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Pastor Jonathan Falwell

When It Hurts Too Much To Cry – How God Works in Our Suffering

Scripture: Various

Summary: In a series of messages based on the book *When It Hurts Too Much to Cry*, Jonathan Falwell talks about promises that Scripture—specifically 1 Peter 5:10—makes regarding what God will do in our suffering.

“I lift my eyes up. My help comes from the Lord.” There is a great line in that song that, to me, encapsulates the entire promise of the truth of that entire song. It’s this: “My God will come through always.” Always. Always. Don’t you like that word *always*? Aren’t you glad it doesn’t say, “My God will come through most of the time”? or “My God will come through every other Tuesday and Thursdays after three”? My God will come through always. No matter how bad it might be, no matter how tough it might be, no matter how much it hurts, my God will come through always.

Today we are starting on a new journey, a journey for the next few weeks entitled *When It Hurts Too Much To Cry*. We’re talking about suffering. We’re talking about pain. That’s something we all understand, isn’t it? Going through difficult moments, we all get that.

Now I’m not talking about the pain that comes from when you get a paper cut and it hurts for a little while and then it goes away. I’m not talking about those moments when you slip and fall and it hurts for a little bit and then you get back up and you’re okay.

This morning I left my house very early. It was still dark outside, and it was a little bit warmer yesterday, so a lot of the snow had melted over the last couple of days, but last night it got down into the low 20s and so a lot of that water that had melted had frozen overnight. So when I left my house this morning it was dark and I had a backpack on my arm, I was carrying my coat and walking out to my car, and right by the driver’s side of my car, as if someone planned it, there was a huge patch of ice, and I didn’t see it. I got to it and slipped and almost fell. I reached back and grabbed the mirror of my car and turned a little bit and hit my elbow. I was not happy. That hurt.

I didn’t fall, but I put my backpack and coat in the car and then I had to run into the garage for a moment and I walked into the garage. Now we know it snowed a lot Wednesday and Thursday, incredible snow, great snow, and the one thing I like to do when it snows, I like to go out and drive in the snow. I’m not one of these guys that want to stay at home and go out and buy all the

milk and all the bread. I try to get rid of all the food before the storm comes so I have excuses to go out in the midst of the snow. I'm not recommending that, for some of you who are saying, "I can't believe he said that!" But I like to do that.

So Thursday lunchtime the snow was still coming down. It was awesome, incredible, and so I wanted to go out to lunch. I told the family, "Let's all go to lunch. Let's go do something." So I went out there, and because the snow was so high I had to clean out around the car for them to be able to get into the car.

So I went out to the garage to get our snow shovel, which, by the way, I don't have a snow shovel; I realized that on Thursday morning. The only thing I could find was a rake. Now this is not one of those rakes that you use to pick up leaves that have the little metal things that move around. This is one of those heavy rakes with the steel ends on it that you use to spread gravel—which, by the way, I have no idea why I have one of those. I have never spread gravel in my life. But I have one, in case you ever need help. Give me a call and I'll send Shari right over with that.

But I got this rake out of the garage and I was clearing the snow and moving the snow from around the car so we could get to the car, and I was so excited about going out and going to lunch on Thursday afternoon that I took the rake, and rather than put it back where it should have been, I just went in and set it down right inside the garage door and I leaned it against the wall

Now remember rakes have a long handle, and this one has heavy steel things on the end—what do you all those things? Prongs. I'm going with that. I leaned it against the wall, and those prongs were sticking up, so they were off the ground.

Well this morning, remember I told you it was dark? I walked into the garage to get something and I didn't turn the light on and I stepped right on those prongs, and that thing smacked me right in the face. Man, that hurt! But let me tell you something: I passed a faith test this morning. I did not say anything bad. It was awesome. It was great. Good stuff. But that thing hit me right in the face. It hurt. It goes away in a few minutes.

We all understand pain and we understand things like that. We understand moments where we undergo suffering. My wife Shari has been sick the last few days. She got sick on Thursday night, probably because I took her out to lunch on Thursday in the snow, but she was sick the last few days—which Valentine's Day, by the way, made it so I was able to get Valentine's dinner through a drive-thru, which to me is awesome. Saved a lot of money.

But we understand those moments of suffering and pain. That's not what we're talking about today and in the days to come. We're talking about the kind of suffering and the kind of pain that makes you want to quit. Anybody understand what I'm talking about? I do. I've been there. The kind of suffering that gets you to the place where you think there is no hope and there is nothing left and you get to the place where you feel like you can't go on, where it shakes your very foundation that it hurts so bad. It's that kind of a moment.

We've all been there. Some of us have been there recently. Some of us might be there right now. Back in 1983, my dad, along with Harold Willmington, wrote a book entitled *When It Hurts Too Much to Cry*. If you were around during those days, you remember that book, because it was great, great truth. Over Christmas break, I happened to be going through some books in my office and I came across this book and started reading it again. It came out in 1983—thirty-one years ago. I started reading through this book. Incredible statements. Incredible truths. And I decided that the message that God gave to my dad thirty-one years ago needs to be preached again. So I decided that's what we're going to talk about, when it hurts too much to cry, because I promise you: All of us either are there, we will be there, or we just came out of there.

My dad used to say you'll get the phone call today. We've all been in those moments. We've taken that book (it's been out of print for years) and reprinted it, and in fact if you go out on Main Street we've got them out there. They're free; you can pick one up and take it home with you. We've only got a few left because apparently everybody in the 9:15 service grabbed one, but for those of you who have Kindle or Nook or iBooks or Android for whatever else there is out there, eBooks, pdfs, whatever, you can go to our website or to any of those places and download them. The pdf will be on our website where you can download it for free. You can just take the book and read it. I want you to read it. It's short, eight chapters. Awesome book about how to get through those moments. And that's what we're going to be talking about in these next couple of weeks.

I want to talk today about not only the idea of suffering, which we all will experience; not the idea of the pain that we're all going to go through, but today specifically we have to begin—we're talking about when it hurts too much to cry—you have to start with a moment, with an idea, with a concept that we are going to make it through, and the only way you can do that is to start with the promises of God in the midst of our suffering.

Now I want to point you to Psalm 46. I want to read Psalm 46, because when we start to talk about when it hurts too much to cry, this passage is an amazing passage that helps us see who God is and what God will do and can do in the midst of these times. It says in Psalm 46, beginning in verse 1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling. Selah." There's that word *selah*—so there.

Verse 4, "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn. The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted. The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge."

This passage tells us with absolutely certainty, with unshaking faith, that our God is with us, no matter what we go through. Isn't that great to know? Isn't it great to know that no matter how bad life might be, God is going to bring us through? Isn't it great to know that no matter how difficult the road that we travel today might be, the journey that we are on, that our God is going to be with us every step of the way, that He is going to bring us through in victory?

Over the next few weeks we're going to hear some powerful testimonies of God's faithfulness, of God's power. You're going to hear one today of someone singing here on the stage a few moments ago, about what God can and will do in our lives.

I want to share with you a couple of promises that help us understand this idea of suffering and how we're going to make it through, and the first one is this: There will always be suffering in this world. You are always going to go through suffering in this world. Now I know some of you are saying, "I thought we come to church to be encouraged. That's not a very encouraging statement." You will never be without suffering in this world. We will always have moments where we are faced with great battles, great struggles.

It says in Matthew 5:10-12, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

Understand that you will always face suffering in this world. Now sometimes that suffering comes in the form of financial issues or illness, sickness. We know about that. We've talked about that. Sometimes it comes in the form of relationships or emotional challenges that we go through.

Sometimes it comes in the idea of persecution, that we will suffer because of what we believe in. Make no mistake about it: We live in a time today where we as Christians are going to suffer for what we believe. Make no mistake about that. We live in a different culture than we lived in ten, twenty, thirty years ago. You may have seen this week a federal court judge here in the commonwealth of Virginia decided that marriage is not something that should be honored and respected, that the marriage amendment in our state is something that is not constitutional, and it was thrown out because this federal judge said that's not right, we need to expand the idea, expand the concept, expand the definition of marriage.

Just a couple of days ago Planned Parenthood was actually, shockingly, celebrating the fact that it was Valentine's Day and actually talking about, "Hey, it's Valentine's Day, you can get abortion for Valentine's Day." Excusing sin. I saw a statement on Twitter this week, I'm not even sure who said it, but they said, "It's a sad commentary in our nation where it costs about \$40,000 to adopt a child, yet you can kill one through abortion for \$400."

Make no mistake. We are going to face persecution because of what we believe. We are going to go through struggles for our faith, for claiming that Jesus Christ is the only way, for standing up for righteousness, for standing against sin. We are going to face it. I'm just going to tell you now, as your pastor, I promise you that when the days come—and there will be days when the world comes in and tells us, as a church, that we have to change what we believe in order to abide by the law—we will not go against the Word of God to satisfy the sin of our culture. We will not do it. We will stand up for truth. We will stand up for righteousness. But we will suffer for what we believe.

My dad wrote that book, *When It Hurts Too Much To Cry*, in 1983. There is a passage in there, a quote that I want to read to you today because it's a quote that clearly tells us what we can believe about suffering. It says, "The children of God do suffer from time to time. But it doesn't mean that God has forgotten us. We need to remember that God's love and mercy and his ministering angels are usually much closer to us when we are in pain and in deep spiritual need than at those times when we are feeling spiritually strong."

Isn't that a great statement? When we are facing life's greatest trials, God in His power, God through His angels, is ministering to us in ways that are even greater than when things are going well.

This book was written in 1983, at a time when my dad was standing up for righteousness in our country, and he was going through some serious persecution at the time, and he just kept doing it, and he just kept standing up and saying the right things. It was during those times that he made the statement that God never called us to be popular; He called us to be faithful, because he understood, he knew that no matter how bad it might be, God is going to get us through. God is going to give us the strength that we need. That God, according to Psalm 46, is our refuge, our safe place.

Years ago my daughter, Jessica, when she was two years old, one day Shari was out of town and I was home with Jonathan Jr. and Jessica, and I think it was one of the first times I was at home with just the kids by myself. The twins had not been born yet. I was there with the kids, and as kids love to do, they were running around the house and playing, running back and forth and making noise and leaving toys all over the floor.

Jessica was running through the family room, running toward the kitchen, and when she got right to the edge of the kitchen she tripped on a toy that was there and fell forward, right into the corner of the wall, and it caught her and cut her entire forehead wide open. Blood was everywhere and she started screaming and crying.

I was watching TV, like all good babysitters do, and when I heard her scream I jumped up and ran to the kitchen and I saw her and saw the blood and she's screaming and I knelt down next to her and wrapped my arms around her as she's lying on the floor. I've got my arms around her, right on top of her, looking right into her eyes, and all of a sudden she stopped crying and stopped screaming. You know why? Because she was in a safe place. She was in her daddy's arms. And even at two years old she knew that was a place that when things were tough that's where she needed to be. When she was hurting, that's where she wanted to be. I had my arms around her, and she didn't cry anymore.

I took her to the doctor and got stitches, but let me tell you something: when we are going through those moments it's exactly the same thing for us. God is our refuge. He is our safe place. When we're going through those moments, so often we're trying to figure out how it is we're going to make it through when all that we've got to do is realize that God wants to wrap His arms around us and let us look squarely into His eyes and understand that we are in our Daddy's arms and He's got it taken care of.

Understand that we will all suffer, but I'm going to give you a second promise today. The second promise is that even though we will all face suffering in this world, you will never face that suffering without Christ. He never leaves us. He never forsakes us. He is always with us, every step of the way. There is nothing that you will ever go through that our God is not there with you every moment, holding on to you, praying for us, ever making intercession for us. Our God is with us in the midst of the storm. Our God is with us in the midst of the fire. Our God is always there.

Passages of Scripture tell us in John 16:33—I love this verse—“These things have I spoken to you that in Me you may have peace.” Regardless of what you're going through, in Him you will have peace.

It goes on to say, “In the world you will have tribulation,” that's a promise, but listen to this promise, “but be of good cheer because I have overcome the world.” There is nothing that you're going to face that our God has not already beat, nothing you'll ever go through, no battle, no war that our God has not already won. Our God has already won the victory. He has already allowed us to experience that because of who He is, we're going to make it. So He says here that even though you're going to go through tribulation, even though you're going to face it over and over and over and over again, “Be of good cheer. Don't worry. Be happy. I got this,” He says, “because I have overcome the world.”

First Peter 5:10 gives us five promises about God's role in suffering. It says, “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.” Five promises in this verse. The first one is you're going to suffer.” He says, “After you have suffered.”

And then the four other promises: He will perfect you. He will establish you. He will strengthen you. He will settle you. When you're going through moments of trial and moments of tribulation, grab ahold this verse. Read it. Memorize it. Hold onto it and rejoice in it, because you are going to suffer, but in the midst of every moment of suffering, God says, “I am going to give you everything you need.”

Now those four promises that I just read, the idea that He's going to perfect us, that is the Greek word *katartizō*, which is the idea, literally it's a medical term, of putting back in proper placement or alignment. It's a medical term. If you break a bone, they have to set it, put it back in alignment.

I've told you before, when I was a kid I broke thirty-nine bones. I broke everything you can break, and then I borrowed some to break. I broke everything. One time in the summer I had a broken leg and I was so upset because it was summer. A broken leg during the school year is okay because you can be late to class and it's excused, but in the summer it's awful because you want to play, so I was excited because toward the end of June I was getting the cast off. I was thrilled about it. So Mom took me in to the doctor to get the cast off and I got it off and I was so excited, I moved my leg around and I could walk again, run again. It was great.

That night, honest truth, I broke my other leg, and I had to go back to the emergency room, had to get it set and put into another cast. The idea, literally, what He tells us in the midst of our suffering He is going to perfect, He is going to put us in proper alignment, He is going to get us exactly where we need to be. It's the idea of being matured, of helping us grow up.

That second word, He will establish us, is the Greek word *stērizō*, which literally gives us the idea of grounding in a firm foundation, that through our suffering He's going to put us in a position where we are safe, that refuge, that place that is strong, a place that no matter what happens around us we will be protected.

It's the idea like we see in documentaries, or maybe if you're from that part of the country, out in the Midwest where they build their houses with concrete tornado shelters. When the tornado sirens go off, they rush down into this bunker and close the door, and when they get into that shelter, they don't have to worry about whether they are going to be safe, because when they are in that room, they are protected. That's what God says He will do in the midst of our suffering. He's going to take us to a safe place, a grounded place, and He will establish us.

He goes on to say that He will strengthen us. That's the Greek word *sthenōō*, which is only used once in the New Testament, and it literally gives us the idea of being strengthened to the point where it strengthens our soul, it strengthens our faith, it strengthens our inner man so that we will be able to face even greater trials and tribulations, not because of who we are, but because of what God is doing in our lives.

And that last promise, that He is going to settle us, is the Greek word *themelioō*, which is the idea of taking us one step further than being strong. In other words, being strong is great, but He's going to take us one step further, to the point where only in God's strength will we be able to make it through.

There are people in this room right now that are going through some moments of incredible suffering. There are people here in our church that are facing some of the greatest trials of life. And I don't want you to miss, I don't want you to forget the promises that God gives to us there. We love to celebrate the mountaintops, but we need to celebrate the valleys, too. Not celebrate what we are going through, but rather celebrate what we're going through, that no matter how bad it is, that our God is our refuge.

Let me share this testimony with you today.

[Video Clip]

Michael Davis: Thanksgiving weekend 2006 we were returning to Virginia from Arkansas.

Jerry Falwell: Holly Davis, married to one of our professors in the history department here at Liberty...

Michael: We were just east of Knoxville and Holly began complaining about a headache. It was very dark outside, so I noticed that she was kind of pinching the air.

Jerry: Holly said, “My head is hurting,” and then she passed out and she was taken to a small hospital and then helicoptered over to the UT Medical Center in Knoxville.

Michael: The doctor called me back after doing the MRI on Holly’s head and he told me, “Your wife has suffered a massive brain hemorrhage. We don’t know if she will be alive when we get to the hospital.

Jerry: She is paralyzed. She is unconscious.

Holly: My last memory was pulling over to the side of Interstate 40 and I remember seeing the grass on the side of the road, and that’s my last memory.

Michael: When her vessels popped in her brain, what happened is that her brain flooded with blood and just shut down. There was nothing they could do except make sure that her brain did not swell. In fact, they had to put a drain tube in her head.

Jerry: They won’t know until she awakens what the extent of the damage is.

Michael: About one-third of the people in Holly’s condition die; about one-third live in a vegetative state; and the other one-third have some level of recovery.

Jerry: Pray much for the Davis family.

Michael: I prayed out to Him when she God sick. The church did. Churches back in Arkansas, churches literally all across the country and some outside this country were praying for God to rescue Holly. As she began to naturally wake up from the coma, they had to keep her sedated to avoid any kind of damage from her being anxious as she woke up.

Holly: I couldn’t figure out why I was in the hospital. It was very confusing and scary. From a human perspective, I was hopeless and helpless. You don’t ever think, *Okay, when I go through this trial, when I’m in a coma, when I have to relearn everything, all these basic life skills, this is what I’m going to do.* You don’t ever think that, and so there is no way to prepare for it. So I just had to depend on God and He got me through and He still gets me through.

I had to relearn how to walk, write, swallow, and I remember driving to the doctor and thinking, *If I could just hit another car head on and die, no one would have to know that I wanted it to happen.*

My brain was damaged to the point where I didn’t have feelings. In the fall of ’07 I had a breakdown because I didn’t feel anything, and I wanted to cry and I couldn’t. Linda and Jim Varrick shared their story at Mountain Glen Bible Study one Tuesday morning, and the dam broke and I started crying and I couldn’t stop crying and I was just miserable. If someone had seen me, they would not have thought I’d ever had a struggle, and yet I felt like I was dying on the inside. I remember asking my uncle, “Why did people pray for me to not go to heaven? Heaven would be so much better than this.”

Psalm 118:17 says, “I will not die, but I will live, and tell what the Lord has done,” and I take that verse very seriously. It’s a mandate on my life. I didn’t die, not so that I could be alive; I did not die so that I could tell people what Jesus did for me. Sometimes He calls us to experience hardship; sometimes He calls us to experience health problems; but ultimately His calling is for our own good, and for His glory, and so how can I not waste what He did in me and how can I use it for His glory and to make Him famous?

Jonathan Falwell: Psalm 118:17, “I will not die, but live, and tell the world what He has done for me.” There are people right now in this room that are going through life’s greatest trials, and because of that trial, because of the suffering, because of the pain that you are experiencing, you are focused so specifically on what you’re facing that you might be missing out on what God can do and wants to do and will do if you’ll just step back and realize that when we get to that place, God is all we have.

With our heads bowed and eyes closed, I want to ask who here today can identify with what we’ve been talking about? Maybe right now you’re going through a trial, you’re going through a moment where everything is falling apart and you’re wondering, “Can I make it?” wondering, “Am I going to get through this?” If right now you are in the midst of that kind of trial, raise your hand because I want to pray for you.

[Praying] God, I pray right now for every hand that is raised. I don’t know the specific situations they are going through, but I know that you do, and I know that you care. But more than that, God, I also know that your grace is sufficient, that with you all things are possible, that nothing is too hard for you.

So I pray that you would bring peace, bring encouragement, bring ministry into their lives, Lord, that you would do in them in their situation what only you can do, that they would see and know that you are at work, that they would not feel as if life is over, but rather that they would begin to celebrate the fact that even in the midst of their suffering that you are doing a great work in their lives. God, I pray that you would bring victory in the midst of every challenge.

In a moment we’re going to stand and sing a powerful song that speaks to what we’re talking about today, “Lord, I Run to You.” In the midst of suffering, we are good at running, aren’t we? But sometimes we are not good at running to the only one that truly can help.

(Singing: “Lord, I Run to You”)

[Praying] Lord, we stand here in awe of the fact that you love us so much that no matter what we face that you want to help us. In our human condition, the culture we live, so often we face great trials. Most of our friends, they scatter, they run away, and we are going through moments where the pain is overwhelming, that it seems like we are all alone, and today we stand here amazed. Your love is amazing. You will never leave us. You will never forsake us.

And so God today I pray that you would speak peace into our lives. Allow us to understand that yes, we are going to face suffering, no question, but when we are in those moments when our heart breaks, when we are in those moments when we are full of fear, when we are in those

moments when we don't know where to turn, God help us to run to you, to fall before you and to know with all certainty that you are our refuge and our strength, that nothing is too hard for you, God.

God, help us to live in that truth. We know we are going to face suffering. We know it's going to hurt. So God in the midst of that help us to know who you are and to know what you want to do in our lives. And God we thank you that that's who you are today.

God help us as we leave this place to believe that and to embrace that, but also to share that. There are lots of people around us who are going through the same things that we are, facing suffering that maybe we don't understand, but help us to let them know and see that our God cares for them just like He cares for us, and you want to make a difference in their life, too. And God for that we give you the praise, we give you the thanks for what you are going to do. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

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