

It seems as we've been walking through the book of I Peter, we've been constantly reminded about the reality of suffering. It seems it's inevitable. Whether you are a Christian or not. The only difference is, if you are not a Christian, your trouble, sin, heartache and brokenness has no purpose, value nor redemption. It's wasted because if you're without Jesus you'll never be able to see good behind the things you go through. If you're a Christian, all of your suffering is redeemed. That means, if you're called according to the purpose of God, He is working out all things for your good. You are more than a conqueror in Christ. You know why? Conquerors in the history of the world have capitalized on GOOD situations: power, wealth, influence etc., but most conquerors—Communists, Nazis, and Napoleon etc.—obliterate the bad. They determine what is beneficial for their cause from their own horrible perspective and they keep out anything that seems “bad.” They kill it!

God redeems it. He capitalizes on the good, and He also renews and remakes the bad. And often times a bad situation, sold for parts, reassembled, and reshaped makes a better running situation than the one before—it's unique. God does this. No other person or God does this, nor claims this. Every other religion in the world is trying to make the best out of a bad situation. They're surviving. But God actually makes good come from bad. This is a higher law.

We need to understand this before we enter into our text for today in I Peter 5. I Peter 4:19—right before Chapter 4—tells us “Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.”

Why would we entrust ourselves to a God who says we're going to suffer? Why would we give our life to this deal? I mean this is the worst marketing campaign ever. I can just see the add now—“Come and give us your money, we'll be sure to lose it for ya.”—*Christianity*, “Where shoppers come to die.” That's bad—bad business.

If you see Christianity as some marketing campaign or business venture, then it will never work. If you see Christianity as some venture in which to add Christ onto your life so he can just make you more successful, then you've come to the wrong place. Now, if you've come to a place to hear about a God who truly cares about you, well then, keep listening.

You see that's the funny thing about humanity. We like things that are bad for us. We like junk food. We like reality T.V. We like isolation, depression medication, self-help. And you know what, this is just the kind of help that God is disgusted with. The reason He comes to you and commands that you die to all this stuff is not because He wants to ruin you, it's because He wants to help you. He wants to fill you. He wants to empower you and show you what real life is all about.

Well in I Peter 5 God, through Peter, is going to give us another ingredient to God's care for you. God doesn't leave you out in the cold when you're suffering. He not only allows you to suffer, but he also puts into place the “systems” for a lack of a better term to help you during that suffering.

No you may ask, “well wouldn’t it just be easier for God to alleviate suffering and then he wouldn’t have to have a system for recovery?” Well sure, that is if God’s purpose was just to make you comfortable. But that’s not God’s purpose. God’s goal is to teach you the love that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit share. God’s goal is to teach you about relationship. God’s goal is to teach you what he looks like and he does that within a community—a church—a family. And because of the FALL, and sin, you tend to be driven toward shame, isolation, darkness, secrecy. —Isn’t that what sin does? It makes us conceal. Well, God knows that kills relationship and so He makes a way for us through the cross to lay all our secrets out before each other without shame and experience a bit of that “nakedness” or transparency that they felt in the Garden. By doing this together, we form REAL community.

Real community is not just high fiving each other. Real community or family is not just being there to help each other or serve one another—there are some churches that build their whole models around this sort of thing. Real community is not built around preference—what you like to do—your hobbies—your interests. The trouble with this is you’ll naturally gravitate toward those that are like you. Now God knows that you’ll miss something in this.

And this is why God came to die on a cross. To give you and I a semblance of connectedness apart from our *preference*. Our connectedness is built on *precept*. That means, when you were “baptized into the Holy Spirit,”—which Scripturally means to be added to the family of God, you became part of Christ’s body. This *precept* is that as a family, you are brothers and sisters. There’s a bond that can’t be alleviated. There’s a sense of community and connectedness that can’t be undone simply by your sin, your shame, or your isolation. The cross made sure of it.

The cross made sure that you would be able to come together on equal footing. Because at the cross we’re all equal in God’s sight. We’re all imperfect, and we are all imperfectly satisfied. So what does the cross do? It makes up the difference and it fills us with what we lack, and when we’re all carrying around grace as our hallmark sticker, it seems easier to relate to each other because we’re all the same in standing. We need God. This removes performance, religion, works righteousness, coveting, clawing your way to the top, etc. It leaves only an ability to truly know one another.

And this is where Peter begins. With the elders of this arrangement. God set up this family to be cross-centered and unified around the gospel of Jesus. And the way he’s going to demonstrate his care for you is to place elders over this little thing called the church to ensure that the mission of the gospel stays the course. This way you can be in community and benefit from community. I Peter 5:1 says, **“So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed:”**

Peter begins by telling us about the leaders under the Headship of Christ. He does this because he wants to show us what type of community we’re walking into. He wants us to understand the type of shelter He’s made for us amidst the suffering. Now an elder is a mature man. He’s a man of sound judgment and person who is spiritually mature. In

James 1 a “mature” Christian is defined as one who is of sound mind. And that’s what an elder is. Elders as outlined in I Timothy 3 are to be above reproach—meaning that they are men of such integrity that if you died, you’d entrust them to raise your children. This is the type of integrity they are to have. They are to be one women men—meaning they model marriage. And marriage speaks of something deeper—covenant—commitment—loyalty—steadfastness—character. They are to be sober-minded, self-controlled and respectable. They are to be hospitable, which means openly welcoming to the lost in all manners. They are not to get drunk, they are not to be violent, and they are not to love money or be greedy. They are to manage their household well, which in turn will show that they will manage a larger family—a church—well.

This is quite the checklist. No wonder the Scripture tells us that elders are worthy of double honor. Not only are they men of intense character, but Peter alludes in this verse that being an elder involves much suffering. An elder is going to join a life of suffering. They are going to die to their needs to serve the body of Jesus. And the suffering they endure is going to be to bring about the character that I Timothy 3 talks about. Being an elder is not for the faint of heart. It is a death-to-self certificate. And this is why Peter sends encouragement to the leaders within this persecution and onslaught. He knew they were the front line Generals, and they were sustaining the most hits out of anyone.

I Timothy 3 tells us to pray first for our elders, our kings, our rulers. This is why, my friends. Their job is hard. And I want you to see this because it should show you the goodness of the Father. Not only is He modeling for you the type of “personhood” he is committed to in leading you—for it says that all should aspire to this position, for it’s noble, but He’s also making a statement about how serious He as your God takes your care and wellbeing. He doesn’t just leave you to any babysitter. He also doesn’t settle for you becoming half-massed people—just making it all the time. God is committed to making you the best you that you can be. And He’s committed to leading you in the best way that you can be led.

Sense the love of the Father for you in his church. Elders, sense the seriousness. A lot of elders in our day are jacked up and messed up and they’re destroying churches because they don’t take God’s careful choosing of leaders seriously. They don’t take God’s care seriously. And they don’t take God’s glory seriously.

For it says that elders will not only suffer, but they will share in the glory that is to be revealed. Though the elders suffer, who do you think will rejoice most greatly at the end of the battle—the one’s who incurred the greatest loss—the one’s who fought the hardest!!! And at the end of their duty they will be able to count their wounded, but they will rejoice at their maturity and the maturity they see in their army. And the Bible is very clear that we will enjoy the fruits of our labor. If you don’t labor, you won’t enjoy as much if it all. If you labor, your estate will be great.

Please get this. This is God’s heart. He takes care of you. He leads you. He protects the flock. Find a church that takes leadership seriously. Find a church that can get you through tough times, and can help enable you to become the type of person that can turn around and help others get through their hard times.

Vs. 2 says “shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.”

We’re going to stay on leaders for a moment. This passage is going to address every demographic, but it first needs to really call out the elders. Peter reminds the leaders of their flocks, that the people they lead have been *entrusted to them*. You know a curious thing about this phrase—it is closely related to the process of casting lots. You remember this process in the OT and NT? It was a process of selection. At the cross they cast lots for Jesus’ clothes. They would throw some dice and whomever the dice favored would get the clothes. This is how Peter himself chose the new disciple in Acts after Judas had fallen and done his famous about face!!!

Well, in the throwing of those dice there was a principle recognized. It was the Sovereignty of God. There was a recognition that life is not about Fate or Karma, but everything is under the sovereign rule of God. They believed this when they threw those dice, and this same idea is used in Ephesians 1 when Paul is writing about God’s predestination of us. Now....God did not just throw dice when he chose us, it was much more loving than that. But the idea here is very important. God didn’t choose you based on YOU. Lot throwers didn’t pick a favorite dice based on its ability. The trust was in God. Well, when God chooses a man, or chooses a leader, or in this case chooses a flock for that leader to lead, he does so not based on anything good in that leader, but on His sovereign wisdom as God.

This is important. We don’t want to confuse the leadership of churches as God and thus depend on them and worship them. We want to ensure that we worship God, and so God picks “nobodies.” He chooses apart from skill or merit. In fact, He is glorified in weakness, so many leaders are weaker than those they lead. In this way, God’s strength can be magnified.

I believe this is first of all a sermon from God to the heart of leaders. If you see yourself as “something great” or special, you are not going to exhibit the care of God. You’re going to be authoritative and probably a communist. If you think you’re great, you’re going to pile up shameful gain, demand worship, boast in your greed, and be driven by compulsion and bad competition. Now, remember, in this time of Peter’s writing these elders were suffering as well. And in times of suffering people can get scrappy, so you bet this was a temptation for the elders as well. They start looking for all they can get, and quickly they lose sight of the people and the care of God as their reward. But if a leader sees themselves as Honored and Privileged to serve God as a leader, they will seek to glorify Him in that.

I say this as a point of warning and exhortation to both leaders and their followers. Leaders, get the Sovereignty of God—hold it deep in your heart. It will keep you humble. It will keep you seriously leading those around you with the care and gentility of God. Those following leaders: when it comes to church and your spiritual walk, the leadership over you is essential and important. You need to look for leaders for your

spiritual journey that graciously, not perfectly, have been endowed by God to exhibit careful care of you, your family and your community. Because God is making a HUGE statement here. Leadership and elders are VITAL to you making it through times of suffering.

Oh, our independent, anarchist, government hating mind doesn't want to hear that. Our world HATES authority. Don't believe me? Look at how people respond to the WORD of God. It's His WORD, and yet even most churches fail to heed what it says in the places where they disagree with it. However, authority and positional leadership were given to show the care of God. God ordained elders to protect doctrine and belief—during times of suffering a lot of false teachers spring up that are just out to get you. He raised them up to discipline you as Scripture tells them—if you're running for a train in your sin, they need to be there to help you course correct. God raised them up to protect, care for and lead you in the abundant life that Jesus promised.

When Peter uses the word elder, he tells them to use “oversight.” This word indicates Shepherding. Which included guarding, guiding, Spirit informed leadership etc. **You need to do this well.**

“And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”

Other verses that speak to the Shepherd:

John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

The training of a Shepherd:

1 Corinthians 9:25 “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

The focus of a Shepherd:

1 Peter 1:4 “and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you,”

Now I've done an adequate job at stressing to leaders the importance of their eldership and stressing to followers the same principle. Suffering is going to come. It is for the purpose of drawing you closer to God, delving you richer into God's family, and filling you with greater respect for your leadership. Don't make this a cult, where you do everything your leader says. That's not it at all. The Bible says there are times where leaders need to be challenged and even disciplined or kicked out. So don't make it about the leader. Make it about the care of God. You will not get His care apart from the Church. PERIOD.

Now there's one thing I left out on purpose in that short mention of the word "oversight." The Shepherd is entrusted with the duty of overseeing the sheep, but you know what he is responsible for? Leading them, disciplining them, showing them where food is, teaching them about the right things etc.

All well and good...

But the Scripture indicates he is not responsible for *feeding them*. Now when I refer to feeding, I do not mean that elders are not responsible for preaching the word. NO. This is what you are called to do as elders. However, you can lead a sheep to grass, but you can't make him eat. You can show him the place, but you cannot make him feed. As elders of the church you can show people salvation, but you cannot renew the heart...that's God's job—the Chief Shepherd.

Let that be a relief to you leaders. You can't change the heart!! Just be obedient in the aspects of character, stewardship and management that God indicated, and let Him decide the flock He entrusts to you.

But also let that be a warning to you out there under leadership, which all of us are under leadership in some capacity. Your leader cannot change your heart. All the information, podcasts, video feeds, etc. in the world can't do God's job. Only God can do that. But you have a part in that as well. It's in I Peter 5:5: **"Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'"**

Be subject to your elders, you youngins'. Being subject means to acknowledge God's arrangement. You may not like this. In fact, if you're human, you're going to hate the thought of submission and subjection. You know why? Because it refers to God's arrangement. And if you're not following God you're going to hate the arrangement because you're rebelling against the Creator. But if you're a believer, with a new heart, you're going to have a desire to be under God, and thus honor how he set things up.

Now, *toward one another* is a reciprocal pronoun—or cyclical. Which means back and forth. So, as elders lead well, the younger ones will also choose to reciprocate more easily.

I am not validating disobedience or rebellion to authority if the authority is bad because the Bible doesn't even do that. Younger ones, you need to subject yourself even if your leadership isn't so hot. But, it helps when leadership takes their responsibility seriously as well. When you sense the care of God in their hearts and office, you'll willingly submit to that care as the care of God. To not do so, is pride.

We quote this verse a lot "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble", but we rarely see the right meaning. This verse here in reference to humility is in direct relation to a person's response to authority and leadership. You can't just be humble just because you're sweet and shy. That's not humility. You could still reject authority and not listen to God. NO! The definition of humility has to include a leader—a God. We are humble when we SEE our need for authority and we willingly place ourselves under

it for our good and for the good of all. That's humility. Any other attitude, God says he *opposes*—meaning he organizes a resistance against pride; like an army in full alignment to disagree and oppose something intensely. That means, that if you continue to reject authority, reject God, and reject His Word, God is not your friend. He's your fiercest enemy.

So elders don't get carried away, and thus become an enemy of God. Younger people, less mature believers, don't get carried away in your youthful zeal and become arrogant, and thus become God's enemy. NO!! **“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.”**

Wow did you catch that! This is huge when it comes your worship of God. Submitting under the mighty hand of God has everything to do with AUTHORITY. He wields his eldership, governments, parents, councils, and WORD as HIS mighty right hand. That's how He set it up and that's how He wants it.

It's bologna that we should have no authority in church. It's boohockey that we should just reject “institutionalism.” Has it gone array. You bet ya'. But so has this ethereal, emergent church, “no authority” movement, that refuses to lead, protect, discipline, or stand up to anyone, or for anyone. That's not LOVE. Love has to have the helping hand of family and it has to have the weighty hand of authority.

Therefore Hebrews 13 tells us that when we submit to authority, it's to our good, and to the joy of those that lead us. It's of no advantage to you to rebel against authority. It just kills you.

Now, I sympathize with you, this is hard. Authority and Care don't seem to go together...right! Well God put this verse in just for all of us to think about: **“casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”** Anxieties are multitasking, and a sense of dividedness. God knew at this point you'd be a bit divided. But He can take it. He actually encourages you not to run away from Him, but to confront Him with it. God is not only a caring God, He's also a strong God. When you carry those anxieties to Him and lay those burdens on His strong shoulders, you're glorifying Him. You're making His strength look good and his care look good.

So getting rid of your anxieties is a form of evangelism. When we try and carry our own burdens, we don't help our faith, we hurt it. We start to draw people's attention to OUR ability rather than HIS ability. So for all you performers out there just trying to keep up the religious wall—pretending everything is O.K. you're only hurting yourself and the cause of Christ. You're promoting yourself as Savior and God just hates that...because you're not HIM!

So God knew you were going to be divided and that you were going to struggle with this truth. You know my suggestion? Go to Him with it...isn't that what He wants anyway...relationship? Go to others with it, especially your leaders...isn't that what He wants, community. The very reason God gives you hard truths is to build the very community in you that He desires for you to have.

But just in case, Peter, and I will issue you a warning. God knows that His desires are the exact opposites to that of Satan. So when you start working in this direction you better be careful, because Satan hates the smell of authority and real community...especially amidst suffering. It just angers him that the suffering he's working so hard to destroy you with is beginning to make you better...remember God makes bad into good...So Satan is trying to destroy you and in the process he's actually fashioning you into the very warriors who are going to tread upon his head!!! AMAZING.

But...

Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

Be self-controlled. Don't sleep. Don't VEG. Don't let Satan get you with anxieties and burdens, but you have to maintain a posture of trust—in His Sovereignty. You have to resist him. You have to engage your mind and take a stand. What defeats the enemy is the sword—the Word of God. He's going to come at you with lies, probably is already. He's going to try and divert you and pervert you away from authority.

The only way you're going to win is to stop being DEFENSIVE. Stop trying to worry about what he's doing, and stop worrying about warding off his attacks. You got to be Offensive. Worry about what God's doing, and focus on that. Satan is a wuss and he knows it. He's like a little yippy dog. Big bark---NO follow through. This verse implores us to get God's perspective. Stop looking at the little devil and the tiny suffering and look at the Big God and His Big Purpose.

There's a saying that says for "Every action there's an equal and opposite reaction." That's science right? Well not in this case. Satan has no opposite reaction that can counter the action of God. Therefore, it should say: "For every reaction there's a greater and opposite action." Don't look to beat Satan by focusing on his reaction to God, beat him by simply walking in the ways of God. That's a great opposite action and it's empowering not fearful.

"And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

There's a promise through all this. Here comes Peter's praise and Doxology: "to him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen." God gets the glory and you get your good. This is a given and fact. So believe it. If you'll submit under your leaders out of love for God, you'll experience a protection, truthfulness, integrity, example and peace that is potent. If you leaders will strive to add grace upon grace to your leadership and not compromise, your flock will stand through the most violent of storms.

That's God's goal anyway right...love? In Peter's final greetings he tells of what gives God the most glory...

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. 14Greet one another with the kiss of love.

He speaks of the kiss of love, the oneness in Christ and the fellowship of God's kids.

2 Thess. 1:3-5 "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever* greater; 4therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. 5*This is* a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.

God not only judges us worthy to share in His sufferings. He also deems us righteous through the cross to receive His reward: The Trinity, community, family, fellowship. This is the greatest strength in times of suffering and it should not be overlooked, nor should it be ignored.



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