

Psalm 141 Seven Habits of Highly Successful Sufferers

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Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0 : 00] We're in Psalm 141 this morning. Psalm 141 and the title for the message is Seven Habits of Highly Successful Sufferers.

There's a pretty good chance if you open your Bible to the book of Psalms and see a Psalm of David, that it's going to be a Psalm rooted in the experience of suffering.

It's more than likely, we think, based on the superscription in Psalm 142, we think that Psalm 141 and 142 go together and that David is writing this in reflection of or in the middle of running for his life from King Saul.

David is a successful sufferer. And I think it's important to start off by saying that not everyone who suffers suffers successfully.

That there are certain stakes at hand in various trials and tribulations, and there's a certain level of passing the test and a certain way of failing the test.

[1 : 08] You can either succeed in suffering or you can fail in suffering. And for the most part, David is a highly successful sufferer.

David seems to do better when life's harder, and he seems to do worse when life is easier. I wonder if God sees any of us in that light. Anyway, so we're going to talk about how to suffer successfully, and we need to understand what God is really doing when he allows various kinds of suffering to enter our lives.

And whether it's a painful season of a relationship, you've been treated poorly, or you are sick, or something else is happening. If you are in the midst of suffering, you need to understand what God is doing.

And the basic idea is that God will qualify us for glory by putting us through a grind. 2 Corinthians 4, this light and momentary suffering is producing for us an eternal weight of glory.

If you study the narratives in the Old Testament in particular, you will often see God revealing a future of glory to his people, and then qualifying them to receive that glory through a season of suffering and struggle.

[2 : 31] So what is going on with suffering ultimately, just as with everything else, is that God has it for our good, and it is in particular connected to a glory that he has planned for us.

I wonder how many of you know that Charles Spurgeon, the great Charles Spurgeon, had a routine struggle with probably biological depression.

I would love to go back, by the way, to some of these. This is not going to surprise you in the least, but I would love to go back to these Puritans and talk to them about their diets. Because I guarantee you they weren't doing themselves any favor with the kind of vitamin D exposure they lacked, and the probably terrible food that they ate, and so on and so forth.

I bet it was just tons of carbs, guys. I'm serious. It was just tons of carbs. Carbs will make you depressed every time. Anyway, as I read about Spurgeon's sufferings, I do wish I could say, hey, maybe get outside and get some sunshine. Stop reading, and so forth.

Anyway, Spurgeon had a regular problem with depression, but he identified pretty early on in his life that depression was for him a prophet in rough clothing.

[3 : 43] How's that for a phrase? A prophet in rough clothing. He's a John the Baptist. Suffering depression was for him a John the Baptist, preparing the way for something much more glorious, much richer.

And that is what God is always doing with our suffering, provided we suffer successfully. God is sending us a prophet in rough clothing, whatever the suffering is, that precedes great glory, provided we suffer successfully.

Well, I mean, I'm not arguing this morning that the seven habits that I'm going to present to you today are the only ones. They're just the ones in Psalm 141.

And so why don't we walk our way through the seven habits of David, the highly successful sufferer. The first one is, is that he prayed continually. Look at verses one through two of Psalm 141.

Oh Lord, I call upon you. Hasten to me. Give ear to my voice when I call to you. Let my prayer be counted as incense before you and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

[4 : 56] What we'll see, in fact, the only reason that we know so much about how David handled suffering is because he prayed so often and wrote so many of those prayers in the form of Psalms.

I will remind you of something I try to share somewhat frequently most of us are walking around with a whole list of things we're worrying about in our heads. If we have been hurt or being hurt, whether through someone or some circumstance, we're going to think about that stuff a lot.

And I always want people to remember, and I want to get myself to remember, that those sort of thoughts are just unaddressed prayers. They're just prayers without an address. All of your worries, all of your internal monologue, all of your reviewing of the hardships you're going through, all of your doubts about its success and so forth.

All of those are just prayers. If you'll just attach dear father to the beginning, and I trust you at the end. And it's really a life-changing thing to understand that you actually pray all day.

You just need to stop praying to yourself and turn all of those anxious thoughts and all of those sort of reviews that you're doing into address them to the Lord.

[6 : 07] That's what Paul's teaching us in Philippians when he says, do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication. With thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.

Here in verses one and two, when David talks about incense and the evening sacrifice, if you know about the Old Testament ceremonial worship structure, he's basically saying, I pray to you in the morning, I pray to you in the evening, I'm praying to you all day long.

And so the first habit of a highly successful sufferer is to pray continually. The second habit of a highly successful sufferer is to speak carefully. He says in verse three, set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth.

Keep watch over the door of my lips. If you have gone through some hardships and I've talked to you, you know one of the things I'm really concerned about is that you don't make it worse than it already is with sin.

That you don't make it worse than it already is by compounding the pain with stupid actions. You know, the statement is so true that there's no problem you're in that's so bad that you can't make it worse.

[7 : 14] I want you to imagine with me two guys, we'll call them Jim and Bob. They live very far apart from each other and they're both, they don't know each other, and they're both about to go through the exact same trial, the same kind of trial.

And one of them, let's say Jim, he is really good at controlling his speech when things get hard. He is good at checking his grumbling, both internally and externally, his complaining.

He's very good at checking himself to not return reviling with reviling. He is really good at guarding his mouth. And then, was that Bob I said? Let's say that's Bob, okay? And I'm mixing them up.

Jim, let's say, going through the same thing, Jim doesn't have control of his tongue. He's a blurter, he's a cursor, he's a complainer, he's a lasher-outer, he's a reviler.

So we got Jim and Bob, and they're both going through the same trial at the same time. Who gets, who is going to make their trial worse than it was beforehand, right? So while we would say that, yes, speech emanates from the heart and we want to deal with the heart, David talks about the heart here in a minute, we also want to say that actually, even as you're waiting for your heart to catch up, and maybe especially as you're waiting for your heart to catch up, in the middle of suffering, highly successful sufferers do not grumble.

[8 : 38] They are careful with their speech. So David asks, Lord, set a guard over my mouth and keep watch over my lips. Number three, they shun sinful diversions.

Look at the next verse. Verse four, Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds, in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies.

I don't, maybe I'm the only one in the room who instinctively seeks to self-medicate stress, suffering, setbacks, conflicts with things like food, drink, sleep, TV, spending money.

Like, I'm probably the only one, right? Reality is, is that we all know where all the dopamine buttons are in our life at all times. And what you're going to find as successful sufferers understand themselves well enough to know that this is the time when I'm going to be particularly tempted to slam a dopamine button that I have in the past.

And friends, we talk about suffering, I think, mostly from that biblical lens where we think of really catastrophic things. But I would just tell you, as a guy who's been trying to walk with God for decades now, a lot of my stupid things haven't been because of hard, big sufferings.

[10 : 09] They've been because I was, I had been faithful to eat well for, you know, say, multiple weeks. And then I had a really, you know, my car broke down. And my stress went up to here.

And then I go and I look for a self-medicating solution. And friends, I'll just tell you, like, you're going to constantly, constantly disrupt God's purposes in so far as you can for your suffering if you keep slamming the dopamine buttons when things get hard.

So David understands this because he's a highly successful sufferer. And so he's like, God, don't let me, what does he say? Don't let me eat of their delicacies, which is totally, which is totally like a completely human experience.

We've all been there. The delicacies are sitting over there in the case. For whatever reason, whether for prudence or for righteousness, we've said no to those. We're not going to go there. And then heart life gets hard.

Where are we going to go? So a highly successful sufferer will shun sinful diversions. Fourthly, a highly successful sufferer will seek correction.

[11 : 25] Look at verse five. Let a righteous man strike me. It is a kindness. Let him rebuke me. It is oil for my head. Let my head not refuse it.

David is concerned that as he is already experiencing pain from the outside, that he would do what is very normal and natural to do. And that is to actively avoid having hard conversations that in the end would produce life.

But we've already been through so much pain and my goodness, this would just be too much. We are absolutely in a coddling era where all you have to do to get someone to be nice to you and leave you alone and not tell you to stop sinning is to say you're having a hard time.

And it is essentially the Christians perceived right to pull their I'm struggling card and therefore distance themselves from all accountability, rebuke, and so on and so forth.

So you want to watch out when you're suffering that you don't become prickly and oversensitive. The reality is, as I've already said, one of the things, if people really do love you, one of the things they're going to be like really concerned about is you take your lumps that are providential from the Lord and not add to them.

[12 : 46] And you will add to them if you don't respond well. And so a good friend, a good friend will come to you and say, hey, let's do this righteously.

Let me help you avoid compounding this problem with additional sin. But someone who doesn't, isn't a successful sufferer, they will use their current pain as sort of a buffer zone to keep people from rebuking, from correcting, and so on and so forth.

They become highly sensitive and accusatory when they ought to be eager to receive help. David doesn't see confrontation and rebuke as a compounding of his pain.

He sees it as a necessary corrective to keep that pain from avalanching and from becoming more than it has to be. This is clearly what we see in the book of Proverbs time and time again.

And people who are actually hungry for God, hungry for truth, and understand themselves are also eager to receive correction. Proverbs 27.5, Better is open rebuke than hidden love.

[13 : 56] Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Profuse are the kisses of an enemy. One who is full loathes honey, but to one who is hungry, everything bitter is sweet. And so time and time again, this is just a key question of like, are you actually hungry and thirsty for righteousness?

If you are, then when people tell you true things, you will not nitpick the delivery of those true things. Now, to be sure, when a sinner confronts you, it's unlikely that they're going to do so perfectly.

To be sure. And so what will really come down to is how hungry are you for truth? And how hungry are you for righteousness? And how sure are you that if you don't receive correction and guidance from your friends, that you will likely fall into further sin?

You have to kind of understand that in the middle of your suffering, all of these sort of possibilities, whether it be grumbling or diversion into sin, and so like, all of it's just right there.

And at that time, you actually want a friend who will love you, not blame you, like Job's friends, but also keep you on track and help you not to compound what you're already going through.

[15 : 09] It will be very easy in those times to blame that person for being unloving. And the Bible's just like, no, that's not right. That's not what's going on. Now, to be clear, we don't give everybody, we don't give everybody license.

We don't give everybody a key into the rebuke room. David says, very qualified, let a righteous man strike me. Let a righteous man rebuke me.

So we don't just admit this privilege to everybody, but we do admit it to somebody. And it's an important part of suffering successfully. Number five is, we, a successful sufferer, will stoke the flames of moral indignation over the wrongness of what he is experiencing.

And I just summarize that by praying against their enemies. And I want to pull this apart at layers for you. First of all, suppose you're suffering something that's not like anybody's fault per se.

A health thing, okay? What do you do with this idea? What is crucial in the midst of suffering is not to become apathetic toward what your heart is crying out for, and that is, I want a world that is right and just.

[16 : 25] I want an unbroken world. I don't want a world with suffering. I don't want a world with death. I don't want a world with pain. It is crucial in suffering that you keep your moral equilibrium even as you're experiencing something that is fundamentally either unjust or eternally ungood.

So suppose you're suffering from a disease. It's important in that moment to understand this should not be happening. What is happening to you right now is sin has cursed our world and you are living in a broken world and you need to keep some sense of sensitivity to the wrongness of the thing you're experiencing.

Don't become acquainted with suffering so much so that you become this sort of it is what it is person. No, if it's wrong, it's wrong and you should embrace that as like, yeah, this is wrong.

In this particular case, David is suffering at the hands of evil men and so he prays for their undoing versus the end of verse 5 and 6. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds when their judges are thrown over the cliff.

Just so we're clear is that the very people who are trying to kill David are bleeding out at the bottom of a cliff while David tells them, I told you so. It's a very fierce, sharp, moral assertion.

[17 : 51] When we are going through suffering at the hands of others, we need to be clear about the wrongness of their actions. Otherwise, how will we ever forgive them?

And also just the wrongness of their actions so that we can know how to pray. Now, how do we reconcile? We've talked about this already in the psalm series, but let's just review really quickly.

How do we reconcile the imprecatory psalms where David is praying for people to get thrown off of cliffs with what Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5, 43? You've heard it said, you've heard that it was said, you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

How do we do that? How do we pray for our enemies while also reading the imprecatory psalms and asserting that David wasn't wrong in praying them? He wasn't.

[18 : 52] How do we handle this? Well, one of the things we can remember is that the gospel that Jesus has brought us is a gospel of blessed destruction. What is the gospel?

The gospel is God's proclamation that in order to live you must die. The gospel is God's proclamation that you must join him at the cross and give in to yourself and die to yourself so that you may live again.

So let me tell you very clearly how you pray for your enemies and you pray for their destruction. The one most glorious option, there's lots of ways to be destroyed, but God's preferred means of destroying a person is by converting them.

in which the old man is dead along with Christ and buried and the new man is risen to walk in eternal life. So here's how I pray for people that are being wicked. Lord God, I pray that you would save them and by saving them destroy their flesh, destroy their pride, destroy their sense of self-sufficiency, destroy the arrogance that allows them to act in such a cruel and hostile way.

I pray that you would destroy them by saving them. And Lord, if it's not your plan to save them, I pray you'd destroy them by destroying them. That's how I pray for wicked people. I ask first that God would kill them by converting them.

[20 : 11] And if not that, then there's plan B. That's how I pray for wicked people. Now, number six, the sixth strategy for highly successful sufferers is some awareness of your own mortality.

Contemplate. People who are good at suffering think about death. And I'm going to see if I can talk about this in a way that is consistent with the way Scripture handles it. You see it in verse seven.

When one plows and breaks up the earth, so shall our bones be scattered at the mouth of Shoal. This is David's poetic way of saying that sooner or later, everybody in this particular story, both the victim and the perpetrator, will collapse and fall and be consumed back into the earth from whence they came.

Why is that such a consistent theme across the Psalms? Why is contemplating one's mortality an important strategy for suffering successfully? Well, let's trace this out a little bit.

So we've got, let's go to James. Let's think about James for a second. James one, where James says, consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you encounter various types of trials. Right? And he says, you know that these trials are testings of your faith and that they're going to produce steadfastness and steadfastness will have its full effect, making you perfect and complete.

[21 : 31] And then he says, if you lack wisdom, ask God. So this is a new cat. This is a category for us now. When you're suffering, you should rejoice.

And if you're having trouble rejoicing because you can't see what God is doing in this, ask God for wisdom. Okay. Now, what is, where does wisdom come from?

It comes from the fear of the Lord. It comes from, you know, the Bible's pretty clear on some of these locations, but I would just point you to Psalm 90 verse 12, where Moses prays, teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

There's something, and it's been known throughout classical history for a very long time. There's something about memento mori. You will die. It's the Latin, you will die. There's something about memento mori that gives us a heart of wisdom.

And obviously, in the midst of suffering, you can see that this is true. One of the things the devil will do when you're suffering at the hands of others is make those others appear to have a level of supernatural power and that they're somehow unstoppable.

[22 : 39] When you're getting attacked by a human lion, God will, the devil will make you think, this lion has no limits. I'm done. So contemplating mortality in general is helpful.

It's like, well, this is all going to be over in time enough. And that's the other problem. Time is very important for human beings. We have to really orient ourselves in it to understand life and so forth.

Well, what happens when we suffer? Have you guys seen that meme? It's, the title says, how to make time stand still. And in the picture is a person doing a plank. Suffering slows down time and it begins to feel like you will just always be in this particular state.

And so when we think about death, we're reminded that this piece of our life is a short piece of our life. And that sooner or later, this season will indeed pass.

And that if I've placed my faith in Jesus, I get to go to the place where nothing bad ever happens again. We need to orient ourselves on a bigger timeline than just this life to really live righteously in general, but in particular, to suffer well.

[23 : 53] Successful sufferers have some capacity to see that this life is short. And therefore, whatever season of hardship I'm going through is short. It will all soon be passed.

And all that is done for Christ will be the thing that lasts. Number seven is to think strategically. Look at the last two verses, verses eight through ten.

But my eyes are toward you, O God, my Lord. In you I seek refuge. Leave me not defenseless. Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and the snares of evildoers.

Let the wicked fall into their own nets while I pass by safely. Look at the heavy proliferation of hunting language in these verses.

Keep me from the trap, from the snares, from the nets. Now, hunting has changed quite a bit since the invention of gunpowder, as you might imagine.

[24 : 52] hunting is more of a solo sport now than it's ever been before, especially large game hunting. But for the longest time, hunting was mostly done through various means of pressure hunting, where you would get a group of people together and go out into a field and simply press the game in the direction that you wanted them to go, usually into a net, a snare, a pit, or off a cliff, so on and so forth.

Now, I want you to think about that because we could, we would get arrested or fined if we did this because you can't do it anymore. But if we wanted to, we could go out into a field right now and position a group of men in a certain way and we could move the deer just by them being afraid of us in a particular direction and voila, we've got ourselves a deer in a pit.

What's going on in that situation is the deer is actually not playing, they're playing checkers, right? The deer is not playing chess. The deer is responding to the person as if the person is the threat, but in reality, you're using this pressure hunting technique to steer a person or a deer towards something that you actually want to, like, this is the undoing is over there, you know.

You think it's me, but it's actually over here. Well, this is the fundamental thing you need to know about Satan's strategy for suffering. He is going to hurt you.

He's going to try to steer you and he's going to use the pain in your life to move you in a particular direction and you just need to know that. You need to not be outwitted by Satan's devices.

[26 : 30] You need to understand that he uses fear and he uses pain to move you in places that are further away from God and more in mortal danger than you were at the beginning. So, you just need to understand what the basic game is on the devil's side.

He is actually trying to steer you and move you in a particular direction. So, those are the seven habits in this text for a highly successful sufferer named David.

He prayed continually. He spoke carefully. He shunned sinful diversions. He sought correction. He prayed against his enemies. He contemplated his mortality and he thought strategically.

Now, wrapping up, David is a successful sufferer. Is he the most successful sufferer in the Bible? Well, if you listen to my sermons, I always end with Jesus.

Here's Jesus, the most successful sufferer who has ever lived or died. Hebrews 2.9, but we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

[27 : 46] Did Jesus maintain these seven habits of highly successful sufferers? Did Jesus pray continually? Read the crucifixion story again. Start with Gethsemane.

You know what it says of Jesus in Gethsemane? And being in agony, he prayed all the more earnestly. What is Jesus saying mostly from the cross?

Who is Jesus speaking to mostly from the cross? He is indeed as he's suffering increases, so do his prayers. Speak carefully. Did Jesus speak carefully in his sufferings?

First Peter 2. When Jesus was reviled, Peter tells us, he did not return reviling. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

This is Peter's way of caring for his church and helping them to stay quiet when unjust suffering. Just hold your peace. Let God who judges justly vindicate you.

[28 : 50] Jesus did that. Shun sinful diversions. Jesus' life was acquainted with sorrows. He had a hard life, but he did not entrust himself to man.

He chose time and time again to do it the father's way and not the easy way, missing meals, missing time with his family, and so on and so forth. Indeed, even as he is dying, he's offered a kind of anesthesia, a kind of primitive anesthesia, and a number of the Gospels record this.

They offer him wine mixed with myrrh, and when he tasted it, he knew what it was, and he did not take it. Why? He chose to be fully conscious in his sufferings, and not eat of this particular delicacy to blunt the pain.

Did he seek correction? David says, let a righteous man strike me. Did Jesus seek correction? No, he did not seek correction. He took on our sin, and the righteous God of the universe struck him.

You know, there's a little, when you're doing Christology, when you're seeing Jesus, there are going to be little wrinkles because he's Jesus. Did he need a righteous man to strike him? No, but we needed a righteous God to strike him.

[30 : 00] Or we would have absolutely no hope in our suffering. Did he pray against his enemies? Well, I'll tell you this. Colossians 2.15 says that in his cross, he disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them.

Did he contemplate his mortality? Absolutely, he did. He repeatedly said, I have come to lay down my life. And as he is on the cross, he calls out to the Father, Father, into your hands, I commit my spirit and having said this, he breathed his last.

Did he think strategically? Yeah. He knew how to not be steered. Read the Gospels and you'll see a man who just refused to be steered. He was always thinking strategically.

So the truth is, is that our entire faith is built, and I think the whole world is built on the concept of successful suffering, starting with Jesus.

He is the foundation of everything, and it is his ability to suffer successfully without sin that makes all of this possible. He went through the great grind for the great glory, Philipians 2, 6.

[31 : 17] Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, this is all the grind, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men, and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of the Father.

There's your grind and glory pattern, it's all over the Bible. And I'll leave us with what we read this morning for our call to worship, Peter's words not only to put your faith in Jesus as the most successful sufferer, but also to follow Jesus' example.

1 Peter 2 19, for this is a gracious thing when mindful of God one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. for what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure?

But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

[32 : 41] He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile and return. When he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed, for you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseers of your souls.

Two things real quick. Do you know how different the world would be? If all Christians learned how to be successful sufferers, do you know how much glory would be on the tail end of that grind?

It would change everything if we could just learn how to do this like Jesus did this. Secondly, do you understand, dear sufferer, that the man, Christ Jesus, acquainted with suffering, is your friend, and that he is right now happy to walk with you and keep you on track?

and help you to suffer well. Let's humble ourselves today and say, Lord Jesus, I think I've been trying to do some of this suffering without my shepherd and the overseer of my souls.

[33 : 57] And I want to walk with you through this. You did it perfectly, and you've paid for me to do it better. So I want to walk with you through this.

I have a friend that many, many years ago, his daughter was born with a heart condition, didn't appear that she was going to survive, and you really couldn't. This was before all the monitors and stuff, and so you just had to stay up while your baby slept.

And he would sit in the room and pray over this little girl who was just flirting with death all night. And eventually he realized, you know, there should be, he went and got another chair out of the kitchen, and he put this chair next to his chair, and he said, Lord Jesus, let's sit here tonight and walk through this again, knowing full well that he had a shepherd and overseer who would absolutely spend the night with him.

Again, as he tried to suffer well. So communion today is all about celebrating this great Savior and shepherd who is with us. So if you place your faith in Jesus, and you're ready to follow him, and you are following him, then I would invite you to come and take a cup and a piece of bread, and come back to your seat, and we'll go through communion together after you get your elements.

Let me pray. Lord Jesus, you are the great shepherd and overseer of our souls. And it is you who laid down your life for us so that we could be called sons and daughters of God.

[35 : 29] We praise your holy name for how faithful you've been to us. And we thank you so much for how much you've forgiven us. There's probably not a way to count the number of times we've suffered poorly.

You are so full of grace. We do want to follow you, and we can see that this is the better way. So, Lord, would for the many times we failed and give us faith, Lord, to pursue you in this way.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Come.