

¹² Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in His suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing His glory when it is revealed to all the world.

¹⁴ So be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, however, it must not be for murder, stealing, making trouble, or prying into other people's affairs. ¹⁶ But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by His name!

¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God's household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God's Good News? ¹⁸ And also,

"If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?"

¹⁹ So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for He will never fail you. 1 Peter 4:12-19 NLT

This scripture passage is loaded with both encouragement and reality. The reality is that suffering is a part of the human experience but the encouragement is found in the message and story of Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that we are to share in His sufferings. In fact, this scripture suggests that we are partners in His suffering.

As we unpack this today my prayer is that you can make practical applications to your life. Peter wrote this way for a reason. All of us face things and here we have this awesome instruction on how to handle life in the storm. Maybe you won't see it today but maybe it will help you understand it tomorrow.

In verse 11 there is a doxology of sorts that Peter uses to close his remarks about serving but in the flow of reading this chapter you must also see it as an introduction to suffering. He wrote these words:

"... that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." 1 Peter 4:11 NLT

The Blessings of Suffering

It may seem like a strange thing to say but in our suffering there is blessing to be found. First of all we bless God by following our Savior in His suffering. Our willingness to pick up our own crosses and bear them with God's help speak volumes about the maturity of our faith.

George Matheson was born in Glasgow Scotland in 1842. At birth his eyesight was poor but by age 18 he had nearly lost it completely. Robbed of physical sight he had an uncanny ability to see spiritual truth with penetrating clarity and insight. Take the role of suffering in the life of a Christian. It never caught him by surprise. He never thought of suffering as strange because he

was a Christian. When according to God's will for his life he was asked to enter into it through his blindness he wrote these words. They are a bit classical in their writing style but try to hear the truth of these words.

"There is a time coming in which your glory shall consist on the very thing which now constitutes your pain. Nothing could be more sad to Jacob than the ground on which he was lying, a stone for his pillow! It was the hour of his poverty. It was the season of his night. It was the seeming absence of his God. The Lord was in the place and he knew it not. Awakened from his sleep he found that the day of his trial was the dawn of his triumph! Ask the great ones of the past what has been the spot of their prosperity and they will say, 'It was the cold ground on which I was lying.' Ask Abraham; he will point you to the sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Ask Joseph; he will direct you to his dungeon. Ask Moses; he will date his fortune from his danger in the Nile. Ask Ruth; she will bid you build her monument in the field of her toil. Ask David; he will tell you that his songs came from the night. Ask Job; he will remind you that God answered him out of the whirlwind. Ask Peter; he will extol his submersion in the sea. Ask John; he will give the path to Patmos. Ask Paul; he will attribute his inspiration to the light which struck him blind. Ask one more!--the Son of God. Ask Him whence has come His rule over the world; He will answer, 'From the cold ground on which I was lying--the Gethsemane ground--I received my scepter there.' Thou too, my soul, shall be garlanded by Gethsemane! The cup thou fain wouldst pass from thee will be thy coronet in the sweet by and by."

Can you see how different this is from the current rash of health and wealth preaching that many flock to hear? I understand why certain preachers can draw a crowd of people who sit at home and watch their power of positive thinking sermons but it is not Biblical and that makes it heresy.

This same attitude that Matheson practiced causes Peter to write these words:

*¹² Dear friends, **don't be surprised** at the fiery trials you are going through, **as if something strange** were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in His suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing His glory when it is revealed to all the world.*

a. Don't be surprised

We should be ready for the "fiery trials" that come our way. Let me try to define what this could mean.

He means there will be seasons in our life when we will lack provision, power, position, protection and a sense of permanence.

He means that at times we will become recipients of verbal or maybe even physical persecutions that arise on account of our devotion to the Word of God.

He means to include the pain experienced by those who have loved ones whose bodies appear to be wasting away before their very eyes.

He means the dark moments in life when we are asked to fend off the prowling attacks of Satan.

b. Don't think that it is strange

Suffering for the sake of our faith should never be thought of as strange. We may wonder where God has gone. We may question His care for us and wrestle with our faith but we should never think that something strange is happening to us. It may be a new chapter in our lives but it should not catch us off guard. We may feel abandoned in our hour of need but in fact we are walking the way of mature Christians when we see it for what it is and press in closer to Jesus.

¹⁴ So be happy when you are insulted for being a Christian, for then the glorious Spirit of God rests upon you. 1 Peter 4:14 NLT

You may feel as though God has left you alone but in fact Peter says His Spirit is resting upon us. It is in our times of testing that God's glory is resting on us. He is covering us; guiding and guarding us through this time of trial if we will just look to Him for guidance.

It is almost as though Peter has memorized the words of Jesus given in His first sermon to the disciples.

¹¹ "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you^[c] and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. ¹² Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way. Matthew 5:11-12 NLT

c. Don't be ashamed

But it is no shame to suffer for being a Christian. Praise God for the privilege of being called by His name!

In America generally suffering for Christ most often will mean that you may suffer some disdain from those around you. Most of that will come from the sad reputation that much of the church world has these days as being mean, unforgiving, unloving and uncaring.

Bottom line: Don't be afraid to identify with Jesus Christ.
Don't be afraid to walk the road that Jesus walked.
Don't be afraid to suffer with Jesus.
Don't be afraid or ashamed to suffer for the cause of Christ.

The poet Ella Wheeler penned these words:

All those who journey, soon or late, Must pass within the garden's gate;
Must kneel alone in darkness there, And battle with some fierce despair.
God pity those who cannot say, "Not mine but Thine," who only pray,
"Let this cup pass," and cannot see, The purpose of Gethsemane.

The Burden of Suffering

There is a burden to be born. We are not to run from it or necessarily try to escape it although Jesus prayed in the garden to be “excused” from the crucifixion. The burden of suffering is a part of life and so how can we endure it? How do we handle it? Peter does not leave us without answers and ways that allow us to make practical applications.

a. Embrace your suffering Be glad

¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household. And if judgment begins with us, what terrible fate awaits those who have never obeyed God’s Good News? ¹⁸ And also, “If the righteous are barely saved, what will happen to godless sinners?”

In every reference to suffering before this passage it has been attributed to the hands of ungodly people but now Peter is suggesting that there may be suffering that we have brought on ourselves by our disobedience. The Bible supports this in other places as well. God is not above disciplining us for our disobedience. You have to be very careful with this truth however because when He disciplines us it is not with a vengeance but rather a desire for us to be made whole and spared the destruction that comes from disobeying. Also one must be careful for judging others who are suffering and drawing a wrong conclusion that it is because they are not in God’s will.

There are times when God will prune us like a tree that He desires to bear fruit. When fruit trees are pruned back they often will bear an abundance of fruit the following year.

If you are being allowed to go through a season of suffering take heart because ultimately will desire that your life be abundantly blessed with His presence and purpose. We are called by Peter to embrace our suffering and allow God to make us joyful even in the midst of suffering.

John Henry Jowett (1864-1922) was an English pastor and teacher who shepherded prominent churches in both England and America. Renowned for his depth of Bible knowledge, his motto was, “I have had but one passion, and I have lived for it-the absorbingly arduous yet glorious work of proclaiming the grace and love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”]

Gratitude is a vaccine ... by focusing on that which is praiseworthy, gratitude inoculates us against the disease of bitterness and resentment.

Gratitude is an antitoxin ... by focusing on that which is praiseworthy we counteract the poisonous lie of the Evil One that says trials are proof that God has abandoned us.

Gratitude is an antiseptic ... by focusing on that which is praiseworthy we sterilize our thoughts of all that would breed the germ of discontent.

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22).

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things” (Philippians 4:8).

Like Peter says if we can't stand the judgment of God now what will it be like to stand before Him someday. Embrace your life. Trust Him and believe that He knows what is best for you.

b. Entrust your souls

Be growing

¹⁹ So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for He will never fail you.

Can you trust Him? Do you trust God? George Matheson that I quoted from earlier learned to entrust his soul to God on many occasions. Something happened to George at 40 on June 6, 1882. He never told what it was but it caused him great mental anguish. His heart cried out to God and as his heart moaned words welled up inside of him, words of comfort. He said later it was as though he was being dictated to when he wrote the verses of a classic and enduring hymn:

O joy that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise not in vain,
That morn shall tearless be.

Entrust your soul to God and allow the experiences of life to grow you and your faith.

Yes you will suffer, somewhere, someday. Yes you will face gut wrenching moments in your life. No we shouldn't be surprised or think it strange or be ashamed. We are to embrace it and entrust God but there is one other thing that we must include.

c. Engage your service

Be good

¹⁹ So if you are suffering in a manner that pleases God, keep on doing what is right, and trust your lives to the God who created you, for He will never fail you.

We must keep on doing what is right and what is right is serving others. Even when things are not going our way we can find a way to keep serving others. Being good and engaging in service to others will take your mind off of your own stuff.

Love is the key. Joy is love singing. Peace is love resting. Long-suffering is love enduring. Kindness is love's touch. Goodness is love's character. Faithfulness is love's habit. Gentleness is love's self-forgetfulness. Self-control is love holding the reins

The greatest antidote for keeping your focus on Christ is to serve others.

To serve my present age. . . .

"It is a very difficult matter to understand when God permits affliction or loss to come into our lives. Our humanity wants to cry out, "Why me God? I love you and faithfully serve you. Why did you permit this sorrow to happen to me?" . . . one reason for affliction is to make us into instruments which will be of greater use to God. For example, a lump of iron ore is violently ripped from its comfortable place in the earth, shipped to a place far away, exposed to melting heat, poured out into a mold, squeezed by rollers, smashed and pounded in a forge, subjected to electric shock to bond other metals to it and later scraped against grindstones to give it a final shape. The resulting screwdriver or exquisite piece of tableware could never have existed except for the difficult experiences it endured along the way."