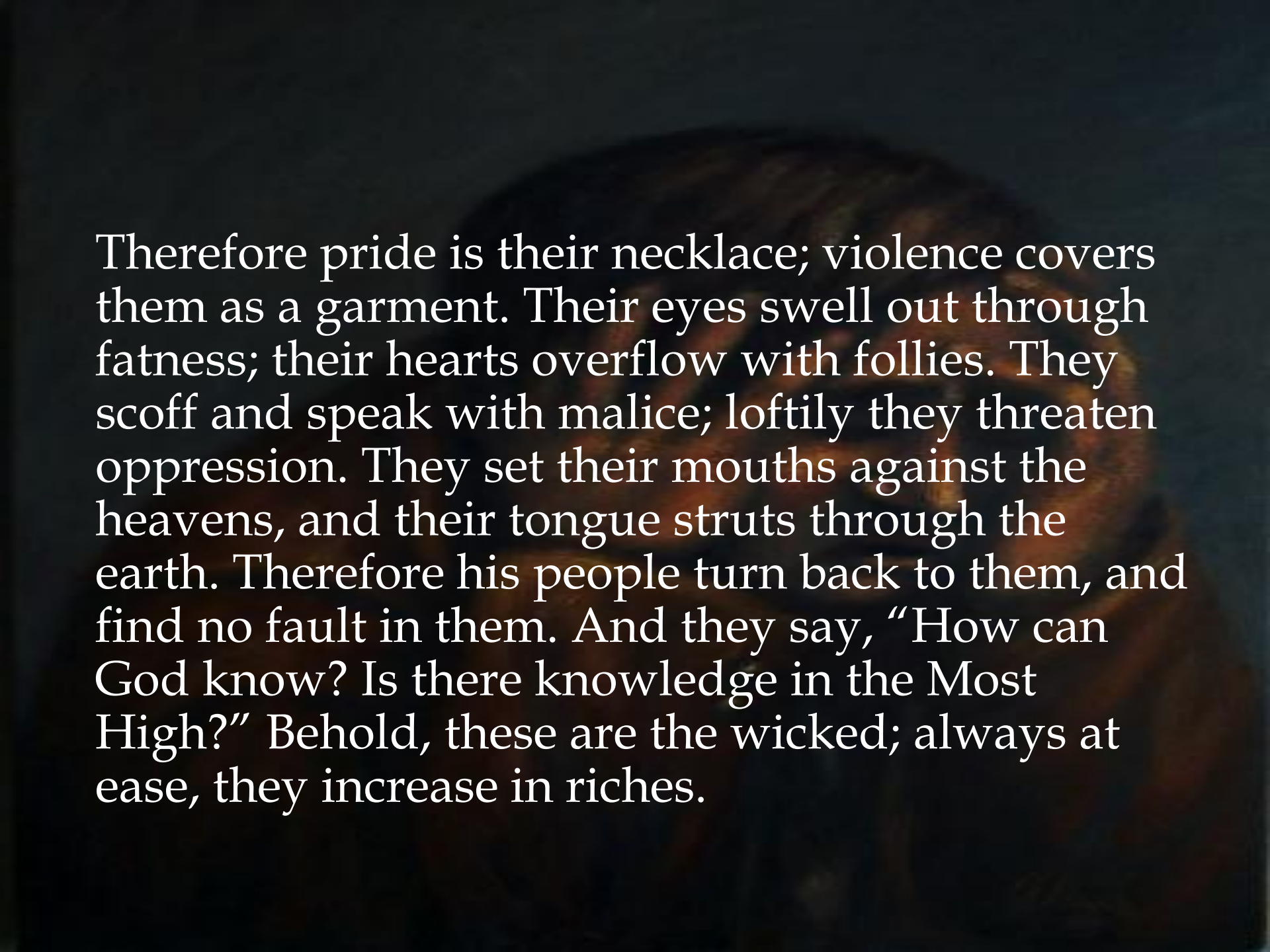
Suffering Blindfolds Destiny

- ▣ Can lead you to see only what you can see
- ▣ Can lead you to see only the here and now
- ▣ Can lead to a functional view of life that lacks any sense of destiny



Psalm 73

Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For they have no pangs until death; their bodies are fat and sleek. They are not in trouble as others are; they are not stricken like the rest of mankind.



Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. Their eyes swell out through fatness; their hearts overflow with follies. They scoff and speak with malice; loftily they threaten oppression. They set their mouths against the heavens, and their tongue struts through the earth. Therefore his people turn back to them, and find no fault in them. And they say, "How can God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?" Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

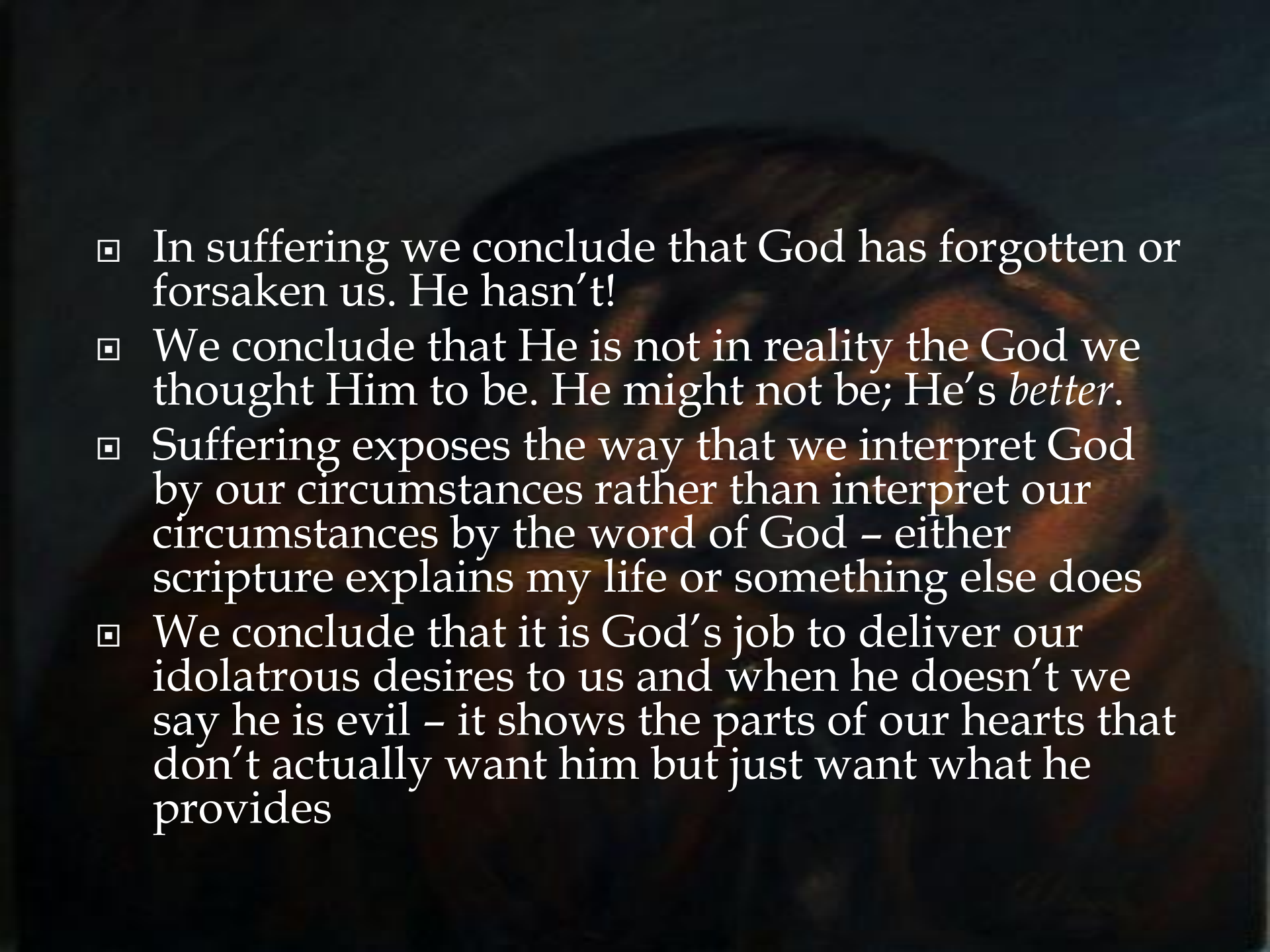
Note the Focus ...

- ▣ This view of happiness has to do with things that are physical, external, and immediate.
- ▣ Created things are central
 - Many of us want little more than to be happy, that is, to enjoy a life of relative ease in the created world.
 - Suffering reveals our worship of created things rather than the creator (Romans 1:25)
 - Whatever is our functional treasure will be the tool we use to interpret our suffering – life consists in possessing and experiencing either things seen/or unseen (conflict)

Note the Conclusions ...

All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. If I had said, "I will speak thus," I would have betrayed the generation of your children. But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task ...
(v13-16)

We tend to focus on the good result. But God focuses on the process of making us good. We are tempted to judge His faithfulness on the basis of how many of our desires for this life He has delivered. But He is working to free us from our bondage to the desires of the sinful nature.

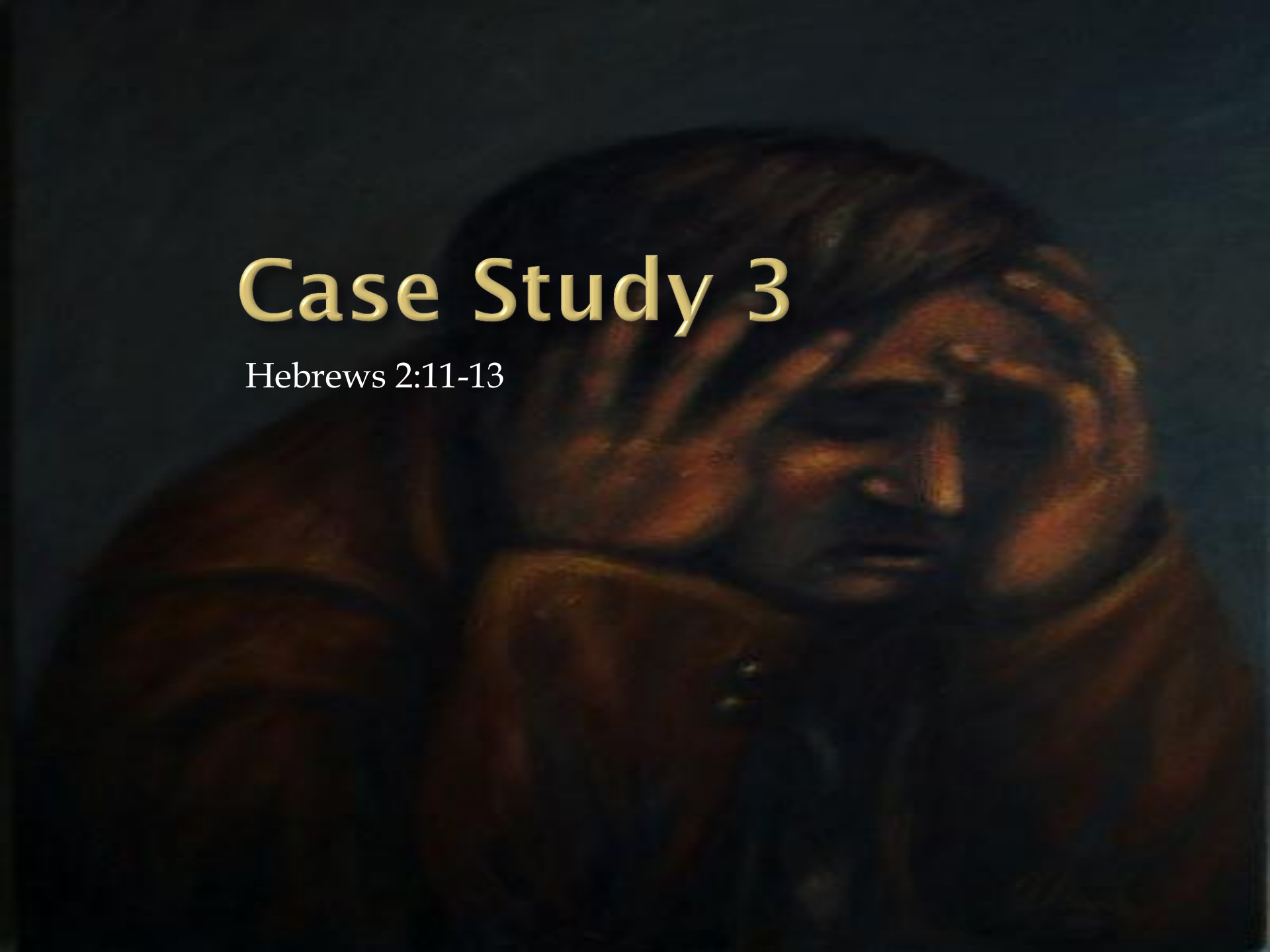
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- ▣ In suffering we conclude that God has forgotten or forsaken us. He hasn't!
 - ▣ We conclude that He is not in reality the God we thought Him to be. He might not be; He's *better*.
 - ▣ Suffering exposes the way that we interpret God by our circumstances rather than interpret our circumstances by the word of God – either scripture explains my life or something else does
 - ▣ We conclude that it is God's job to deliver our idolatrous desires to us and when he doesn't we say he is evil – it shows the parts of our hearts that don't actually want him but just want what he provides

Paul Tripp

What is God working on? Is He working hard to provide us with the biggest pile of this world's stuff and this world's happy experiences? If so, He has miserably failed. Even worse, He has used His creative and redemptive power to give us only that which is doomed to pass away. Would this be the work of a good God? Would a good God motivate us to hope in things that are by their very nature temporary? Would He want us to stand on a slippery slope? Would He want our lives to be the passing fantasies of our sleep? Would He be good if He did anything less than to confront our powerful delusion of the permanence of this world? That is what trials and suffering, death and loss do.

Case Study 3

Hebrews 2:11-13

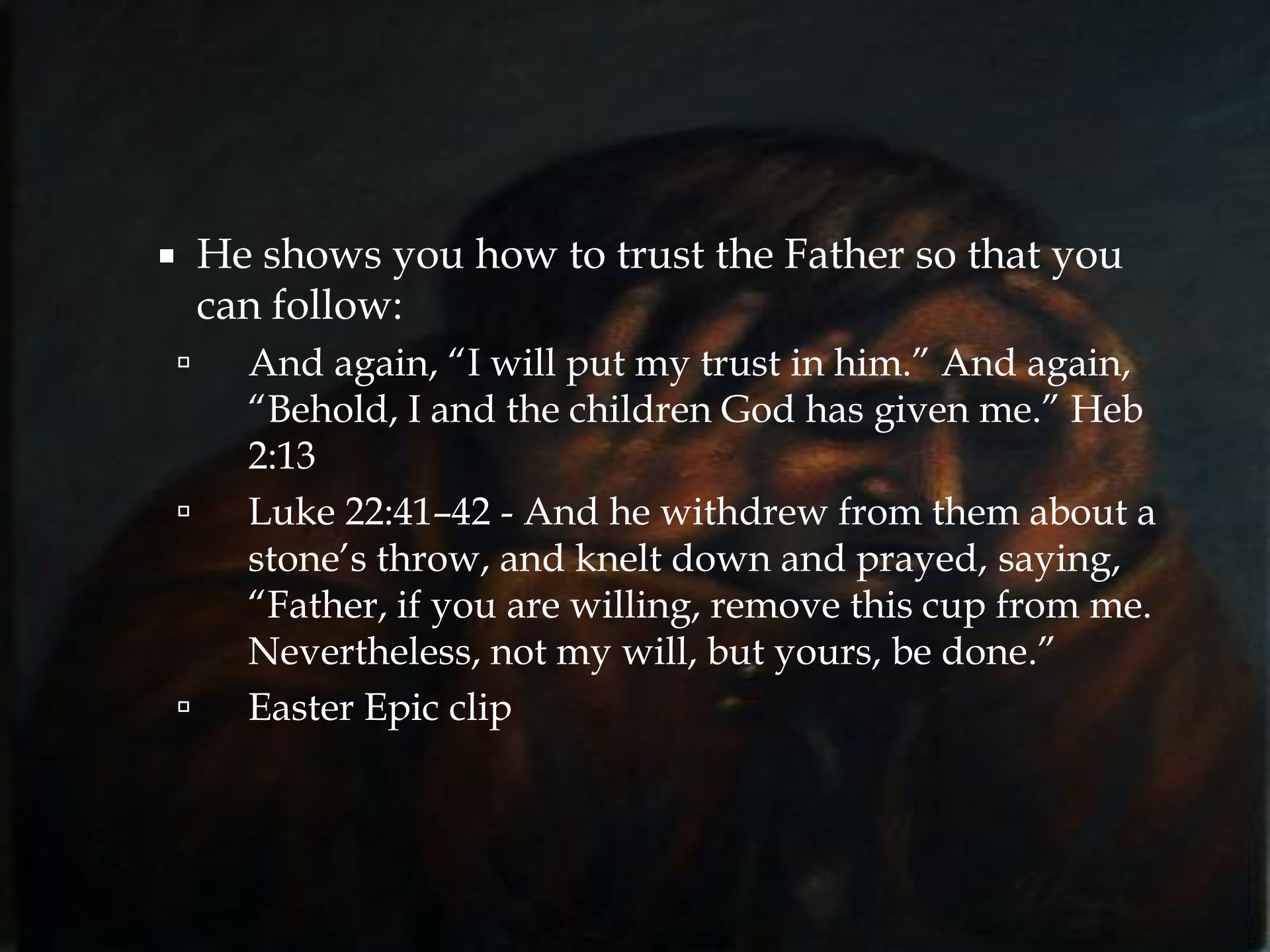


Hebrews 2:11-13

For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.” And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

Hebrews 2:11-13

- ▣ Jesus deals with the key issues for sufferers:
 - He reminds us about the character of God
 - ▣ "... I will tell of your name to my brothers ..."
 - He is with us in our suffering
 - ▣ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest. Ps 22:1-2
 - He leads you in true worship
 - ▣ ... in the midst of the congregation I (Jesus) will sing your praise. Hebrews 2:12

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- He shows you how to trust the Father so that you can follow:
 - And again, “I will put my trust in him.” And again, “Behold, I and the children God has given me.” Heb 2:13
 - Luke 22:41–42 - And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.”
 - Easter Epic clip

43 And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. 44 *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly;* and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.