

Date: September 6, 2020  
Series: *Faith for Tough Times*  
Title: *A Reason for Suffering*  
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Scripture: 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 4:12-19

### **1 Peter 4:12-19**

**12 - Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.**

**13 - But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.**

**14 - If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.**

**15 - If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.**

**16 - However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.**

**17 - For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?**

**18 - And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"**

**19 - So then, those who suffer according to God's will, should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.**

This week while browsing the Internet, a list of instructions caught my eye. It claimed to be an excerpt from the US Government Peace Corps Manual for its volunteers who work in the Amazon Jungle telling them what to do in case they are attacked by an anaconda. Here it is, and listen up, because who knows, you might be out for a walk in downtown Derwood and come upon a huge boa constrictor.

- (1) If you are attacked by an anaconda do not run. The snake is faster than you are.
- (2) Lie flat on the ground. Put your arms tight against your sides, your legs tight against one another.
- (3) Tuck your chin in.
- (4) The snake will come and begin to nudge and climb over your body.
- (5) Do not panic.
- (6) After the snake has examined you, it will begin to swallow you from the feet and always from the end. Permit the snake to swallow your feet and ankles. Do not panic.
- (7) The snake will now begin to suck your legs into its body. You must lie perfectly still. This will take a long time.
- (8) When the snake has reached your knees slowly and with as little movement as possible, reach down, take your knife and very gently slide it into the side of the snake's mouth between the edge of its mouth and your leg, then suddenly rip upwards, cutting the snake's head in half.
- (9) Be sure you have your knife.
- (10) Be sure your knife is sharp.

Now, if this sounds suspicious to you, it should. Actually, no such instruction appears in the Peace Corp Volunteer manual. Plus, you CAN outrun an anaconda, not outswim, but definitely outrun. Actually these "Anaconda attack instructions" is another one of those urban myths that saturate the Internet. Some say it originated in *Mad Magazine* and it certainly sounds like *Mad Magazine* reading. In any case, this list of fake instructions does illustrate an important principle, the importance of BEING PREPARED.

In today's text Peter applies this principle to suffering, he talks about what we can do to prepare ourselves to face it, or to keep with the Anaconda example, what we can do to prepare ourselves so that suffering doesn't swallow us whole! With your Bibles still open let's see what Peter has to say. First, he tells us:

## (1) EXPECT it.

This is an important guideline because many times we act surprised when suffering comes our way. When a crime is committed in a neighborhood and a TV reporter interviews the people who live there, what do they say? *"That kind of thing never happens here!"* When someone gets a serious illness they often say things like, *"I never thought this would happen to me."* Sadly, many of these "surprised" people get bitter and shake their fist at God and accuse Him of being unfair. I read that Ted Turner's sister died when he was a boy and from that point on, since God didn't answer his prayers, he did that. Ted "shook his fist at God" and rejected Christianity and the Bible.

I don't know if Turner ever truly embraced the faith he rejected, but many people who do, many Christians are like him. They are SHOCKED when they face suffering. And Peter says to us all, *"Don't be like that." "Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."* (1 Peter 4:12)

The point is, God is using Peter to tell us that one of the best ways to PREPARE for suffering is to EXPECT it. Christians WILL endure suffering. As Jesus said, *"In this world you---WE---WILL have trouble."* (John 16:33) George Whitfield understood this. He said, *"I LOOK for perpetual conflicts and struggles in that life and hope for no other peace, but only a cross, while on this side of eternity."*

Well, why is this true? Why should we EXPECT to suffer? In his commentary Bob Russell cites five answers to this question, five sources of suffering.

### a. Sometimes we suffer because of our Christian faith.

Peter mentions this in verse 14 when he talks about being, *"insulted because of the name of Christ."* Believers in the First Century were often insulted simply for being Christian. In fact, the term "Christian" was originally coined as a derogatory term used by people who hated Christ followers.

As I said a couple weeks ago, they were called atheists because they wouldn't worship Caesar, cannibals because they ate the body and blood of Jesus and even incestuous because they loved each other as family. In our day and age, we often face insults from people who say we are narrow-minded to say Jesus is the only Way to Heaven or holier-than-thou because we say our faith is the only true faith.

But that's not the limit of suffering believers face. In the last century more Christians have suffered and died for their faith in Jesus than in any other time in history and this is especially true of believers who live in Muslim countries.

This week I came across something Philip Yancey wrote after a recent visit to Beirut: *"Christians who work in Muslim countries speak of 'MBBs' (Muslim Background Believers), their abbreviation for people raised Muslim who decide to become followers of Jesus. Some keep their new identity secret, continuing to faithfully attend the mosque. Others declare their new allegiance, which often leads to family shunning and sometimes violence. Local pastors tell of murder threats against converts. Or, a woman may have her children taken away, and be held in a kind of detention, forbidden to leave her house. In one city, I visited a church service that included many MBBs. The pastor warned, 'Please don't take pictures. The danger to Muslim converts is real.'"*

Well, all that should not surprise us. Following Jesus in a fallen world means going against the flow and that can be painful. Daniel Berrigan puts this way, *"If you're going to follow Jesus you better look good on wood."* We must not be surprised at the suffering that comes our way.

Remember? Jesus said, ***“If they hated Me, they will hate you.”*** In fact, if we’re NOT suffering, if there is no friction in our attempt to move forward toward Christlikeness, it probably means you’re NOT moving forward!

In his novel *Ah, But Your Land Is Beautiful*, Alan Paton tells the story of Robert Mansfield, the headmaster of a school in South Africa during the days of apartheid, that now-fallen cruel system of racial segregation. When Mansfield's school was barred from competing against a black school, he finally took a stand against apartheid and resigned his post. A friend said to him, *“You know you will be wounded. Do you know that?”* Mansfield replied, pointing to Heaven, *“When I go up there, the Big Judge will say to me, ‘Where are your wounds?’ If I say I haven’t any, he will say, ‘Was there nothing to fight for?’ I couldn’t face that question.”*

### **b. And then, sometimes we suffer because of our sinful behavior.**

Verse 15 says, ***“If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer, thief, criminal or meddler.”*** Many people suffer terrible diseases, or things like bankruptcy, loneliness, or humiliation not because they live as Jesus commands, but because they don’t. They suffer the inevitable painful consequences of their willful disobedience to God’s loving laws.

I’m reminded of a story about an armed robber in Rapid City, South Dakota named Dennis Lee Curtis. When he was captured police found a piece of paper in his wallet containing his personal rules of conduct.

1. I will not kill anyone unless I have to.
2. I will take cash and food stamps - no checks.
3. I will rob only at night.
4. I will not wear a mask.
5. I will not rob Mini-Marts or 7-Eleven stores.
6. If chased by a vehicle I will not put the lives of innocent citizens at risk.
7. I will rob only seven months of the year.

It was as if Dennis felt these rules should exempt him from suffering for his crimes and many times we embrace the same way of thinking, *“I won’t gossip unless I have to. I will not slander someone unless he deserves it. I will not skip my daily Bible study and prayer time unless something more important comes up.”* Peter says, if you sin, you will suffer and you deserve it!

### **c. Sometimes we suffer because of a satanic attack.**

The Bible tells us that Satan brought one painful trial after another into Job’s life. The Apostle Paul said his thorn in the flesh was a messenger of Satan sent to torment him. The fact is we work AGAINST the enemy and he doesn’t like that. As Revelation 12:12 says, ***“He is filled with fury because he knows his time is short.”***

Now, some take this idea to the extreme and attribute every problem to a satanic attack. They sneeze and say, *“The allergy demon is attacking!”* They say they are late because the traffic jam demon got in the way! That’s silly. But Satan does seek to kill, steal, and destroy us, and we shouldn’t be surprised that he inflicts pain. In these times we have to be like Job and trust that God knows what He’s doing by allowing it to happen.

### **d. Sometimes we suffer because we live in a fallen world.**

You know, as bad as Covid-19, it is nothing like the “sin virus” that Adam and Eve introduced to the world with their disobedience. Covid-19 has infected about a third of one percent of the world population, twenty-five million people, but SIN has infected 100%, 7.6 BILLION (and counting). We are all sin-sick, and so is the world itself. The Bible says that because of the fall all creation is groaning; it’s out of alignment. Philip Yancey put it this way: *“Since Genesis 3 we live on a sin-stained planet. This is why there are earthquakes and hurricanes and floods and dangerous bacteria and cancer.”* And it affects everyone, forgiven sinners and those who refuse to

turn from their sin. Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples? *“...those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no!”* (Luke 13:4-5).

This week Sue and I learned about a time when dozens of children killed in a church school in Aberfan Wales back in the 1960’s when an avalanche of 300,000 cubic yards of coal sludge buried the town. That kind of thing happens all the time and it underscores what Jesus said, *“In THIS world we’re going to have trouble.”*

#### **e. And then, sometimes we suffer because of God’s discipline.**

Hebrews 12:6 reads, *“The Lord disciplines those He loves.”* Think of it this way, if you love your children you won’t let them do things that will hurt them. You will punish them to try and correct that dangerous behavior.

Our Heavenly Father does that. He punishes us to correct wrong conduct. When Jonah went in the opposite direction from what God commanded, he suffered a terrible storm at sea and barely survived three uncomfortable days in the belly of a fish. Then when he was vomited on shore he said, *“I think I’ll obey God now”* and got to preaching. Hebrews 12:10-11 says, *“Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

So, the first thing Peter says we can do to prepare for times of suffering is to expect it.

The second thing he says is:

### **(2) REJOICE in it.**

Look at verses 13 and following. *“Rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.”*

Why should we be expected to rejoice?

#### **a. It’s good for us.**

There is nothing like suffering to help us grow and mature as Christ followers. Verse 14 says, *“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are BLESSED for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”*

In her book, *A Place of Healing*, Joni Eareckson Tada shares about a time she visited the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, in the years before the recent fire that almost destroyed it. She says, *“There it was, almost one thousand years old, standing there so huge and---black. I had never seen such a dirty cathedral! After hundreds of years of soot, dust, and smoke, Notre Dame was covered in layers of black grime. It was even difficult to make out the beautiful carvings and details on the exterior. But then the grand old cathedral went through a year-long restoration. Scaffolding was erected, and the entire exterior was sandblasted. I was stunned when I saw a recent photograph of the cathedral. It was beautiful—and so very different from the way I remembered it. The ancient stones glowed bright and golden. You could see details on carvings that hadn’t been visible in decades. It was like a different cathedral. What a wonder a bit of sandblasting can accomplish. When I think of how that process changed that cathedral in Paris—I can’t help but consider that way God uses suffering to sandblast you and me. There’s nothing like real hardships to strip off the veneer in which you and I so carefully cloak ourselves.*

*Heartache and physical pain reach below the superficial, surface places of our lives, stripping away years of accumulated indifference and neglect. When pain and problems press up against a holy God, suffering can’t*

help but strip away years of dirt. Affliction has a way of jackhammering our character, shaking us up and loosening our grip on everything we hold tightly. But the beauty of being stripped down to the basics, sandblasted until we reach a place where we feel empty and helpless, is that God can fill us up with Himself. When pride and pettiness have been removed, God can fill us with **‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’**”

**b. Another reason to rejoice in times of suffering is because it helps us appreciate more fully what Jesus endured for us.**

When you suffer physical pain, you can better identify with the excruciating pain that shot through Jesus’ body from the thorns that pierced His head to the spikes pounded through the arches of His feet. When you suffer emotional stress, imagine what Jesus endured. He suffered severe daily stress. He encountered hostile critics, slow learners, incessant demands, constant interruptions.

When you suffer alienated relationships, remember Jesus’ own brothers mocked Him. Judas betrayed Him. Simon Peter let Him down in the clutch. All forsook Him and left Him alone when He needed support the most.

Corrie Ten Boom says that one of the first things that happened to her and her sister in a Nazi prison camp was that they were stripped naked and forced to march single file in front of the leering eyes of the prison guards. It was so humiliating. But she whispered, *“Betsy, they took Jesus’ clothes too!”* Betsy responded, *“Oh, Corrie! And I never thanked Him!”* Somehow the humiliation of that moment helped them better appreciate what Jesus’ endured for their sake.

**c. A third reason to rejoice in suffering is because our response gives power to our witness.**

Verse 16 says, ***“If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed but praise God that you bear that name.”***

Suffering puts the spotlight on us as Christ-followers. People watch to see how we will react. If we let it, suffering can enhance our credibility. People listen to our witness with a more attentive ear. In 2004 Chechnian extremists took 1,100 people including nearly 800 middle school children hostage in the city of Beslan, Russia. For 52 hours they wouldn’t let them eat, drink water, or have any privileges. Then Russian troops stormed the building in a barrage of explosions and gunfire killing over 300 of the hostages including 186 children. The parents were deeply grieved and ferociously angry—understandably.

One Baptist pastor, Sergey Totiev, had two of his children killed and a third lost an eye. He also lost four nieces and nephews. One magazine reported that, at the memorial service for these children, attended by 1,500 people,

*“Some men shouted back angrily at visiting pastors who called for peace and forgiveness. ‘This is not a time for forgiveness!’ they protested, ‘It’s time for justice.’ Then Pastor Sergey Totiev spoke, ‘We don’t want to curse anybody. We don’t want to hate anyone. We want even the death of our children to be a shining light. We know that our children are with God and we want everybody in this community to have the same hope.’ The men fell silent, listening with tears in their eyes.”*

They listened to the words of that Baptist pastor because he had experienced the same suffering. His words had credibility the visiting pastors’ did not.

Listen. Nobody wants to go through pain. But once you’ve been there, your influence is expanded. Scars give credibility to your faith.

Quick review: To prepare for suffering we must EXPECT it, REJOICE in it, and finally Peter says, we must:

### **(3) TRUST GOD with it.**

Verse 17 says, ***“For it is time for judgement to begin with the family of God; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”***

God is going to administer justice someday. The righteous who have suffered patiently will be commended. James 5:11 says, ***“As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.”***

God rewarded Job’s endurance by giving him twice as much at the end as he had at the beginning. We are promised in Scripture that if we are faithful in suffering, one day God will honor us. It may not be in this life, but when judgment day comes it will be a day of glory for those who have proven faithful in suffering. Verse 19 says, ***“So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”***

Lt. General Jonathan Wainwright was in his late fifties when he was put in charge of defending the Philippines against probable Japanese attack. The Filipino and American troops he was given were ill-prepared and ill equipped. But President Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur to leave the Island and told Wainwright to stay and not to surrender.

The odds against Wainwright were overwhelming. There was an acute shortage of everything including morale. Wainwright rallied his starving troops and resisted as long as humanly possible. Finally, in an effort to save his men from certain death, Wainwright had no alternative but to surrender and he and his men, were taken captive. Wainwright was in Japanese captivity for 3½ years. He wasted away to 130 pounds. He was beaten and humiliated. He battled deep depression. He thought if he ever were released he would probably be relieved of his command or even court-martialed for surrendering and his family would be humiliated for his failure. Those thoughts haunted him for his entire captivity. Through it all he did his best to boost the morale of other POW’s, and he refused to give any aid or information to the enemy in spite of their brutality and torture.

To his surprise, when the war was over, Wainwright was invited to join General Douglas MacArthur on the USS Missouri where he witnessed the surrender of the Japanese. In fact, he did more than witness. General MacArthur had him help sign the paper accepting the Japanese surrender. But that’s not all that happened to Wainwright. He received the distinguished service cross and when he arrived in Washington, 700,000 people lined the streets from the national airport to the White House wanting to get a glimpse of the hero. President Truman presented him with the highest award, The Medal of Honor.

Some of you are going through painful times right now. You may feel imprisoned. You may be battling depression. There is no word from God and you wonder if He’s punishing you or forgotten you. You may be beating yourself up for those times you’ve surrendered to wrong desires or made wrong decisions. You may feel like a failure. Don’t give up hope. God has not forgotten you. He is poised in Heaven, ready to welcome you home, applaud your effort, and give you the highest award – the Crown of Life – and say, ***“Welcome home good and faithful servant.”*** So hold on. Life is hard but God is good. He is going to make all things new and right one day.

Let’s pray