

Suffering As A Christian

1 Peter 4:12-19

Pastor John Miller

One time someone once said that God has one son without sin, but none without sorrow. One son without sin, but none without sorrow. Jesus was called the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we're gonna learn from this text that God wants us to rejoice even in our suffering because then we'll experience the glory and the grace of God which comes upon us.

So here Peter is doing this. He's writing to strengthen the suffering saints, and he's trying to help them to stand. They were facing a fiery trial, and Peter wanted them to be able to stand. So he exhorts them, not only in this first epistle, but in this passage particularly, to instruct them concerning the inner response that they should have as they suffer as Christians.

Verse 16, now there are four inner attitudes or actions that we need to take when we are going through a time of suffering. And it's simple, but it's not simplistic. And I want you to write them down if you're taking notes. Number one, we should expect suffering. Look at verse 12. He said, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial, which is to try you as though some strange thing has happened unto you. Do not think it's strange concerning the trial that you're going through.

It means don't be surprised. This strange means it's an attitude of bewilderment. The natural reaction to human suffering in the heart is regarded as strange or alien. And now here's what happens, we as believers think that I'm a Christian, I love Jesus, I go to church, not just the church, but Revival Christian Fellowship. So I'm a super saint. And I'm also a member of the Deeper Life Club, which doesn't exist by the way, I'm just joking. Some of you are going, I wasn't invited, what's that? We get this idea that if you're really spiritual, you're not going to suffer.

Nothing could be further from the truth. If the Son of God suffered, what makes us think that if we take up His cross and we follow Him, that we will not suffer as well? So we should expect in this fallen, sinful world that we will experience rejection and persecution and opposition and sorrow and suffering.

Now this verse 12 is packed with spiritual truth, and the phrases in there are so important. No, now one of the first things we do when we suffer is we begin maybe to question, does God love me, right? I thought God loved me. If God loved me, why do I have cancer? If God loves me, why did my loved one die? If God loves me, why did I lose my job? If God loves me, why won't my car start? If God loved me, why does the dog dig holes in the backyard? Even Christian dogs dig holes.

(audience laughing)

But sometimes we begin to question the love of God. So I love verse 12, verse one, the first word, be love it. Now whenever you find that word, it has two meanings. It means God loves you

and the writer who is Peter, he said, I love you. So, you know, that was the kind of a term that they would use to greet one another, by the way. In the early church, I think it's kind of cool we should revive it, beloved. Good morning, beloved, because it reminds us, God loves you and I love you.

And it's good to know God loves me, right? It's good to know that others love me as well. So we should never, ever doubt the love of God, nor should we think it's strange or foreign. So another thing that we freak out about in verse 12 is we think that this is out of God's control. Why did God let this happen? God isn't in control. So God doesn't love me. God's not in control, this just happened to me.

So notice in verse 12, 11, thinking that strange concerning the fiery trial, as though some strange thing happened to you. Now the word happened there literally means to go together or to fall together. So what he's saying is it just didn't happen. It's not what we call happen stands. It is designed by God. God has allowed it for a design and for a purpose. Now we think it's strange. The word strange there means foreign. It means foreign. So it's not strange or foreign for a Christian to go through suffering and to go through sorrow.

D. Edmund Hebert, in this excellent commentary on this passage.

He said, "He who has enlisted under the banner of the crucified Christ, need not be surprised if conflict, hardship, and suffering follow. Jeoswell Sanders said, "Every adverse experience when rightly received can carry its quota of good." And I love what a woman by the name of Madame Guyon said. She said, "Oh, if you can only knew, if you only knew what peace there is in an accepted sorrow, knowing that God allows it, God loves me and God is in control.

That's where our faith rests when we go through a time of sorrow and a time of suffering. Now next we all, we have to have this attitude, verse 13 and 14, we need to rejoice in our suffering. Now you might say, well pastor, I can expect suffering. And by the way, we are saved, but we live in a fallen world. We are saved going to heaven, but we still live in bodies that are subject to sin. So we're going to suffer in this fallen world.

But now we are to rejoice in our suffering. Look at verse 13 and 14. Peter says, "But rejoice as much as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings. Then when his glory shall be revealed, you may be glad with exceeding joy." If you be reproached in the name of Christ, verse 14, happy are you for the spirit of glory and of God rest upon you. On their part, that is the part of those who are persecuting you, he that is Christ is evil spoken of. But on your part, he that is Christ is what? Glorified.

So we're to rejoice. That's the positive. That's a sharp contrast, but instead, causing us to rejoice, not with bewilderment or perplexity or doubting God's love, but to rejoice. Don't be freaking out. Now this phrase rejoice means constantly, continually be rejoicing. And by the way, verse 12 down to verse 19 is full of what is called imperatives, which are commands, they're not suggestions, they're not recommendations. Their imperative commands.

They're all in the present tense, which means constantly being obedient to these commands. So we are commanded to have an attitude of gratitude and rejoice even in our sorrows and even in our sufferings.

In Acts chapter five, verse 41, when the apostles were beaten and whipped for preaching the gospel, they departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame.

Jesus said it like this in Matthew 5 verse 12. He said, "We're to rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for how great is your reward in heaven." So get an eternal perspective and rejoice when you're going through suffering.

James chapter 1 verse 2, James says, "My brother encountered all the joy when you fall into diverse or different trials or testing." And that's what it is, it's a trial or a test.

Now, here's what's hard to rejoice. So I wanna give you some reasons from the text why you should rejoice, right out of the text. Four reasons to rejoice.

Number one, your suffering means fellowship with Christ. If you respond properly and obediently and trustingly to your suffering and sorrow, it can bring you into a deeper, intimate fellowship with Christ.

Look at verse 13 again. He says, "Rejoice, why?" Because you become partakers of Christ's suffering. So stop right there. When you suffer and you surrender in your suffering to God, you come into a deeper, more intimate fellowship with Him.

This is what Paul said in Philippians 3:10. He said, "I want to know Him," that is Christ. "I want to know the fellowship of His suffering, and I want to be made conformable unto the image of Him." So Paul wanted to go deeper in fellowship with Christ and his suffering.

This doesn't mean that we can add to his atoning work. It's already a finished work, but it means that it drives us.

I learned a little poem years ago, I had one little stanza. I thank God for the bitter things. They've been a friend to grace. They've driven me from the path of ease to storm the secret place. I thank God for all the friends who have failed to fill my heart's deep need. They've driven me to the Savior's feet upon His love to feed.

I'm thankful to that through all life's way, no one could satisfy. And so I found in God alone my full and rich supply.

That's what happens when a believer runs to God and trust in the Lord when he's going through a time of suffering.

How about the three Hebrews and Daniel three, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? They were thrown into a fiery furnace. I would say that's a trial, right? Nothing burned but the ropes,

they were set free. And guess who was hanging out with them in the furnace? Jesus, right? The Son of God.

So even in the furnace of affliction, the Lord is with you and we can rejoice. Second reason to rejoice is our suffering now means glory in the future. Look at verse 13. He says that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad with exceeding joy. So the suffering now means glory in the future. Paul said in Romans 8, verse 18, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed." So keep an internal perspective.

Here's number three reason to rejoice in your suffering. Our suffering brings to us the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This is very parallel to my first point that our suffering means fellowship with Christ. But our thirdly, our suffering brings a extra dose of the Spirit's power and presence into our lives. You notice that in verse 14, he says, "If you be reproached in the name of Christ, happy are you, why?" Here's the reason, the Spirit of glory and of God. That's the Holy Spirit of glory and God.

Rest upon you on their part, he's evil spoken of, but in your part, he will be glorified. Remember when Stephen, Acts chapter seven, was stoned to death? By the way, his name, Stephen, is Stefanos, which means crown. And Stefanos is actually not a diadem, not a kingly crown, it's a victor's crown. And he was being stoned to death for preaching the gospel. It says that his face shone like an angel. And he looked up into heaven and he saw the heavens open. And he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God the Father, only place in the Bible, Jesus is standing to welcome home this first Christian martyr.

And what a blessing that the Spirit of God and the glory rested upon Stephen as he was going through that time. And then here's number four. We rejoice because our suffering enables us to glorify God. This is bottom foundation truth. This is rock bottom foundational truth.

In your sorrow, in your suffering, in your pain, in your adversity, in your difficulty, You can glorify God. And that's why we're here, amen? To glorify God and to enjoy him forever. It enables us to glorify God as the spirit of glory and of God, verse 14, rests upon us. But we can bring glory to him.

A philosopher by the name of J. R. Miller said these words. He said, "A photographer carries his picture into a darkened room that he may bring out its features." He says, "The light of the sun would mar the impression on the sensitized plate." There are features of spiritual beauty which cannot be produced in the life in the glare of human joy and prosperity. God brings out in many a soul its loveliest qualities when the curtain is drawn and the light of human joy is shut out.

I love that. And we don't really do that kind of photography that much today, but in the old days you'd take the, this photographer would take the place into the dark room and develop them, right? Well, God brings you into the dark room to develop you. Now, we may be in the dark, but God's never at a distance. He said he would never leave us or forsake us. Maybe that you don't

really hear him or see him, but he's promised never to leave you or forsake you.

So expect suffering, rejoice in suffering, and here's number three, write it down. Examine your life when you suffer. Now, you gotta be careful you don't get too introspective, but we do wanna examine our lives and ask him, "Am I suffering because of my sin or disobedience?" Look at verse 15 to verse 18. He said, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer or as a thief or as an evil doer or as a busy body in other man's matter." Isn't it interesting that he mentions murder, thievery and evil doing in the same statement as busy bodies?

What is the busy body? Someone who sticks their nose in business that doesn't belong to it. It's basically Peter saying mind your own business. Don't stick your nose into my business. Keep your eyes and focus on the Lord. Now notice in verse 16, "Yet if any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed.

Let him glorify God on his behalf. For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begin, it does. What shall the end of them that obey not the gospel of God be? And if the righteous, verse 18, are scarcely saved, which literally reads, are saved through much difficulty or adversity or suffering, if they're saved through sorrow and suffering, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

So if Christians go through suffering and sorrow and chastening, what do you expect unbelievers to face someday when they stand before the judgment of God? So the furnace of suffering brings more light by which we can see our lives in light of God's holiness. If God's refining process to remove the dross and to purify us.

Now questions we should ask when we go through suffering. Verse 15, ask, am I suffering because of my sin? Is God chasing me because I've sinned and he's trying to get me to repent, trying to wake me up? I think it is valuable and beneficial as a Christian. If God allows suffering or sorrow in your life, ask the Lord, "Lord, is it I? Is there sin in my life? Is there an attitude that needs to be readjusted? Is there actions I need to abandon? Do I need to confess my sin?" God, pray that you would forgive me and cleanse me from all unrighteousness.

God loves us too much to let us just go, so he will chase us. It's kind of a fancy biblical word for God spans us to get us back on the right path. Sometimes God wants to get our attention, so he brings suffering to wake us up to our sin that we need to repent of and be abandoning.

And then the second question we should ask when we suffer, Verse 16, is am I ashamed or do I glorify God? If I'm suffering because of my witness of Jesus Christ, do I recoil in shame or do I try to glorify and honor the Lord, let my light shine before others that they may see my good works and glorify God who is in heaven?

Then the third question we need to ask, verse 17 and 18, am I concerned for the lost? And this one's a challenge.

When you're suffering, you're not thinking about unsaved people, 'cause sometimes you're

suffering because of them. But what we should be asking is, "Lord, can I be a witness? Can I be a testimony? Can I seek to win them to you? Can I somehow share with them and lead them to you?" That's so very important.

Our suffering and sorrows can be an opportunity to witness to the goodness and glory of God. I'm gonna give you a biblical illustration in Acts chapter 16. Quickly, when Paul and Silas were in Philippi and they were beaten and whipped and thrown into an inner prison in stocks. Remember that? And in midnight, what did they do? They sang songs.

Now, if I were Silas and I'm in stocks and I've been beaten, I've been thrown in jail and it's midnight and Paul turns to me and says, "Let's sing," I'd slap him. It would be a Christian slap, but I would slap. I'm not gonna sing, where's God? Why did God let this happen to us? We're preaching the gospel, why shouldn't we be in jail? This is no good, but the Bible says they sang songs and Luke included it in the narrative, he said, and the prisoners heard them, I love that.

Why? Because an earthquake came at just that moment. The prison doors were open, and the jailer thought that all the prisoners had escaped, so he pulls out his sword, he's gonna take his own life, and Paul and Silas yelled out to him, "Do thyself no harm, we are all here." Now again, if I were Paul and Silas, I would say, "Shh, don't say a word until you hear him hit the ground." And then we're gonna book it out of here.

Now they said, "Don't harm yourself, we're here." And immediately he put these things together. They're singing praises to God. An earthquake opens all the doors, they could escape. They know that I was gonna kill myself, but they told me not to. So he grabs the light, he comes trembling into their cell, and he says, "What must I do to be saved?" What a great question, right? What must I do to be saved? And the answer, believe on Jesus Christ and you will be saved. What a beautiful story.

So they were witnesses in their suffering to unbelievers to bring them to God. I believe that they complained and sulked and griped, and the prisoners heard them. They would never have won the Philippian Jailer to Christ. So be a testimony, examine your life.

And here's number four, write it down. Commit yourself to God when you suffer. I like to call this have yourself committed. Notice verse 19. Wherefore, here's the grand conclusion. Let them who are God's people, children of God, Christians, that suffer. There's that key word. According to the will of God, do what? Commit the keeping of their souls to him in well-doing.

In other words, as you continue to do what's right, as a faithful creator. And my favorite verses in this text are verse 12 and verse 19, the beginning and the ending. In the New Living Translation, verse 19 reads, "So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, trust your lives to God who created you, for he will never fail you." I love that.

So here's the grand conclusion, commit yourself to God. So the wherefore brings it all together. This is the putting it into shoe leather. If you are suffering according to the will of God. Now, two statements are made in this text. You suffer as a Christian, and you can suffer in the will of God.

Now, the reason why this text is precious to me is I grew up in a church that was commonly teaching that if you had enough faith and you were super spiritual, you not only wouldn't suffer physically, you would prosper financially. There was a lot of health and wealth prosperity preaching, that is not scriptural or biblical. God's people do suffer. Does that mean they're forsaken? No, God's in control.

But when I saw this statement, suffer according to the will of God, it blew my mind. You mean you can be in God's will and suffering? Yeah, just because your car blew up, just because the diagnosis was bad from the doctor, doesn't mean you're out of the will of God. You could be smack dab in the center of God's will and suffer, don't forget that. God knows what he's doing, God is in control.

Many of the great saints in Hebrews chapter 11 were put to death for their faith. They were men and women of faith, but they suffered. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins and destitute and afflicted, but they were men and women of faith. So we find here the important truth that you can suffer and still be in the will of God. What are you supposed to do?

Then verse 19, commit your keeping of your soul to him as a faithful creator of well-doing. Now, this word commit is a financial term, or literally a banking term. It's continually trusting oneself to God's protective care. It's a picture of giving, of entrusting something to the care and the protection of another.

So you put your money in the bank in hopes that at least you can recover it when you need it, right? So you invest, you put your money in their care. So you're to entrust yourself to God. Look at chapter five, verse seven of first Peter, a verse we all love, casting all your what? Your care, your anxious, worry, fearful thoughts upon him. Why? 'Cause he cares for you. Jesus cares about you.

And then keep on doing well, go back to our text, verse 19, Keep on doing and well doing. You don't stop doing what is right, reading, praying, seeking the Lord, going to church, serving the Lord, just because you're suffering. And then remember this, verse 19, he is a faithful creator. Someone said, "We must leave to God all that depends on him, and think only of being faithful and all that depends on ourselves." Amen? I love that.

Let's pray.