# Gratitude – In sickness and in health

***Lessons from childbirth – that pain is intermingled with joy***

***Ecclesiastes 3***

*There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens: 2a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, 3a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, 4a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, 5a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,*

***We hold together two things which we know about life***

* ***Romans 8:28-30*** – God works all things for our good.
* ***Romans 8:22-23*** – The whole creation groans in pain – so do we.

***Turning to God in sickness***

***We must not confuse lamenting with grumbling***

* ***Grumbling*** is when our trials drive us from God rather than towards Him
* ***Lamenting*** talks to God about our pain in humble faith
* A complaint is an accusation against God that maligns His character, but a lament is an appeal to God based on confidence in His character.

***Psalm 13 is a model of lamentation***

* ***Turn (13:1) –*** We turn to God and state the problem to Him
* ***Complain (13:1- 2)*** - We humbly and honestly identify our pain.
* ***Ask (13:3-4) –*** We move on to ask for the Lord’s help.
* ***Trust (13:5-6) -*** We end with an expression of trust in God

*“No matter what precautions we take, no matter how well we have put together a good life, no matter how hard we have worked to be healthy, wealthy, comfortable with friends and family, and successful with our career — something will inevitably ruin it.”* Tim Keller

***Truths about God revealed by suffering***

***Luther’s three pillows (to help us sleep at night)***

***God is sovereign***

* ***Daniel 4:34-36*** – His dominion is an eternal dominion.
* ***Genesis 50:20*** – Who sent Joseph to Egypt?
* ***Acts 2:22-24*** – Who sent Jesus to the cross?

***God is good***

* ***Deuteronomy 32:4*** *–* To be good is to be worthy of approval. God is the final standard of goodness. God’s character, actions and intentions are always worthy of approval.
* ***Psalm 34:8*** *– “Taste and see that the Lord is good.”*
* ***Romans 5:6-8*** - The death of Christ proves that God is good.

***God is wise***

* *God’s wisdom mean that he always chooses the best goals and the best means of achieving those goals.*
* ***Psalm 18:30 –*** *God’s way is perfect.*
* ***Job 38-41 –*** *God does not explain all His ways.*
* ***Deuteronomy 29:29 –*** *The secret things belong to God.*

*“I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.”* Elizabeth Elliot

***Trusting God’s purposes despite sickness or suffering***

***Sickness or suffering drives us into the arms of God***

* ***Psalm 73:13-22*** *– It drives us* ***to*** *God or* ***from*** *God – the choice is ours.*
* *“God whispers in our prosperity; he speaks in his word; he shouts in our suffering.” - C S Lewis*
* ***Deuteronomy 8:3*** *– In the Wilderness we learn that we do not “live by bread alone”.*
* ***Job 42:5*** *- Job confessed, “I had heard of God by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you”.*

***Sickness or suffering can deepen our prayer lives***

* ***2 Chronicles 20:12*** *- “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you”.*
* ***Nehemiah 1:3-4*** *- Devastating news causes us to weep, to fast, and to pray.*
* ***Romans 8:26*** *- When we lack words to pray, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness,” interceding for us “with groanings too deep for words”.*

***Sickness or suffering makes us more like Jesus***

* ***Romans 8:28-30*** – God’s good purpose is to create people like his Son.
* ***We are given three images as to how God does this:***
  + *“****Psalm 66:10-12*** *– We are being refined like silver.*
  + ***Hebrews 12:1-13*** *– We are being chastened like a beloved child.*
  + ***John 15:1-8*** *– We are being pruned like a fruitful vine.*
* ***Luke 22:42*** - Jesus tasted the deepest cup of suffering for us

***Sickness or suffering can grow our faith***

* ***2 Corinthians 1:8-11 –*** *Trials happen so “ that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”*
* ***1 Peter 1:7 -*** *Trials prove the genuineness of our faith.*
* ***2 Corinthians 12:7-10 -*** *The thorn was a painful, chronic, limiting, and humiliating problem. It magnified the grace of God in Paul’s life.*

***Sickness or suffering point our eyes towards heaven***

* ***Romans 8:18*** – Present suffering will result in future glor
* ***2 Corinthians 4:17-18*** – These light and momentary sufferings are preparing for us an eternal weight of glory
* ***Hebrews 2:14-15 -*** *Jesus destroys the fear of death*
* ***1 Corinthians 15:20 –*** *He is the firstfruits of those who will be raised*
* ***Revelation 7:15-17; 21:1-4: 22:1-5 –*** *God is the final reward of His people*
* ***–*** *Trials happen so “ that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead.”*
* ***1 Peter 1:7 -*** *Trials prove the genuineness of our faith.*
* ***2 Corinthians 12:7-10 -*** *The thorn was a painful, chronic, limiting, and humiliating problem. It magnified the grace of God in Paul’s life.*

*“The mark of a child of God, is not that we have attained or are perfect, but that we long for Christ, we thirst like hungry babies for his Word and fellowship and power. And the better we know him, the more we love him. And when we finally enter into his presence with rejoicing, our endless song will be, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing." Your mouth is always full of praises for what you value most. ‘To you who believe, he is precious.’”* John Piper

***Where does Gratefulness in sickness take us?***

Faith that is real leads to faith that is strong, which points to faith that is eternal

With faith, there is gratefulness. With gratefulness comes joy

**Questions**

* How does Romans 8:22-23, 28 help us respond to the claim, ‘If you had enough faith you would be healed’ and to our inner worry, ‘If God really loved me he wouldn’t let me continue to suffer.’
* What does Psalm 13 teach us about how to lament well?
* How does knowing God’s sovereignty, goodness and wisdom help us to be grateful despite our suffering?
* You are being refined like silver (Psalm 66:10-12), chastened like a beloved child (Hebrews 12:1-13), and pruned like a fruitful vine (John 15:1-8). What do these images and Bible passages teach us about God’s love and purpose in suffering? How do they encourage our gratitude?
* In what ways does suffering prepare us for glory?
* How can we best minister to others when they are in pain?
* How best do we grow those in our churches who have never been through sickness or suffering to not be fearful of it?

**Reflections**

* Why do we perpetuate the myth of pretending to other Christians that we’re not facing stress, hardship or sorrow?
* Elisabeth Elliot said, ‘I am not a theologian or a scholar, but I am very aware of the fact that pain is necessary to all of us. In my own life, I think I can honestly say that out of the deepest pain has come the strongest conviction of the presence of God and the love of God.’ What have you learnt about God through your pain and suffering? Pause, jot one or two of these lessons down, and turn them into prayers of thanks to God.
* Imagine the Master silversmith holding you in the furnace until all the dross is burnt away and he sees his reflection in you. Picture your heavenly Father disciplining you because you are his, he loves you and wants you to share more of his holiness. See the gardener pruning, cutting away even the good things in life, so that you would be more fruitful. Dwell on these images and share with a Christian friend how God is working in these ways in your life.
* Pain can either turn us away or towards God. Pray for the Lord’s grace so you can allow this time of suffering to deepen your prayer life and strengthen your relationship with God: ‘We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you’ (2 Chronicles 20:12).