

## SageTalk Episode #19 – Suffering: Does It Come With Instructions?

Paul Lawler: Greetings, this is Paul Lawler. I'm with Al Henson and this is Sage Talk. Al, would you set up our topic for today?

Al Henson: I'd love to. It's good to be here Paul with you, and most important it's good to be here with Jesus.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: We really hope that as you and I are having conversations about topics and subjects, it's with Jesus, and Jesus is having a conversation importantly with us, with others. Dear brother, sister, friend, thanks for listening in. Our thread through our podcasts in these weeks have been for some time now transformation.

Al Henson: It is a thread, because we come to understand in the heart of God and the mind of God and the will of God that our individual transformation, Romans 8:29, that God has, before the foundation of the world, knowing us, determined that we could be made and formed and conformed and transformed into the likeness, into the image of the person of Jesus Christ.

Al Henson: To love like he loves, to see things the way he sees things, to think the way he thinks. Transformation, and we've been choosing subjects. A couple of podcasts ago, we had confession. Last week, worship and you got on fire Paul on that one.

Al Henson: This week, part one and then part two, we're going to deal with the suffering, adversity, trials and its impact and purposes, redemptive purposes in transformation, as well as in the expansion of the kingdom, as well as the glory of God.

Paul Lawler: Now this is such a relevant topic. There's no life, there's no listener with us today that suffering has not and will not, said with compassion, touch every life in some way.

Al Henson: Theologically it's because man has fallen into sin and man is separated from God. Man is being driven by selfishness and greed and lust so much. In the midst of a fallen culture, enslaved in sin, suffering, it's there. All of us have suffered.

Al Henson: A loss of a loved one, a child, cancer. Paul, I've been with brothers and sisters who have been martyred. Some of my Timothy's have been martyred, and I have seen suffering. With compassion and hope we are rescuing now. I received information just two days ago of a 15 year old girl who had been sexually abused.

Al Henson: Now she's with a child, and her mother just died. She's alone. I found her on the street six months pregnant and she's suffering. Sometimes when we think of

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suffering ... One of the greatest things I see in suffering, Paul, is because of such ...

Al Henson: Even in America, as around the world, there's such a deterioration of the family, because there's such a deterioration of light and truth, that so many young people are growing up now in a very unhealthy, even abusive, sexually abusive situation, but just unhealthy situation, a broken home.

Al Henson: They're suffering, because they're lacking the love God intended them to have. They have experienced a lot of rejection, and not acceptance. They've been dishonored, so they feel of no value, of no worth and hopeless. Suffering is just ... When we're speaking of suffering, we talking of suffering in every direction Paul.

Paul Lawler: Pervasive in nature.

Al Henson: Yeah, it's there. Just a general direction to guide you as a listener to be able to follow us, today we're going to deal with the, how do I suffer? We'll try to help you answer the question, how do I suffer? I'm in the middle of it.

Al Henson: Some listener is in the middle of something. This is one of those podcasts that listen, but you need to call a friend. Everyone out there knows somebody who is suffering that will need to hear some of the sage wisdom we might give them today that we've learned as we've suffered with others and with ourselves.

Al Henson: We're going to answer the question today, how do I suffer? I'm in the midst of it, and God is not always delivering us just immediately out of suffering, but he walks with us, and how do I suffer? How do I suffer with people that are suffering?

Al Henson: Secondly, we're going to talk about when you are suffering, you're extremely vulnerable. We're going to talk some about vulnerability while you're suffering. Let's just start into this Paul, just some conversation you and I with Jesus about how do I suffer?

Paul Lawler: Al, this is a little bit personal, but several times in ... Just for the fact that we've done life for decades, our family, just as your family, has gone through seasons where health reasons there was deep suffering. We've gone through seasons of persecution as followers of Christ.

Paul Lawler: In Western cultures, as you know, Pastors, if you're taking a biblical stand, you're going to take some hits. We've faced all of that, but I would begin by saying that one of the things that's been key in suffering is being able to embrace suffering with Jesus, in the presence of Jesus, and to tap into the presence of Jesus in suffering. Would you say some words about that?

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Al Henson: Yeah, I would, and I want to tie in a second thing to that, because the conversation. We really want to say three things about how we suffer, and that is you do suffer with Jesus. You can and you do, whether you know it or not, he's there and you can suffer with others.

Al Henson: Then primarily the thing that enables us and gives us the strength to suffer is with them you're suffering with unusual hope. When we're suffering, it seems to be hopeless. How can this have some benefit? It has a redemptive purpose, so you're suffering, you're suffering with hope.

Al Henson: Hebrews wants us to know something about suffering with Jesus and who we're suffering with. We're not only suffering with God, infinitely powerful, infinitely loving, but he also is a God who can be touched. In Hebrews 4:15 it speaks that we have a high priest.

Al Henson: We don't have a high priest that cannot be touched. He can be touched with the depths of our feelings of infirmities and our weaknesses and our sufferings, because he was human. He was the God man, and he suffered much in life, as well as upon the cross.

Al Henson: He suffered much, and so Christ is with us, and he can be touched. That means that he can understand and comprehend. I actually believe, because I am in Christ, that not only did he suffer that I understand, but when I'm actually suffering now, he's feeling my pain.

Paul Lawler: That's why that passage says he sympathizes with our weaknesses, which it connotes that he's in it with us. He feels with us.

Al Henson: Yes, yes, and he does. Tying others into that, that's the reason why being in Christ and in the body of Christ, we have Galatians chapter 6 that would want to teach us, chapter 5 I think it is. Excuse me, chapter 5, bear you one another's burdens.

Al Henson: Another passage will say when they weep, weep with them, and when they rejoice, rejoice with them. God did not bring sin into the world. Man, Satan and man brought sin into the world and brought suffering upon themselves, but God did not intend us to suffer alone.

Al Henson: He didn't abandon us. He is with us, so we're suffering with an understanding Christ who's all loving and all powerful. We're also to suffer with others. I do believe this is when we're willing to be loving and not be so selfish and allow ourselves to step into the pain of others, which I have by the grace of God, I've had the opportunity to do as a Pastor.

Al Henson: I've helped the waving wife of a martyr. I've helped little children in my arms, five and six. "Papa Al, why did God let my daddy die?" We are to suffer with others.

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Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: Allowed myself with the spirit to feel what they were feeling at some level, so we don't suffer alone. Then let's chat a little bit about that while we're suffering with Jesus and suffering with one another, then we have hope.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: Let's talk about that a little bit Paul, this hope that we have.

Paul Lawler: Yes. Now I want to touch on something you said as we move to hope. The tendency in the West is for us to be independent and isolated. What you just described, how do we suffer? If I may articulate it in a way that bridges off what you shared, we don't isolate.

Paul Lawler: That the provision of God in suffering is Jesus himself who sympathizes with our weaknesses and the body of Christ, others.

Al Henson: It's interesting, we're going to go to the hope in a moment, but you just spurred on an important thought is that because we are with Jesus and with others and he is God, he not only understands and sympathetic, but he is God, the power of the Holy Spirit to give strength in suffering, to give peace in suffering, to give comfort in suffering along with the hope, or along with the hope and suffering. It's a mystery, but it's real.

Al Henson: When we embrace Christ and his eternal purposes and plans in our suffering, we experience the very life of God of joy and peace. With Christians, those that are really intimate with God, you can be actually full of joy and crying at the same time.

Paul Lawler: Yeah. Yeah, and I know that there's ... Al, this may not be for everybody that's listening, but this is just where my heart is drawn right now. There may be somebody listening right now, and we just want you to know that we know that your pain is real, and we lovingly want to validate that.

Paul Lawler: As we do, we just want to remind you that God knows of your pain, that Jesus does sympathize. He feels the weakness that you're in, and that I want to encourage you not to journey in isolation. Hear that not just from two men who are advocating from you, but hear that out of the heart of God.

Paul Lawler: Not to isolate in your pain, but get around some others who love and care well.

Al Henson: Let me say to those who are going to want to go to minister to the suffering, a lot of people are hesitant to go, because they're not sure what to say. Then you have those that are more religious in mind, and they go and they have all these religious statements to say.

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Al Henson: That often doesn't help at all. It's just something that I've learned that God has taught me and I try to practice. I would encourage others to practice. Never underestimate the power of your presence.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: That you'd loved enough and you came to just sit with them while their suffering.

Paul Lawler: So good.

Al Henson: Number two, sitting with the suffering is become an expert at listening. Do not feel the need to give answers, because some of the redemptive work that God is doing in suffering, it's very hard to really understand. Only God can really understand a part of what he's doing.

Al Henson: We have one of our Homes of Hope, with compassionate hope we have a young lady that she's our first rescued one who's now rescuing others. What she went through in life, watching in a very impoverished, darkened, Godless culture. An alcoholic father pulling a knife and seeing him almost stabbing her mother and kicking them and abusing them.

Al Henson: Then being sexually abused in the fifth, sixth grade, and then labor trafficked at 12. Then sold as a child bride at the age of ... Falsified at the age of 16 out of that culture into another culture, and yet she suffered. Through that and all of that, God ultimately brought into a place where Jesus was.

Al Henson: Now she has found Christ, and she has found healing in her own soul. She has come to understand that she started her suffering for the first time. Now she could suffer with Jesus. If you listen to her story, when she testifies and shares a story, you'll hear that.

Al Henson: I'm thankful for the suffering, because it brought me to Jesus, and for the first time I knew love. Now she's rescuing others. That's a part of the redemptive purpose. It's also a part of the power of the gospel to take that which ... Joseph says this. Joseph went through so much in family and a broken family.

Al Henson: Can you imagine having your own brothers trying to start to kill you, because they despise you and then they decide not to and they throw you in a pit. Then they say, "No, let's sell him." You're in slavery and in prison. Ultimately he says, "People meant this for evil, but God had an eternal purpose, an eternal plan and God meant it for good"

Al Henson: Which goes to that third area, not only are we suffering with Jesus and we suffer with others, but we suffer with hope.

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Paul Lawler: Yes. Every story of suffering may not end in life. There are times where a cancer diagnosis, it ends with a believer going to be with the Lord.

Al Henson: Going home.

Paul Lawler: Which is why the scripture tells us we don't grieve as the world grieves, we grieve differently, because we don't grieve as a people who are without hope. We recognize that there is healing, there is a resurrection, and that there is a new life that we're promised.

Paul Lawler: "A man who believes in me," Jesus says, "Will live even if he dies." We recognize as Christians that we do have a different worldview. We have a reality that we look at that all of life is not defined by what we experience here. We recognize and I'm validating that we do look at all of this differently.

Paul Lawler: Everything's not defined here, and it's important. It's important for that to be said, because we're mindful there are those listening today that are walking some paths right now.

Al Henson: I was just thinking as you were sharing there, Paul, that the ultimate final power of suffering or evil in the world is death. For us death is not the end. It's just another door into our greatest hope, which is a place of no sin, a place of no tears, a perfect place with God.

Al Henson: This hope ... Our time is going to get away from us. I wanted us, Paul, to go another area. That is not only the question of how do we suffer? We've talked some about that. We suffer with Jesus, with others, and we suffer with hope. So much of the trials in life that you go through are going to have an end in this life.

Al Henson: I want to make sure we understand, because Christ can heal. Most trials that I've been through, they had a beginning and they had any end as God finished his purposes and plans there. We're very vulnerable, and we're very vulnerable in suffering, because when we're suffering physical pain, emotional pain, mental pain, and the enemy gets involved.

Al Henson: When we talk about vulnerability, the enemy especially we want to talk about. He has three major lies.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: I want to mention those, and we'll just chat about them briefly, because our time is limited here. Lie one, you sure God is good? How could a good God allow this to happen to you? Two, where is your God now? The lie of abandonment, and then the third lie is, Oh, you deserve this.

Al Henson: Look what you've done. Look who you are, look what you've done, and certainly some suffering is the consequence of our own sin. Obviously our own

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disobedience has suffering that goes with it, but often the trials that we're going through is not a consequence of our own sin. It can be the consequence of someone else's sin, or just the consequence of living in a fallen world. Chat into that just a moment.

Paul Lawler: Well, first of all, all of us know that those feelings and thoughts are very, very real. They are rooted in both physical weakness, as well as spiritual warfare. In our physical weakness, we're more vulnerable in we're vulnerable spiritually.

Paul Lawler: We're vulnerable emotionally, just because we're in a weakened state. There is a warfare that comes from our enemy who the scripture describes as an adversary who comes to steal, kill, and destroy. His methodology is deception, to seek, to deceive a believer to believe lies in a vulnerable state.

Paul Lawler: I will go back to what we were sharing in points one and two. For the believer, it's essential to, in suffering, to look to Jesus and to be in community with other believers, not isolate.

Al Henson: When you said look to Jesus, I was thinking of verse in Hebrews 12:2, "Looking unto Jesus, looking unto Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy, that hope, the joy that was set before him, he endured such contradiction of sinners and the cross." That's what you're talking about there.

Paul Lawler: That's exactly right.

Al Henson: When we're suffering with Jesus and the enemy's coming against us with all of these lies, where is God now? Are you sure your God is good? We need to look unto Jesus and get the truth.

Paul Lawler: That's exactly right. And these lies are very similar to what Jesus encountered even when he was suffering physically in a prolonged fast in the desert. That is the enemy coming and questioning who he was, the validity of who God is. It shouldn't come as a surprise if the same tactics come at us.

Paul Lawler: It's important for us to be mindful and discerning what voice we're hearing. That Jesus, the scripture states, is our advocate, whereas the enemy is our accuser. Being mindful of that makes the difference in discerning whose voice am I really hearing?

Paul Lawler: An accusation is always worded and phrased in a way where it oppresses. It puts a lid on the heart and the mind and diminishes human flourishing. Whereas an advocate is inviting you to come out of the pit. An advocate is for you, not against you.

Paul Lawler: An advocate is the one who bled and died to redeem you. There's much more we could say about that. To be sensitive to time, it's really important in a

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vulnerable place like this to be able to discern the difference between the two voices that can be at play in the mind.

Al Henson: One of those voices is a voice of the father of lies. The other is the voice of the father of all truth, which is Jesus and God himself. A couple of things I want to make sure that you're not hearing as you're listening. As you listen to Paul and I, you may be thinking, "Well, where's the joy in suffering? Where is the peace in suffering?"

Al Henson: You sound like just to be a Christian, it's just a morbid kind of thing. That's not what we're saying. You're listening to a brother who a lot of people think if you go among the persecuted church, you're going to get among them and they're going to hear a lot of why me? Oh me and poor me and whiners.

Al Henson: It's never been the case with me. Some of the most joyful people in the world are those that I've been with that have suffered for the cause of Christ.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: That you really need to listen to the next podcast, because that's where we're going to deal with the redemptive side of suffering. The other thing I do want to say, and we'll spend more time in the next podcast about this, is that there is a dangerous doctrine that's crossed out ...

Al Henson: We're shipping our dangerous doctrines around the world, and that is the doctrine of prosperity. I do want to say that there is a biblical doctrine of prosperity, but that it's always Jesus will to heal, and that if you follow God and walk with God, you're going to be blessed physically in health and financially and all of these things.

Al Henson: My dear brother and sister, that's just not an accurate understanding of scripture and other ways of God.

Paul Lawler: Amen.

Al Henson: We're going to talk about next time the redemptive side of suffering. We're going to talk about what is the biblical teaching of biblical prosperity in relationship to suffering? Paul, let's just catch our sage points now.

Paul Lawler: Let's do, and so some of our sage points today are, as we suffer that we do have the opportunity to suffer with Jesus in the presence of Jesus. Secondly, to suffer with others and not to isolate. Then thirdly, as Christians, we do suffer with hope, that it's not the end of the story.

Al Henson: That when you're suffering, sage point four, you're very vulnerable. As you're vulnerable to darkness, you're also vulnerable to light. It's a very sensitive time.



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A. W. Tozer once said, "When one enters into the trial or adversity of suffering, a window of light from heaven opens up."

Al Henson: It's a great time to gain light and understanding of the ways and thoughts of God when we're suffering. Give a final word and then I'll close us in prayer.

Paul Lawler: Well, what I'd like to do is just read a familiar passage of scripture very briefly out of 1 Peter 4:12 where the scripture tells us, "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 in Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."

Paul Lawler: "If you were insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and God rest upon you." It's with that in mind that we recognize that just as you said, the prosperity gospel, it is a deceptive expression of the gospel.

Paul Lawler: The scriptures do clearly teach that there are seasons where Christians suffer for many reasons.

Al Henson: I think through the suffering sometimes the word of God is ... I want to read one more verse and then we'll pray. 2 Corinthians in 4:17, Paul who suffered tremendously for Christ, he says, "But our light affliction ..." I know he called it light, even though it wasn't light.

Al Henson: Humanly it wasn't, he called it light, because in relationship to the redemptive purposes which we're going to catch in the next podcast, it was light. He says, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment worketh for us, for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Al Henson: To our brother, sister listening in that is suffering, there's something glorious happening there.

Paul Lawler: Yes.

Al Henson: Please, something glorious is taking place in your life. Even if you're a young person listening in and you had a horrific, painful childhood, out of that something ... The gold can be got, something glorious can come out of that when you understand God's redemptive purposes for suffering.

Al Henson: Jesus, spirit of the living God, help brothers and sisters to understand and have your wisdom and your light and your knowledge and the purposes and plans for us in the trials and adversity. While we suffer, help us spirit we pray to understand these matters.

Al Henson: Give peace and comfort and encouragement and hope to our brother or sister that's listening, that's actually suffering right now as they're listening. In Jesus' name, amen.

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Paul Lawler: Amen.