

Suffering, Saving and Serving--Psalm 23 (Naaman and his Servant Girl) *Goodness in the Middle (BONUS track, Compassion Sunday 2022)*

We're in the middle of this series from Psalm 23, and we have one more official message in this series, but I'm actually going to do a BONUS message this week--showing how in a time of suffering and waiting, one of the things we can be sure of is God wants us to be ministering to others. That is how God often takes care of you in suffering, and what David means in Psalm 23 when he says, "My cup overflows."

I'm doing this because this is COMPASSION SUNDAY, a week we observe every so often to highlight a ministry we love working with here at TSC called *Compassion International*. Compassion does holistic child development with vulnerable children in some of the poorest communities in the world--and by holistic I mean spiritual, physical, educational, medical--the whole package.

I've been to visit several of their locales around the world--it's amazing. It's a church, educational, medical, community-development center right in the middle of these cities. The partnership strategy is simple: Members in our church "adopt" a child in need, commit to making a small monthly donation, and send an occasional note of encouragement as you want to. It's so easy. I love it.

Works Consulted:

Andy Stanley, "No Explanation Required"

Tim Keller, "Receiving the Spirit: The Lepers Are Cleansed"

Sally Lloyd-Jones, "The Little Servant Girl & the Proud General"

Tim Keller, "Revelation"

Each of my kids has sponsored a child in the Dominican Republic: It's been a great way to introduce my kids to the needs of the world and to personalize it for them. Over the years, they've exchanged letters and we've even traveled down there a few times to see them. If you're looking for a way to get your kids involved with missions at an early age, this is it.

For you parents, this is an opportunity to awaken your child to cultural issues around the world and personalize it by giving them a specific person they can pray for and share their faith with.

And, for others of us, young professionals, older singles, senior adults--you just get to play the role of big brother or big sister in a kid's life for less than you spend on coffee at Starbucks each month. This is a low investment, high impact ministry.

At the end of today's message I'm going to give you the opportunity to explore sponsoring a child. And, in case you're wondering--we don't get anything back from this as a church--we don't make commission and Compassion does not give us one dime. We just believe in this mission.

Now, here's how this week relates to our series, *Goodness in the Middle*: When we find ourselves in a place of waiting--and we all do from time to time--the one thing we can always be sure that we should be doing is ministering to others.

David said, in his time of wilderness, and trial, walking through the valley of the shadow of death, "My cup overflows." --Psalm 23:5 In trial, God fills us up with himself so much that there is enough to overflow to others. **Remember the SPONGE?** God is so powerful and

in-control and joy-giving and overflowing in love, that if you are soaking on him, when life squeezes you, what comes out of you is his grace.

In fact, and I'll show you this today: one of **God's primary purposes** for sending suffering into our lives is to bring salvation to the world. The melody line of the whole Bible is that through God's suffering servants he brings redemption to the nations. That happened ultimately in Jesus, but it's a pattern set down in the Old Testament, repeated over and over until they create a silhouette that Jesus just steps into. When God's servants go through an unfair trial, and life SQUEEZES them, what comes out of them is God's grace, and through that others learn the truth about God.

Today, we're going to see this principle play out in the story of a young girl who suffered--a girl whose name we don't even know and that you've probably never heard of. She found herself in a TERRIBLE situation, but because of her trust in God through it, God used it to bring healing to a bunch of people around her.

And what I'm going to suggest is that for many of you, what God wants from you in your time of waiting is for you to start ministering to others, and a great way to do that is through Compassion International, and I'm going to give you the chance to do it.

In fact, write this down as we begin: Serving is always the proactive posture of the Christian life.

(Naaman and the Servant Girl)

2 Kings 5, if you have your Bible. Today you're actually going to hear about **TWO suffering people**—one was a believer and the other not—and their sufferings are intricately intertwined.

In fact, the believer in this story suffers precisely so the unbeliever can escape his.

- The unbeliever is a man named Naaman and he has a **terminal disease**: leprosy.
- The believer is a 14-year-old girl who was kidnapped, her **parents were murdered**, and she was **trafficked**. **She is a victim in every sense of the word**. But today you are going to see how God turned her suffering, awful as it was, into something beautiful.
- I remember as a kid there was this **painting show that would come on PBS** on Saturday morning after all the good cartoons were over. (It was the **kind of thing you'd watch when you've totally given up on your day--you knew it was going to be sweatpants and Crocs day--**
- It was called the **Bob Ross Painting Show**. Anybody remember that? Bob, the painter, would paint these pictures and as he went along he'd explain what he was doing. "Oh... Happy trees." **He'd always start by slapping these amorphous blobs of color** onto the canvas and you'd think, "What is that?" but then somehow through a couple of quick strokes he would make it into a beautiful "**cloud**", **like so good that** you'd think, "That could be a picture of a cloud!" And he'd say, "Happy little cloud." And I'd think, "How did he turn that amorphous blob of paint into a cloud with just a couple of strokes?"
- Well, in a way, that's **what you are going to see God do** in this story. You've got these things that **feel like accidental, colorful blobs** of chaos that God adds a **couple of strokes to** and they suddenly transform into works of art.

2 Kings 5:1--(Y'all, this story is **one of my favorite stories** in the whole Old Testament. I'm serious. I love it more than the story of **David and Goliath**; I love it more than **Daniel and the Lion's Den**; I even love it more than **left-handed Ehud** sticking a knife in the fat king's belly or Ja'el driving a spike through Sisera's temple.) **And, here's the thing, if you didn't grow up in church, you've probably never heard it!** So you're in for a treat.

[5:1] Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a mighty man and in high favor with the king, because by him the LORD had given victory to Syria. (Now, wait... victory over whom? Well, Syria's enemy was Israel. Naaman was the captain of the forces that had conquered Israel. God had promised Israel that if they wandered from him, he'd send enemy armies in to punish them, and Syria was one of those armies. He (Naaman) was a mighty man of valor... but (and this is a huge but) he was a leper.

- At the time, leprosy was the **most feared disease** in the world. It started as a **small, white, powdery spot on your skin**, like a rash, that would soon spread all over your body. Wherever it spread, the **nerve endings in your skin died** and **boils** would break out, leaving these **gaping wounds of raw flesh**. Eventually **body parts decayed and fell off**; your **facial features** lost shape and you became grotesque.
- And in those days, there was **no cure**. Leprosy had a **100% death rate**. And, to make matters worse, it was regarded to be **highly contagious**.
- So, **the moment one of these spots** was discovered on you, you were immediately banished, where you'd spend the next **10–20 years in isolation** as you slowly corroded and died. We can cure it pretty easily now in the Western world, but sadly, there are still tens of thousands of people with leprosy in South Asia and Africa.

So, here you have the mighty Naaman, a man on top of the world, who discovers one of these "spots of death" on him. He goes from being on top of the world to the pit of despair.

[2] Now the Syrians on one of their raids had carried off a little girl from the land of Israel and she worked in the service of Naaman's wife. Here is our second character in the story, the Israelite servant girl. [3] She said to her mistress, "Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! (Samaria, at this point, was still part of Israel. She's talking about Elisha, one of the greatest prophets in Israel's history.) He would cure him of his leprosy." [4] So Naaman

went in and told his lord (the king), "Thus and so spoke the girl from the land of Israel." [5] And the king of Syria said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he went, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothing. Now, this would have been a *ginormous* sum of money! In our terms, it's **750 lbs** of silver and **150 lbs** of gold! **CLOTHING may seem an odd addition**: "Here's \$5 million dollars... and some shirts," but don't think 'jeans and a t-shirt,' this was like a whole formal party get-up. It was super-expensive; most people **never owned even a single set of clothes** like this. So, to have 10 pairs would, today, like having a garage full of Maseratis. The point is, the man of God gonna be blingin.'

[6] And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, and the letter said, "When this letter reaches you, know that I have sent to you Naaman my servant, that you may cure him of his leprosy." [7] And when the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his clothes and said, "Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man sends word to me to cure a man of his leprosy? Only consider, and see how he is seeking a quarrel with me." (He thinks the **king of Syria is looking for an excuse to go to war with him**. After Israel fails to heal Naaman, the Syrian King will say, "I asked you to heal my general and you didn't. So now I am going to destroy you.")

[8] But when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his clothes, he sent to the king, "Why have you torn your clothes? Let him come now to me, that he may know that there is a prophet in Israel." **Elisha recognizes a bigger purpose in Naaman's leprosy**—God is wanting to do something in Naaman's life, and to all of Syria that the Lord is God.

[9] So Naaman came with his horses and chariots and stood at the door of Elisha's house. **(Imagine what this would have looked like!** A mighty cavalcade of horses and chariots: today it would be like an

entourage of police cars and Suburbans suddenly driving right up to my front door, helicopters flying overhead.)

[10] And Elisha sent *a messenger* to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."

- You catch that! Elisha *doesn't even go out to see* him. He sends out an **INTERN**. One thing I've learned over the years: **Important people don't like to talk to interns**. I read that **Steve Jobs got really upset** with President Obama when, after Apple released the 1st iPad, Obama had Rahm Emanuel, his chief of staff, call Jobs to congratulate him instead of doing it himself! Here, you've got **the most powerful man in the world** coming to the home of a relatively unknown prophet and the prophet won't even come to the door, he sends *a messenger*.
- (BTW, how would you like to have been the intern who had to deliver this message? "I'm sorry, General Naaman. Brother Elisha has a busy afternoon and won't be able to see you today. Meanwhile, Naaman can look inside and see Elisha kicked back in a recliner with his feet up watching the Bob Ross painting show)
- **Question: What do you think God's doing here?**

[11] But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, "Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper." "I thought there would, **like, be a ceremony; Elisha would run out of** a smoke-filled tunnel, and **jets** would fly over; Beyonce would sing; Elisha would walk on **hot coals**, charm some snakes and then I'd be healed."

Furthermore, [12] Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" We've got rivers in Syria, and they're better than this piddly little Jordan River. One day I hope we can take a Summit trip to Israel, but if you go, you'll see that the **Jordan River is not that impressive**.

It's more like a slightly-oversized creek than anything. Mostly shallow, muddy. Plus, it would have been another **15 miles** past Elisha's house, which would have meant a couple more travel days on horseback for Naaman!

So he turned and went away in a rage. **He's insulted**. Probably plotting revenge. [13] But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if it was a great word the prophet had spoken to you; would you not have done it? Has he only said to you, 'Wash, and be clean'!" (BTW, **it's significant how many times God uses servants in this story to bring Naaman to salvation**. This whole process is a lesson of humility. True conversion always is.) And these servants say, 'Listen, Master, if Elisha had told you to do something difficult: to get the **berries off a plant** at the top of Mt. Everest or to **clip the toenails** off a dragon, wouldn't you have done that? **Look, all he told you is**, 'Go and wash!' Go try it. **What have you got to lose?** Let's **swing by the Jordan** on the way home, and if it doesn't work, then you can come back and do your 'big bad General' thing to Elisha."

[14] So he went down and dipped himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God, (and on the 7th dip) **his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.**" (IOW, **he** dipped the first time, nothing happened. 2nd, 3rd, 4th, nothing happened; Naaman each time getting angrier and angrier; **he can FEEL** the mockery of his servants. Or their scorn at how pathetic he looks. He thinks: "What am I even doing, humiliating myself by putting myself underwater 7 times in this nasty little river of a country we've conquered? What am I doing? Everybody thinks I've lost my mind." But he's desperate--and on that 7th time, as he comes up out of the water he looks... *and... the leprosy is gone. He's got skin, it says, like a baby's skin.*

[15] Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came and stood before him. And he said... (Now, keep in mind, **this is his and Elisha's first official meeting**; up until now, Naaman had

only talked to assistants.) So, here's the question: **What would you say** to the man who had healed you from a **terminal disease** the first time you met him? Probably something like, **"You saved my life! Thank you."**

Look at what Naaman says, vs. 15: **"Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel."** Friends! He doesn't say the-first-thing about leprosy! He never even mentioned it. He only talks about God. Naaman hadn't been looking for God; he'd been looking for a cure for leprosy. **But God used his search for a cure to lead him to something even greater than the cure itself—a relationship with God himself.** *And the knowledge of God was so valuable that when he finally met Elisha for the first time He. Forgot. Even. To. Mention. The. Healing. All he talked about was God.* If you go into your boss' office to **request for Friday off**, and he says, "Sure, but while you are here, I just got done meeting with the board and you did a great job last year and we are going to give you a \$100,000 bonus." When you get home that night, and your wife says, "How was work today?" I doubt you'll bring up that you were able to get Friday off. That's what happened to Naaman. He found something better than a healing from leprosy. He found the Lord.

So, I want to make 2 points from this story. The first is how God often uses pain in your life to bring YOU to him. The second is how God uses pain in your life to bring others to him--which I've told you we want to focus on in our partnership with Compassion.

1. God uses your pain to bring you to him.

- **Here's the question Naaman's story should make you ask: What if God was trying to send you a message in your pain?**
 - I'm not saying this is true for all the pain we go through, but it's a question some of you should at least ask?
 - You see, **up until the moment that Naaman discovered this spot on him**, he had felt on top of the world. The story says he was **"on the king's arm,"** which means he was the king's right hand man. It says he was **"highly regarded,"** which meant he

was "a celebrity." Everybody in Syria loved him. He was a national hero, trending on Twitter.

- **And all that was taken away in a moment, by one small spot. One small spot brought the mighty Naaman crashing to the ground.** One small spot showed him how fragile everything was.

What if God was doing something similar in your pain? Again I'm not saying for sure that is what is happening, but...

- What if that "problem" had been put there by God to wake you up to a bigger problem--the problem that you're not right with God and don't know him?
- I know a lot of athletes that point to a debilitating injury as the thing that finally woke them up to the really important things in life. I once met a professional athlete who had just signed a multi-million-dollar contract to play in the pro's, but then **got into an accident doing something dumb** that totally destroyed his future career. This guy **didn't know God**; his career was his god. He **told me with tears in his eyes**, "I lay there on the ground, my legs broken, saying to myself, 'I can't believe I threw away my entire career for a few foolish seconds of fun.'" I said to him, "Respectfully, I think God may have been up to something bigger in your life. I think I might have been trying to say to you, 'You are throwing away your entire eternity for a few seconds of glory in an athletic arena.'" To make a long story short, **God ended up using this** to bring him to Christ.
- **What if God, in your pain**, had something for you beyond—better than—even the cure for that pain? And what if this thing he had for you was **so valuable** that *after you found him, like Naaman, you find yourself failing to mention the healing, or complain about the problem, so great is the treasure you now have in God?*
- Naaman was looking for a cure to leprosy but found God, and he recognized the knowledge of God to be SO valuable that when he met Elijah for the first time he forgot to even mention the healing.

So, again, I ask: Has God revealed a spot in your life that tells you that you're not as together as you have thought?

- Maybe the 'spot' is a wrinkle in your **marriage—your marriage is falling apart** and you can't do anything about it;
- Maybe it's a **problem with your kids** and you feel helpless. That's maybe where I see this most. You are worried about them, or maybe they are wandering. Or maybe you have no more relationship with them and you keep asking, "How did we get here?"
- Maybe it's a **habit you can't break** (alcoholism, pornography, a bad temper)
- Maybe it's a personal **failure** you're humiliated by
- Maybe it is a **dull, aching unhappiness** you just can't get rid of.
- Maybe it's the **inability to figure something out**. You feel paralyzed, unsure of which way to go.
- A **health scare**. In a sense, all of us have this same spot--it's our mortality. We are all going to die. Your body has an expiration date on it. It's like you walk around with a stick of dynamite in your hand with no idea how long the fuse it. It could be a week or it could be 70 years, but at some point you will die. Even with all our advances in modern medicine, the death rate is holding steady at 100%.

These **spots can all wake you up to a bigger problem**--that is, where you stand with the God who created all of us. You see, **leprosy, throughout the Bible, you see, symbolizes sin**. Like leprosy, **sin deadens**. It **grows in you** and corrupts you over time. Because of it, you slowly **lose feeling** in your life—parts of you die. **Your innocence**; your **joy**; your **optimism**; your **compassion** for others. You become grotesque.

Scripture says, "**the wages of sin** is death." Our souls have a **spot of sin on them that is** corroding us from the inside out. And sometimes these lesser spots--the problems in our lives--can wake us up to the ultimate spot we should be worried about. **(I haven't told this story in**

a while: Ivan (the spot) – And the Holy Spirit totally left me. *If he dies, he dies*. Do you think God is going to judge me for how I live? Later that afternoon there was an accident right beside where we were working... he picked the car up. He's **screaming at you!**)

The point of this story is not that every leper who heads out to the Jordan River will find healing for his skin disease; the point is to show us that God sometimes uses suffering to open up your eyes to your need of him. Again, I'm not saying that is the case with you--as we saw with Job and Joseph, a lot of our suffering doesn't have a root cause in our lives. But, sometimes God is trying to get our attention. As the writer of Psalm 119 says, "**Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word.**" –Psalm 119:67 NIV (God used affliction to bring me back to himself.)

So, our first point is that God often uses our pain to bring us back to him. And Naaman shows us that all we need to respond to God, if he's doing that in our lives, is **humility and faith**.

Humility: That's **the one thing God keeps going after** with Naaman. Naaman in this story **keeps trying to go to the top**: "Let me see the prophet. Here's an enormous amount of money. Ask me to do something hard." Yet God keeps **sending Naaman to the bottom. Talk to an intern**. Do something humiliating.

The path to God is the path of humility. You can't get there any other way. If you are going to be saved, the one thing you absolutely need is a sense of absolute need.

- **Eph 2:8–9: For by grace you have been** saved through faith--**faith not in what you have done**, but what Jesus has done. **It is the gift of God**--this healing has **nothing to do with Naaman's might or strength**. It is not given as a reward for anything in you. It is the gift of God.
- You see, the cross absolutely **destroys our pride**. The cross declares that **God's verdict** on our lives was death. Some of you

have always lived for report cards. You always want the “A,” the “high pass.” The “graduated with honors.” The “pat on the back.” On the report card of life, the only one that really matters, all of us received a failing grade. And to receive healing from Jesus, we have to admit that. Embrace it.

So, I ask again: Do you have the humility to come to Jesus? Think about **how much humility it took for Naaman to cross** that border into Israel, a place he regarded as **inferior to Syria**, to seek salvation; **to admit** that the **healing he sought could not be found** among his own mighty Syrians but among the despised Jews. **I say this because** maybe this is where you are: you never thought you’d be in a place like this, with people like these. **A church of born-again Christians?** For some of you, we are in the same category as knuckle-dragging Neanderthals for you. **Do you have the humility and courage to question your convictions, to consider these things with an open mind?**

God can save anybody, it just takes humility and faith. Faith means just believing what God says and taking a chance on it. Like Naaman did. As it was for Naaman: *There is a fountain...* but you have to believe that and plunge yourself in.

Shew. I love talking about this stuff but we need to get to our 2nd point:

2. God uses your pain to bring others to him.

- Let’s **turn away from the pain of Naaman** and toward the pain of **this little girl** for a moment--because, in a big way, she’s **the real hero** of this story.
- **How would you respond** if the man who had murdered your friends and family and then took you captive and made you a slave in his house--how would you respond if that man got leprosy?
- I would have said, “*Ha! The **old goon’s** got leprosy. **Serves him right**. Now I get to watch his decrepit old body fall apart and die.*”

But listen to what this incredible young lady of faith says: “**Would that my lord were with the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.**” –2 Kings 5:3 She seems **genuinely to care** about Naaman. She seems, remarkably, to have forgiven him for all the pain he’d caused her. **Somehow, a little 14-year-old girl has the faith** to say, “*I’ll let God be the Judge and make things right. My job is to have compassion.*” Her cup runneth over. (**SPONGE**). I have to imagine that the only way she responded like this is because she had internalized the stories and songs of her people. Since this is generations after David, she might even have known (or memorized) Psalm 23! Can’t you see this sweet little girl, lying in her bed at night, probably terrified, quoting this Psalm to herself?

I really want to give this girl a hug when we get to heaven. Because this **sweet little 14-year-old girl**, whose name we never know, gives us one of the clearest OT pictures of Jesus. **Think about it:**

- She **suffered through no fault** of her own. In fact, her suffering was **caused by Naaman’s sin**. And yet, she forgave him. And what’s more, her **suffering became the means** of his salvation. His healing came because of the suffering of the one he sinned against! **Right? Think about it: Had she not been in this situation**, Naaman would have never heard about Elisha, and he would have died of his leprosy. So her suffering, which HE caused, became the means of his salvation.
- **In the same way, our salvation would come through a ‘Suffering Servant’ whose suffering we caused.** Like this little girl, Jesus suffered not for **his own sin**, but ours. And **like her, instead of hating us** for causing his suffering, he forgave us and **kept loving us**. And his suffering **became the means by which we can wash our sins away**.
- **We killed him!** *But surely he has borne our grief and carried our sorrows. We esteemed him smitten by God, and afflicted, but he was wounded for our transgressions; bruised for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his stripes (the stripes we caused) we are healed.*

- *And “Lord, now indeed I find, thy power and thine alone, can change the leper’s¹ spots, and melt the heart of stone. Jesus paid it all! All to him I owe! Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow.”*

And here’s what it means for you, believer. Like this little girl, God uses our suffering now to bring others to him.

Remember the “melody line of the Bible” I mentioned earlier? God, ***through the suffering of his righteous servants***, brings redemption and healing to the nations. It’s what he did through Joseph. It’s what he did with this young girl. It’s what he does, ultimately, in Jesus. And it’s what he intends to do *through us*. **Suffering servants are at the center of God’s plan.**

To put it another way ...

Suffering is the God-ordained means by which God brings salvation to others.

Listen to what the Apostle Paul says: **“Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.”** –Colossians 1:24 **ESV** Now, in one sense, this verse almost sounds blasphemous, doesn’t it! What could possibly be lacking in Christ’s afflictions? Didn’t Jesus say just as he died, “It is finished”? If it’s finished, what could still be lacking? The work of salvation is finished. But the work of telling people about it is not. As Martin Luther said--it wouldn’t matter if Jesus died 1000x if no one ever heard about it. God has appointed our suffering and sacrifice as the means by which others can hear the gospel.

Some of you may have heard the story of Eric Liddell, the Scottish Olympic runner in the 1920’s whose story inspired the movie *Chariots of Fire*.

- We remember Liddell for what the movie depicts—how because of his religious convictions, he refused to race on Sunday, but then won a race he had never trained for. **PIC** And it is an awesome movie.
- But what we often skip is that after he became an Olympic gold medalist, Liddell left to be a missionary in China in 1925. He worked in one of the poorest provinces in the country, and when war broke out in 1941, the British government ordered all of their citizens to leave China. But Liddell stayed, because he knew his ultimate allegiance wasn’t to the British government or the Chinese one; it was to God. And when the Japanese army got closer to his city in 1942, he stayed to help the poor Chinese he’d given his life to. And when in 1943 the Japanese took the city, he was sent to an internment camp, where he spent the last two years of his life.
- All who knew him there described him as selfless, loving, and completely focused on others. He led all kinds of Chinese prisoners to Christ and started a church in the prison. Toward the end of the war, the Japanese selected a random group to be set free and he was one of them. But he gave up his spot to a pregnant woman and was shot.

Eric Liddell understood that it is often through our wounds that God brings healing and salvation to others.

Now, I want to be clear: I don’t mean that if you’re in an abusive situation like this young lady was, God wants you to stay there. If you’re in a situation where you’re being mistreated or abused—and you have the opportunity to get out—please, by all means, take it. You’re not helping anybody by staying in an abusive situation when you could get out of it--if anything, you’re just empowering the abuser. I’m just saying that often what we later see is that in moments

¹ Many records indicate that “leopard’s” was the original word used in the song. ☺

we felt like we couldn't control, when we were suffering and didn't know why, God had a good plan in it to use our suffering to point others to Jesus.

So here's the question: Are you willing to take on wounds so that other people can come to know Jesus?

- Maybe that's what he's doing in your pain--giving you a chance to put Jesus on display and you need to ask God to help you shine in suffering. SPONGE. To ring out Jesus.
- Maybe that will happen through your **forgiving of someone**. A spouse. A boyfriend. A parent. A business partner.
- Or maybe it will happen through you voluntarily making a **financial gift**. A financial sacrifice can be a kind of voluntarily-imposed suffering, particularly if it is one that affects your lifestyle.

Listen: I'm not questioning anyone's suffering here—please hear me on that. But there is something about talking about suffering while sitting in an air conditioned auditorium in the most developed country in the world that should BEG the question, as a believer: Are we willing to embrace sacrifices, to voluntarily take on WOUNDS, so to speak, so that other people can come to know Jesus and experience an abundant, flourishing life?

That's what this Compassion Sunday is about. I told you at the beginning our entire family sponsors kids from the DR. Last time I went I remember walking into a house and meeting a little girl whose parents had died and whose uncle was raising her. However, her uncle had been trafficking her to the men of the village for money. But through Compassion, praise God, she had been rescued from that situation and is now thriving physically and spiritually in a safe home, a Christian school, and a healthy church environment. Summit, hear me: That happened because over 1600 of you sponsor Compassion

kids in the DR. Children are rarely trafficked if caring adults know their name and have a relationship with them, which is what sponsorships facilitate.

I spoke recently at a student camp with another former Compassion child who was fatherless and didn't even own a pair of shoes until he was 8. However, through Compassion, he now has his PhD, is a pastor, and runs his own Pastor Training Institute in East Africa where he trains hundreds of pastors every year. That happened because believers like you got involved in Compassion.

I tell you those stories not because they are emotionally gripping but because they're *true*. And I'd just ask you to consider: What if you hadn't been born into the developed world of the United States? Your only source of income was as a peasant farmer. You loved your children, but you had no money to provide a formal education for them. You could barely afford even basic healthcare, so you had constant nutritional issues; no governmental safety net due to years of corruption and crime. And all of this in a place where you would likely never even ever hear the gospel. What would you tell an individual who could change the future **for your child** if they had the power to do it?

I'm not trying to make you the savior of other people--we've got plenty of our own problems to deal with to play savior to everybody else. I'm just telling you that we have a real chance to make a difference to kids around the world and we should take it.

Before I tell you how you can sponsor a child today, let me show you one more story: a young man named Yanelly—excuse me, *Dr.*

Yanelly—is yet another example of a Compassion child whose life was changed because of a sponsor. Check it out.

[VIDEO](#)

I'm asking God to move in the hearts of TSC to **sponsor 2k Compassion children this weekend.**

You can see all around at our different locations there are **tables setup with packets on them.** Each of those packets contain the profile of a child in need who is waiting for a sponsor. 2000 is a lofty goal, I know. In fact, the most Compassion has ever had from a single church in a weekend is 1900, but Summit I know we can do this. Plus, the current record of 1900 is held by our friend Joby Martin and the church of 1122 in Jacksonville, so we need to put him in his place. Just kidding. Listen, we did this a few years ago and we had right around 1k kids sponsored, which is amazing! But this year I believe we can double that to 2k...AND, listen to this: we have a member who has **begged to remain anonymous** pledge... that if we beat our previous record of 1k sponsorships this weekend then he will make a \$100,000 donation to Compassion specifically to help single pregnant moms and newborns in the DR.

I tell you that because success in ministry is figuring out where God is at work and joining him in it. Well, God is already clearly at work in this believer's heart to get the gospel and love to the least of these, and he is inviting us to join him in it.

This [HOLD UP CARD] is a Compassion International Child Sponsor Commitment Card; this is an opportunity to explore sponsoring a child currently living in poverty. Not all of us are called to adopt, but we are

all called to care for the orphan and the overlooked. Sponsoring a child in poverty helps provide the education and spiritual formation which breaks the cycle of poverty. And did you know, every 4 minutes a Compassion child somewhere gets saved. You can become part of that.

What you'll do, if you accept this challenge, is grab a card and fill out the bottom portion where the tear-off is. At the end of service your CP's will tell you where to drop that off.

So I'm gonna pray, thanking God in advance for this 6-digit gift and also for how you are going to respond in this moment, and I'm gonna ask God that we crush our previous record of 1000 partnerships as well as Joby Martin's record. Amen? Are you with me?!

After I pray, I'm gonna stand you up and call you to come to one of the tables around your campus where they have these packets. This will be like an altar call that we do for baptism or prayer--but this time you're just taking a packet. After I pray and say "Amen," you'll simply step out, grab a packet to sponsor a child, come back to your seat, fill it out, and then our CP's will tell you what to do with it at the end of service. Listen: It's not uncommon for me to call you to the altar for prayer for one of your needs; today I'm calling you to step out to offer yourself to help meet someone else's.

So, I ask again: ***Are you willing to become a suffering servant for others?***

Let's pray...

OK, you come.

