



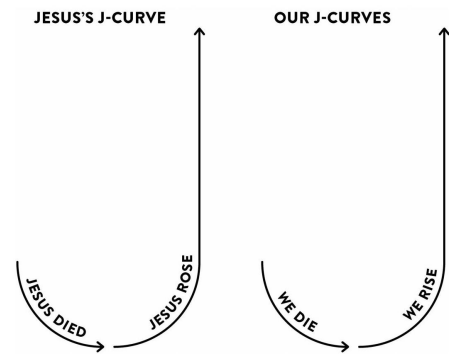
THE CHURCH OF THE ADVENT

How the Gospel Transforms Suffering

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Summary: In this passage, Paul shows us how we can face suffering in a way that produces spiritual renewal on the inside, even though on the outside it may look like we are wasting away (v. 16). First, Paul shows us a new paradigm for suffering. Many people view suffering through a karma paradigm – that ultimately good things happen to good people, and bad things happen to bad people. But the gospel turns this on its head. Suffering is surprisingly a place where we can experience profound intimacy with Jesus because no one has suffered more than him. Through him, we can experience suffering without being utterly crushed or driven to despair (vv. 8-9).

This leads to a new pattern for suffering. The gospel is the good news that by faith, we are joined to Christ's death and resurrection. His death and resurrection then become the "shape" of our lives by the power of the Spirit (vv. 10-12). Author Paul Miller calls this the "J-Curve." Part 1 of the J-Curve: We enter into some kind suffering in which evil is weakened or killed. Part 2: By grace, sinful parts of us are put to death. Part 3: We emerge with new life, deeper maturity, and more conformity to the image of Christ. Whether we suffer because we are trying to address *evil in the world*, or because *evil is done to us*, or because of the *evil that is in us*, all of these are "mini deaths and resurrections" because they contribute to the death of sin and the growth of Christ in us.



The J-Curve is the shape of the normal Christian life. Our lives mirror Jesus'.

Finally, we have a new promise for suffering. Scripture is clear that suffering is evil and part of a fallen world. What sustains Paul through all of his difficulty is not simply the knowledge that it is making him a better person, but that in Christ, it is producing an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (v.17). One day, all of our afflictions will be fading memories. They will seem like a dream compared to the real world of the new heavens and the new earth.

- Questions:**
1. How do you tend to view suffering in your life? As an interruption or obstacle? As if God is punishing you? As evidence of God's absence? Share from your lived experience, not necessarily what you know is the correct theological answer.
 2. How do the sufferings of Jesus give meaning to your own suffering? Have you ever experienced something difficult in your life that became an opportunity for intimacy with God?

3. Discuss the pattern of the J-Curve, the cycle of death and resurrection that is necessary for growth in the Christian life. What do you think about this? Where else in the Bible do we see examples of this truth?
4. Pastor Tommy shared three stories of how suffering had produced a J-Curve in his life. Which of these stories did you relate to, if any? How has suffering or difficulty created a J-Curve in your life?
5. As you think about the promise of the “eternal weight of glory” in the new heavens and the new earth, what are you most looking forward to?

Prayer:

Pray for God to help you experience your struggles as opportunities for ongoing, daily intimacy with him who has suffered. Pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit, your life would mirror the shape of Jesus’ life in all circumstances through death and resurrection. Praise God for the hope we have that one day suffering will cease, and Jesus will make all things new. Pray for faith to fix our eyes not on the things that are seen and transient, but on the things that are unseen and eternal.

Do:

Think about the present struggles you are facing right now. Reflect on these questions through prayer or journaling. What inside me is being spotlighted by the suffering? What sinful part of me needs to be put to death? What is blocking me from greater trust and faith in the Lord? What do I need to let go of or turn away from? What truth do I need to embrace?