

Rethinking Your Suffering

A Study of Philippians 1:27-30

Characteristic of Completeness: Faith

Big Idea: Suffering is a grace disguised.

Related Scriptures: Genesis 50:20; Deuteronomy 29:29; Job 1-2, 10, 38-39;
2 Corinthians 11:23-29; 12:7-10; James 1:2-4

Introduction:

- A. It is Friday morning, 12:30AM, and Jerry is in bed with his wife. They had just shared a delightful evening of conversation and hot chocolate and laughter. Before falling asleep, Jerry's wife, Lynda, turns to him and says, "Jerry, I can't imagine life being any better than it is right now. It is so wonderful to me. I am overcome by the goodness of God."¹

Jerry and Lynda had been married for almost twenty years. They longed to have children, but were infertile for the first eleven years of their marriage.² But then along came Catherine, now eight years old. Then David, now seven. Then Diana Jane, now four. And finally, John, now two.³ They are all sleeping peacefully in the house, along with Jerry's mother, Grace, who had come to visit for the weekend.⁴

They are a Christian family. Each has come to believe in Jesus for eternal life. Lynda has earned a Master's degree in music from USC. She is a professional singer, voice coach, choir director, and home schools the two oldest children.⁵ Jerry earned his Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary and his Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago. He is a college professor.⁶

They are good people. Not perfect, but good. Jerry and Lynda had been planning to adopt a special-needs child into their family. They were exploring the possibility of moving to Africa for a year to do volunteer work. And they were both active in building homes for the poor through Habitat for Humanity.⁷

The next day, the entire family piles into their minivan and heads out from their home in Spokane, Washington to a powwow on a Native American Reservation in rural Idaho. Lynda has been teaching the children a unit on Native American culture and this is a field trip. They spend that evening enjoying dinner with tribal leaders as they explain

¹ Jerry Sittser, *A Grief Disguised*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 54.

² Ibid, 16.

³ Ibid, 18.

⁴ Ibid, 16.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid, back cover.

⁷ Ibid, 60-61.

the various elements of the powwow—the traditional dress, the dances, the symbolism.⁸

It is 8:15PM as the family piles back into the minivan to head home on the lonely rural highway. Ten minutes into the trip, Jerry sees the headlights of an oncoming car. Suddenly, the drunk driver traveling at 85 miles per hour crosses the center line and rams the minivan head on.⁹

Jerry gets his breath. He is alive. His is the only door that will open. He struggles to pull his loved ones out of the mangled wreckage. It takes over an hour for the emergency vehicles to arrive. In that time, Jerry frantically drags himself from one family member to the next, taking pulses, doing mouth-to-mouth, and CPR. In that time, the horror settles in. Jerry watches his mother, Grace, die. Jerry watches his four-year-old, Diana Jane, die. Jerry watches his wife, Lynda, die¹⁰—the one who, less than 24 hours before, said, “Jerry, I can’t imagine life being any better than it is right now. It is so wonderful to me. I am overcome by the goodness of God.”

Where is God now?

- B. If God exists, and if God is so good, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world? What are we to make of suffering?

The biblical text we’re studying today is ► Philippians 1:27-30. Here, the Apostle Paul doesn’t give us all the answers, but he certainly encourages us to rethink the difficult issue of suffering.

I draw ► three main points from the text. I have no problem with the first two. You probably won’t either. So, I’m going to move through the first two points rather quickly.

It’s the third point that stretches me. And I think it’s going to stretch you.

- I. The first point ► is this: Suffering is to be expected. Pain is an unavoidable part of this life. Affliction is going to come. Count on it.

Let’s take a brisk walk through our text. I want to show you that it is peppered with evidence for the inevitability of suffering. At first, the evidence is more subtle and indirect. But later in the text, it becomes quite plain.

- A. In the first part of ► Verse 27, Paul says,

⁸ Ibid, 16-17.

⁹ Ibid, 17.

¹⁰ Ibid, 17-18.

^{NAU} Philippians 1:27 Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ . . .

The original Greek word translated ► “conduct yourselves” is unusual. The Greek word is *pol-it-TOO-oh-my*. It’s the word from which get our English word politics. It means to be a citizen or to live in a way consistent with one’s citizenship.¹¹

The suggestion is that believers in Jesus Christ are citizens of heaven, not of this world. As such, we’re not home yet. And being away from home is not supposed to be comfortable. Suffering is a kind of homesickness.

B. In the middle part of ► Verse 27, Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 1:27 . . . so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit . . .

► “Standing firm” suggests that there are forces or circumstances that are going to conspire to knock you down. There will be suffering.

C. In the last part of ► Verse 27, Paul says to stand firm . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 1:27 . . . with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel

The Greek term for ► “striving together” describes toiling together against an implied opponent or competitor.¹² In fact, the word carries the imagery of a military campaign,¹³ or an athletic contest, or a gladiators’ fight in an arena.¹⁴ There will be suffering.

D. In ► Verse 28, Paul says to strive together . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 1:28 in no way alarmed by *your* opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you, and that *too*, from God.

The clear assumption is that we will have ► opponents. And opponents bring suffering.

¹¹ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “πολιτεύομαι,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

¹² *Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2d. ed., eds. J.P. Louw and E.A. Nida, s.v. “συναθλέω,” (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988).

¹³ BDAG, s.v. “συναθλέω.”

¹⁴ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 150.

E. In ► Verse 29, Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake

Here, it is quite plain. We are going to suffer. It's a given.

F. Finally, in ► Verse 30, Paul says to the Philippians that they will suffer . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 1:30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

1. The Greek word for ► “conflict” is *ag-OWN*. It's the word from which we get our English word, agony.
2. What conflict or agony did the Philippians see and hear to be in Paul?
 - a. Nearly ten years earlier, they had seen for themselves Paul thrown in a Philippian jail and then run out of town for his faith.
 - b. And now Paul is under arrest in Rome.
 - c. And during the time in between, Paul himself describes his suffering in 2 Corinthians 11, beginning in Verse 23. He says he's been . . .

^{NAU} 2 Corinthians 11:23 . . . in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. 24 Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes*. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. 26 *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; 27 *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. 28 Apart from *such* external things, there is the daily pressure on me *of* concern for all the churches.

Sounds like suffering to me. Paul is saying to the Philippians, “You, too, can expect more of the same.”

- G. You ► might wonder if Paul is just talking about suffering uniquely associated with being a Christian. Maybe so. But I suspect this includes a lot more kinds of suffering than we realize.

It is a common assumption that there are two kinds of suffering: suffering for Jesus and all other suffering, “spiritual” suffering and “secular” suffering. But it seems to me such a distinction is often impossible to make for believers. Admittedly, some distinctions are clear. You play in traffic and get hit by a car, you’re suffering for your own stupidity, not for Jesus. But other forms of suffering are not so clearly categorized.

1. For example, Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 12:7, that he has a “thorn in the flesh” that won’t go away, meaning he probably had some chronic physical malady. Some speculate that he had migraines.

We don’t normally associate such things with suffering for Jesus. We might chalk that up to “all other suffering.” After all, unbelievers get migraines, too. But Paul tells us his suffering does have a spiritual dimension. It’s not just “secular.”

2. And how about Job? One day, he’s minding his own business, eating dinner. He’s not preaching. He’s not on a missionary journey. And through a series of seemingly natural disasters, he loses his livestock, his family, and his health. Looking back, we know from the Bible that his suffering had spiritual roots. There were spiritual forces in conflict. But in the midst of his suffering, Job had no way of sorting this out. In fact, his friends wrongly concluded that Job must have done something to deserve it all.

And so, it seems to me that suffering often defies tidy categorization or explanation. And I suspect suffering for Christ probably includes far more than we think, particularly for those who are following Christ.¹⁵ Suffering for Christ is inclusive. It is inexplicable. And it is inevitable. Suffering is to be expected. That’s the first point.

- II. That brings me to my ► second point: Suffering is to be endured in community. We’re supposed to suffer together, as a family. Suffering is far worse when you do it alone.

- A. In ► Verse 27, Paul says he wants to hear that the Philippians are . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 1:27 . . . standing firm in one spirit . . .

¹⁵ Silva says, “the important question arises whether or not physical persecutions, or afflictions suffered as a direct result of the believer’s Christian identity, are the only experiences that qualify as suffering for Christ. Neither this passage nor the NT more generally gives an explicit and unequivocal answer to the question. We may consider, however, that for the person whose life is committed in its totality to the service of Christ, every affliction and every frustration becomes an obstacle to fulfilling the goal of serving Christ,” Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2ed. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1992, 2005), 84.

To stand firm in “one spirit” means to suffer together as a family, as a unit, as a team.

- B. And notice later in ► Verse 27, Paul says he wants to hear that they are standing firm .

..

^{NAU} Philippians 1:27 . . . with one mind striving together . . .

The phrase rendered, “with one mind” could just as legitimately be translated, “as one person.” When one person hurts, we are all to hurt, because believers constitute one body of Christ on earth. We are to suffer together.

- C. It seems to me, therefore, we ought to allow others in the church family to enter into our suffering. There’s nothing godly or noble about suffering silently alone.

It also seems to me that this is strong motivation to sink your roots deeply into a church family in anticipation of the suffering that will surely come. Suffering is to be endured in community. That’s the second point.

- III. I suspect that ► Points 1 and 2 are easy enough to swallow. Suffering is to be expected, and suffering is to be endured in community.

But Point 3 is going to go down hard. Here it ► is: Suffering is to be viewed as a grace. A gift. A favor. A blessing from God. Suffering is a grace disguised. In fact, that is ► the big idea of my message this morning: Suffering is a grace disguised.

- A. Let me show you how I get that from our text. There are two pieces of evidence that support this big idea.

1. The first piece of evidence is merely corroborating; I could scarcely make the case on this first piece of evidence alone, but it does help. It comes in the last part of ► Verse 28, where Paul says, “and that *too*, from God.” To what does ► “that” refer? It seems clear that whatever “that” is, it comes “from God.”

It is very natural for us to go backwards to the nearest preceding idea to determine what “that” refers to. And so, on that basis, ► we would normally think “salvation” is “that” which comes from God. It’s the closest thing that comes before, and it makes sense, right?

Not ► so fast. In Greek, terms are given genders—masculine, feminine, neuter—so that terms that belong together can be matched up. When the gender of terms is considered, it becomes clear that the “that” does *not* refer

to “salvation” but to the whole concept of striving and suffering in the entire preceding context.¹⁶

What’s the point? Somehow, suffering comes from God. I’m not saying evil comes from God. But it is God who allows us to suffer.

2. This fits with the second piece of evidence that comes in ► Verse 29, where Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake

Paul is saying that both believing in Jesus and suffering for Jesus have been “granted” to you. You may be surprised to know that the word for ► “granted” is built off the Greek word for “grace.” Here, to grant means ► to give freely and graciously as a favor.¹⁷ What Paul is saying, then, is to suffer for Christ is given to us by God freely and graciously as a favor. I see no way around it: Suffering is a gift of grace. Suffering is a grace disguised. And I’m not out on a limb on this. A host of scholars confirm that I’m interpreting this text accurately.¹⁸

- B. How ► in the world can suffering be a grace disguised? Paul doesn’t elaborate. And in all the Scriptures, I can find helpful glimpses of meaning in suffering, but not a complete explanation. There are some examples of how God took something evil and turned it into something good. The story of Joseph comes to mind. And certainly Christ’s crucifixion. And we’re told that trials can build character¹⁹ and that it can help us comfort others.²⁰ But I haven’t found a full explanation.

It’s as if God is saying, “You’re just going to have to trust Me on this one.” I imagine it’s a little like parent saying to a toddler, “Eat this; it’s good for you.” But it tastes awful. We receive it by faith. Indeed, that’s our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week: faith.

¹⁶ Bible scholar Randy Leedy has grammatically diagrammed the entire New Testament in Greek save portions Revelation, which he still working on (available in Bibleworks®). In the notes for his diagram that includes Verse 28, he says, “I’m taking [‘that’] (neuter gender) as referring, not to salvation (feminine gender), but to the whole concept of suffering courageously for Christ. This whole business of from God, because suffering for Christ is part of what God has graciously given to us.” O’Brien seems to agree (157).

¹⁷ BDAG, s.v. “χαρίζομαι.”

¹⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians, Black’s New Testament Commentary*, ed. Henry Chadwick, (London: A & C Black, 1998), 102; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 171; O’Brien, 158; Silva, 83; Frank Thielman, *Philippians, The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry Muck, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995). 100-101.

¹⁹ James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-4.

²⁰ 2 Corinthians 1:3-5.

When it comes to suffering, there are some things I just don't get. I guess it shouldn't come as a shock; I can only know what God has revealed, and He hasn't revealed everything. Deuteronomy ► 29:29 tells us,

^{NAU} **Deuteronomy 29:29** "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us . . ."

I can ► almost hear and certainly sympathize with a person who is disgusted, thinking, "Well that's just not good enough for me. You say suffering is a grace disguised. Well, tell that to Jerry, the guy who lost his mother and daughter and wife!"

Actually Jerry told that to me. Not personally; I don't know Jerry. But some three years after his tragedy, Jerry Sittser wrote ► a book about it titled, *A Grace Disguised*. I borrowed his words for the big idea of this message. And I'm going to borrow heavily from his book now in outlining some of the ways that Sittser feels that his suffering has been for him a grace disguised.

But first I want to point out that Sittser is not a superficial, Pollyannaish, just-put-on-a-happy-face kind of guy who is in denial. He is refreshingly real. He ► says,

. . . I feel compelled to say at the outset, however inadequate my words, that what has happened to me has pressed me to the limit. ► I have come face to face with the darker side of life and with the weakness of my own human nature. ► As vulnerable as I feel most of the time, I can hardly call myself a conqueror. If I give the impression I think myself heroic, perfect, or strong, then I give the wrong impression. . . .

► *My suffering is as puzzling and horrible to me now as it was the day it happened.*²¹

And yet, Sittser is able to say ► this, too: "If we face loss squarely and respond to it wisely, we will actually become healthier people, even as we draw closer to physical death. We will find our souls healed, as they can only be healed through suffering."²²

How can he say that? What exactly is he talking about?

Borrowing from Sittser's experiences, let me offer ► a list of six ways that suffering can make us better people. It's by no means a complete list. And I am careful to say ► suffering *can* make us better, not *will*.

Suffering *can* make us better, if we allow it to do its work in us to draw us closer to God. Suffering will *not* make us better if we remain embittered and hardened to its lessons.

²¹ Sittser, 11.

²² Ibid, 10.

1. First, ► suffering can point us back to God, to think more deeply about who He is, and wrestle with questions about His character that we wouldn't otherwise. I'm going to be quoting Sittser extensively. I don't normally do this, but I simply can't match his authority or his eloquence on this topic. He explains,

*... suffering forces us to think about God's essential nature. Is God sovereign? Is God good? Can we trust Him?*²³

*... I chose to become a professor because I **wanted** to think about big questions . . . But after the accident I **had** to think about them, especially about God's sovereignty, which forced itself upon me through the crisis of my experience. For years I had prayed every morning that God would protect my family from harm and danger, and I thanked God every night that these prayers had been answered. I did not thank God the night of the accident, and I hesitated for many months afterwards to begin praying again for anything. I was tortured by the question of where God was that night. I wondered whether I would ever again be able to trust him.*²⁴

*I longed to continue believing in God. . . . Still, I could not help asking, "What if God—the God I have trusted for so long—does not exist?" I followed the trail of that question for a while, looking honestly at where it would lead me. Since suffering made belief in God more difficult, at least for a time, I decided to investigate the implications of unbelief. What would atheism do for me in my suffering that belief in God did not do or could not do?*²⁵

The farther I followed the trail of this question, the more troubled I became. I discovered that sorrow itself needs the existence of God to validate it as a healthy and legitimate emotion. If there is no God, human emotion collapses into a terrible relativism, and it makes no difference how we respond to loss. It becomes entirely subjective, like individual tastes in ice cream. I cried at the funeral because I lost three people whom I loved. But why? Why not snicker at their burial and scoff at the whole experience? We grieve the dissolution of a marriage. But again, why? Why not celebrate the freedom from obligation and urge married people to take such commitments less seriously? We mourn a man's tragic accident and severe disability. But why not laugh at his condition instead? We empathize with a

²³ Ibid, 137.

²⁴ Ibid, 138.

²⁵ Ibid.

couple who has a Down's syndrome baby. But why not urge them to institutionalize the baby and try again?²⁶

If there were no God, there appears to be no ultimate reason why we should feel one way or the other, since emotions like grief or happiness have no grounding in a greater objective reality outside the self. In an atheistic worldview, it becomes all but impossible to establish to absoluteness of truth and falsehood, or good and evil, or right and wrong. . . . Not that atheists feel less bad about suffering than religious people do. Suffering hurts, no matter what the worldview of the people who experience it. It is this fact that we identify something as bad that makes me want to ask, "Where did we get the idea of good and bad in the first place?"²⁷

. . . Such knowledge can only come from the existence of God.²⁸

The trail of atheism I followed, therefore, led me right back to belief in God.²⁹

Suffering can point us back to God

2. Second, ► suffering can also make us more. Our souls can grow larger through suffering. Sittser says,

. . . though I experienced death, I also experienced life in ways that I never thought possible before—not after the darkness, as we might suppose, but in the darkness. I did not go through pain and come out the other side; instead, I lived in it and found within that pain the grace to survive and eventually grow. I did not get over the loss of my loved ones; rather, I absorbed the loss into my life, like soil receives decaying matter, until it became a part of who I am. Sorrow took up permanent residence in my soul and enlarged it. I learned gradually that the deeper we plunge into suffering, the deeper we can enter into a new, and different, life—a life no worse than before and sometimes better. A willingness to face the loss and to enter into the darkness is the first step we must take. Like all first steps, it is probably the most difficult and takes the most time. . . .³⁰

²⁶ Ibid, 138-139.

²⁷ Ibid, 139.

²⁸ Ibid, 140.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid, 37.

. . . The soul is elastic, like a balloon. It can grow larger through suffering. Loss can enlarge its capacity for anger, depression, despair, and anguish, all natural and legitimate emotions whenever we experience loss. Once enlarged, the soul is also capable of experiencing greater joy, strength, peace, and love.³¹

. . . Loss can make us more.³²

. . . the grief I feel is sweet as well as bitter. I still have a sorrowful soul; yet I wake up every morning joyful, eager for what the new day will bring. Never have I felt as much pain as I have in the last three years; yet never have I experienced as much pleasure in simply being alive and living an ordinary life. Never have I felt so broken; yet never have I been so whole. Never have I been so aware of my weakness and vulnerability; yet never have I been so content and felt so strong. Never has my soul been more dead; yet never has my soul been more alive. What I once considered mutually exclusive—sorrow and joy, pain and pleasure, death and life—have become parts of a greater whole. My soul has been stretched.³³

Suffering can make us more.

3. Third, ► suffering can also simplify and clarify our lives. Sittser says,

Deep sorrow often has the effect of stripping life of pretense, vanity, and waste. It forces us to ask basic questions about what is most important in life. Suffering can lead to a simpler life, less cluttered with nonessentials. It is wonderfully clarifying.³⁴

. . . During that first year I cared little about advancement or prestige. I did my job, though not to impress other people or to get ahead. I was rarely elated by successes or depressed by failures—as if I was detached from it all. When I came up for tenure, I never wondered or worried about it. I spent time with friends because I valued being with them, and I decided what I wanted to believe because I thought it was true and right, not because it was popular or expected. I reflected on the kind of person I wanted to be, not to please others but to be true to God and myself. I enjoyed a rare kind of simplicity, freedom, and equilibrium that I may never know again.³⁵

³¹ Ibid, 39.

³² Ibid, 40.

³³ Ibid, 179-180.

³⁴ Ibid, 63.

³⁵ Ibid, 64-65.

. . . Loss invites us to ask basic questions about ourselves. “What do I believe?” “Is there life after death?” Is there a God?” “What kind of person am I?” Do I really care about other people?” “How have I used my resources—my time, money, and talent?” “Where am I headed with my life?”³⁶

. . . Life in the present moment has become a gift to me.³⁷

. . . I will never recover from my loss and I will never get over missing the ones I lost. . . . Moreover, I will always want the ones I lost back again. I long for them with all my soul. But I still celebrate the life I have found because they are gone. I have lost, but I have also gained. I lost the world I loved, but I gained a deeper awareness of grace. That grace has enabled me to clarify my purpose in life and rediscover the wonder of the present moment.³⁸

Suffering can simplify and clarify our lives.

4. Fourth, ► suffering can also help us define ourselves more internally and less externally. Sittser says,

Loss forces us to see the dominant role our environment plays in determining our happiness. Loss strips us of the props we rely on for well-being. It knocks us off our feet and puts us on our backs. In the experience of loss, we come to the end of ourselves.³⁹

But in coming to the end of ourselves, we can also come to the beginning of a vital relationship with God.⁴⁰

. . . we reach a point where we begin to search for a new life, one that depends less on circumstances and more on the depth of our souls.⁴¹

. . . We need someone greater than ourselves to help us forge a new identity. God is able to guide us on this quest, to help us become persons whose worth is based on grace and not on performance, accomplishments, and power.⁴²

Suffering can help us define ourselves more internally and less externally.

³⁶ Ibid, 65.

³⁷ Ibid, 67.

³⁸ Ibid, 68.

³⁹ Ibid, 77-78.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 78.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 79.

5. Fifth, ► suffering can also help us come to grips with forgiveness. Suffering almost always comes with regrets. “If only I had . . .” “I should have said . . .” “Maybe this wouldn’t have happened if I . . .” Sittser says,

*Regret is inescapable in a world of imperfection, failure, and loss. . . . People with regrets can be redeemed, but they cannot reverse the loss that gave rise to the regrets.*⁴³

*. . . If I want transformation, I must let go of my regrets over what could have been and pursue what can be.*⁴⁴

*. . . loss can be transformative if it causes us to seek the forgiveness of God.*⁴⁵

*. . . The gift of divine forgiveness will help us to forgive ourselves. . . . Divine forgiveness leads to self-forgiveness.*⁴⁶

Suffering can help us come to grips with forgiveness.

6. Finally, ► suffering can also open our eyes to grace. Sittser explains,

*Why me? I have asked that question often, as many people do after suffering loss.*⁴⁷

*. . . I once heard heard someone ask the opposite question, “Why not me?”*⁴⁸

*“Why not me?” is as good a question to ask as any.*⁴⁹

*So why not me? Can I expect to live an entire lifetime free of disappointment and suffering? Free of loss and pain? The very expectation strikes me as not only unrealistic but also arrogant.*⁵⁰

*. . . Granted, I did not deserve to lose three members of my family. But then again, I am not sure I deserved to have them in the first place.*⁵¹

⁴³ Ibid, 85.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 91.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 108.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 109.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 110.

⁵¹ Ibid, 111.

. . . On the face of it, living in a perfectly fair world appeals to me. But deeper reflection makes me wonder. In such a world I might never experience tragedy; but neither would I experience grace, especially the grace God gave me in the form of the three wonderful people whom I lost.⁵²

. . . The problem of expecting to live in a perfectly fair world is that there is no grace in that world, for grace is grace only when it is undeserved.⁵³

I dread experiencing undeserved pain, but it is worth it to me if I can also experience undeserved grace.⁵⁴

. . . Despite the fact that I had been a Christian for many years before the accident, since then God has become a living reality to me as never before. . . . Grace is transforming me, and it is wonderful. I have slowly learned where God belongs and have allowed him to assume that place—at the center of life rather than at the periphery.⁵⁵

So God spare us a life of fairness! To live in a world with grace is better by far than to live in a world of absolute fairness. A fair world may make life nice for us, but only as nice as we are. We may get what we deserve, but I wonder how much that is and whether or not we would really be satisfied. A world with grace will give us more than we deserve. It will give us life, even in our suffering.⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid, 112.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 114.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 115.

⁵⁶ Ibid.