

## “Lower Thirds” Material

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Pastor Ben Cross

### Christian Suffering

The noun “suffering” is used 16x in the New Testament and 4 of those are in **1 Peter**.

The verb “to suffer” is used 39x in the New Testament and 10 of those are in **1 Peter**.

1 Peter makes up less than 2% of the New Testament, but accounts for over 25% of the New Testament’s teaching on suffering.

**John 21** - It’s not surprising that Peter gave a great deal of thought to a theology of suffering. Peter addresses suffering as a normal, expected, even essential part of the Christian life, which runs counter to American culture.

Dr. Brand: *“In the United States...I encountered a society that seeks to avoid pain at all costs. Patients lived at a greater comfort level than any I had previously treated, but they seemed far less equipped to handle suffering and far more traumatized by it.”*

If we are surprised by suffering as if something strange is happening to us, the devil will paralyze us with fear, bitterness and self-pity as he goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (**1 Peter 5:8**).

In the past century alone, more Christians have been martyred for the name of Christ than all Christians martyred in the previous 19 centuries combined, reaching back to the early Church!

Peter not only tells us how to handle suffering, but how thrive in suffering—how to use suffering to experience a blessed life.

**1:6-7:** *In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the **PROVEN** genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though **REFINED BY FIRE**—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

**4:12-14** *Beloved, do not be surprised at the **FIERY TRIAL** when it comes upon you to **TEST** you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.*

### Two Important Insights about Suffering

If we are able to put suffering into a distinctively Christian understanding and worldview, we’re already halfway home to responding to suffering in such a way that’s profitable and beneficial.

NOTE: I’m indebted to Dr. Timothy Keller for the insights in this message.

#### **1. WHAT SUFFERING IS—IT’S FIRE.**

Literally, Peter writes: *Do not be surprised at the “fiery ordeal” which comes upon you to “prove” you.*

“fiery ordeal” = to purify. (cp. **Revelation 3:18** – “Buy from me gold refined by fire.”)

“to prove” = to test, to reveal what something is made of.

The refiner’s fire creates separation.

Our Faith: The fire of Christian suffering is all about trust, and this benefits us in three important ways.

Benefit #1: *Suffering reveals what we really trust in.*

A fiery ordeal is any trouble that reveals our allegiances.

The heat of a fiery trial creates a separation between our allegiance to God and our allegiance to other things, and now the “ore” of our faith can no longer, in good conscious, continue in that state where the pure and the impure once co-existed.

Benefit #2: *Suffering reveals how utterly inadequate those things are that we trust in besides God.*

**Jeremiah 2:27-28** *They say to wood, “You are my father, and a stone, you gave me birth.” They have turned their backs to me, and not their faces. Yet, when they are in trouble. They say, “Come and save us.” Where then are the gods you have made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you, when you’re in trouble, for you have as many gods as towns of Judah.*

When facing the troubles of life, any other functional trust, any other functional priority, except God himself, will inevitably disappoint and betray.

How will any of those trusts stand up to the reality of life’s problems?

When we face a crushing loss and everything feels meaningless, or we grow bitter, it's because we have placed our functional trust in something or someone besides God, and its died.

Benefit #3: Suffering teaches us to place our trust in God.

Suffering is a gift from God nobody wants, but we all need.

## 2. HOW DO WE RESPOND?

Response #1: (v. 12) Do not be surprised by fiery trials as if something strange is happening to you.

Response #2: (vv. 13-14) Rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings; that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.. (cf. **Romans 5:3-5; James 1:2**)

Both responses are commands.

Rejoice, because, as a Christian, just as Jesus' suffering was redemptive, just as, when he handled suffering obediently, he was highly exalted and given a name above every name, **you are in that same pattern!**

We are to rejoice that we are contributing to the ongoing suffering of the body of Christ for the sake of the Church (**Colossians 1:24; Ephesians 3:13**).

Part of being filled with the Spirit of Christ is sharing in the sufferings of Christ.

Our witness while suffering may be used by God to lead others to faith in Christ (e.g., Paul's story - **Acts 20-28**).

Peter is not saying a Christian goes after pain, but in following Christ, we will inevitably go through pain.

Joy runs deeper than our legitimate emotions of grief.

It's not the grief that will defeat us. The surprise will. Self-pity is surprise. Bitterness is surprise.

Response #3: No shame (vv. 15-16). We must not suffer as criminals and evil-doers, not even as busy bodies (meddlers). *Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

If we understand the place suffering plays in our lives as God's children, we will see the real gift that suffering is, and when we respond to grief and loss with that kind of shameless faith, God is glorified.

Response #4: Commit (v. 19) So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

The example of Jesus - **2:21-25** (cp. **Luke 23:46**)

The word "commit" means to make a deposit with full confidence.

No other religion in the world has what we've got. We have a God who became one of us and suffered like us and far more.

Jesus understands our pain. He is able to sympathize with our weaknesses and give us grace in our time of need (**Hebrews 4:15**).

In your suffering, cast all your cares on Jesus, for he cares for you (**1 Peter 5:7**)—just prior to the warning that the devil is a roaring lion who seeks to devour you (**5:8**).

### The Theology of Suffering in Ultimate Perspective

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

Judgment begins with God's household. (cp. **Hebrew 12**).

**v. 13** *Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

Will there be celebration and commendation when we stand before Jesus at his coming, or will there be loss of reward and shame (**1 John 2:28; 1 Corinthians 3:10-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 2 Peter 1:11**)?

Judgment of those who do not obey (reject) the Gospel – eternal death, the torment of being separated from God's life and joy forever. (cf. **Revelation 20:11-15**)