



Today we wrap up our three-week journey through the series we have called *Why?: Making Sense of God’s Will*. We have looked at the idea that sometimes in the process of finding faith, we feel like we are losing faith. Questions and conflict that are often raised by experiences of setbacks and suffering can cause us great anxiety. We end with these simple words of encouragement from Paul, “Do not lose heart.”

Where does Paul direct us for comfort, encouragement and affirmation? What do you think Paul means by the phrase “eternal glory that far outweighs them all”?

You have probably heard the statement that “perspective changes everything.” Paul closes by challenging us to adopt an appropriate perspective. How would you describe your perspective on your life right now? In what ways might a change in your perspective encourage you to not lose heart?

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GPS for Families

GrowPrayStudy.org/family

Read the story of Lazarus from John 11. Use a children’s Bible if you have young children. Say: “Many people wondered why Jesus delayed going to see Lazarus. They believed Jesus could heal and didn’t know why he would let his good friend die. This is like people today who do not understand why God doesn’t heal all their problems. Do you ever feel that way?” (Give an example from your own life of when you wondered “why?”) Try to find something good that came from that situation and explain that even though you didn’t understand why, you trusted God to use it for good. Read Romans 8:28.

Explain that just like you don’t always know why we set certain rules or say no to a request, you have to trust us to take care of you. Everything we do is what we believe to be best for you. God is even smarter than us, and even though we don’t always like the answers he gives us, we trust him to take care of us.

Mary and Martha believed in Jesus’ power to heal and that he was the Messiah. But still, Jesus wanted to increase their faith and see the full power and glory of God. They said they believed in the resurrection but had not yet seen God’s power to raise the dead. It was distant to them — not connected to their current lives. Jesus resurrected Lazarus in order to show God’s ultimate power.

MESSAGE “God and Suffering”

SCRIPTURE Romans 8:28

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Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:

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PRAYER FOR THE WEEK

Holy and loving God, we reaffirm today our belief that you are our only hope and strength. We believe that you and you alone have the power to bring beauty and meaning out of the wreckage we sometimes experience in our lives. Remind us today, Lord, that your love and grace will win in the end and that the tears we shed, the sufferings we endure and the sadness we experience will one day be completely wiped away. We trust you for all these things, in Jesus’ name. AMEN.

In the first verses of chapter 11, a new set of characters is introduced into the gospel narrative of John. Mary, Martha and Lazarus are residents of the small community of Bethany located just a few miles outside of Jerusalem on the eastern slope of the Mount of Olives. We are not told when Jesus made their acquaintance, but it is clear from this introduction that this family held a special place in Jesus' heart.

A common misconception of faith is that it protects us from anything "bad" ever happening in our lives. We sometimes presume that "righteous behavior" is a safeguard from physical or emotional harm. Yet, in our text today, a close friend of Jesus has fallen ill.

How does Jesus respond to the news of Lazarus' illness? According to these words, what do you expect will happen next in this story?

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By the time Jesus arrived in Bethany, Lazarus, who was introduced earlier as "the one you [Jesus] loved," has been dead for four days. Jesus has not arrived in time to prevent his friend's death or the grief experienced by his two sisters, Mary and Martha. When word of Jesus' arrival is received, Martha goes out to greet him, but for reasons unexplained, Mary decides to stay behind.

Experiences of suffering and grief often raise difficult questions. When Martha greets Jesus, what challenging question does she ask? How does Jesus respond? Where does Jesus point Martha to in his reply?

Have you ever asked or received from someone you care about a similar question? How did you handle that? In what ways might the response that Jesus offers to Martha direct us in providing care and support for people experiencing suffering and grief?

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Today's reading immediately follows that earlier exchange between Jesus and Martha. In verse 31, we notice that there are others in the house with Mary when her sister returns with the news that Jesus wants to see Mary. These friends and family have gathered to offer comfort and support these sisters. They follow Mary to ensure that Mary does not have to mourn alone.

When Mary sees Jesus, she shares the same question that Martha had earlier posed to Jesus. However, the circumstances seem to indicate that perhaps there is more anger, hurt and confusion in Mary's words. Looking back in verses 25 and 26, how did Jesus earlier respond to Martha? What is different about the way Jesus responds to Mary? Why the difference?

What leads to Jesus' tears? What does this picture teach us about Jesus and how he enters our suffering?

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In our GPS reading on Monday, Jesus received word that his friend Lazarus had fallen ill. Upon hearing the news, Jesus had responded, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." The events that followed seem to indicate that Jesus had been mistaken in this previous statement.

Lazarus did die, and when Jesus arrives at his grave, his friend had already been dead for four days. Author Frederick Buechner writes, "Resurrection means that the worst thing is never the last thing." Whatever situation we face, whatever grief we may be experiencing, whatever loss we may have endured, our faith teaches us that hope endures because there is always another chapter to our story.

Today, whether you are in the midst of suffering, a season of sorrow or a moment of celebration, spend a few moments offering to God your thanks and praise for this central truth of our faith. Through the sacrifice and strength of our savior, resurrection will be the last chapter of our story.