

LIVING HOPE - Following a Suffering Savior

INTRODUCTION

One of the things I've noticed about my boys over the years is that whenever we're walking somewhere unfamiliar, they instinctively look to see where Dad is stepping.

Whether we're hiking a trail, crossing rocks near a creek, or making our way through terrain they've never seen before, they often stop and ask, "Dad, where do I step?" They're not really asking about the trail itself. What they're asking is whether they can trust the person walking ahead of them. They assume that because I've walked a little farther than they have, I can see things they can't yet see. They trust that if I tell them where to place their foot, it's because I've already tested the ground myself.

The older I get, the more I realize that every one of us eventually finds ourselves asking that same question of God.

Life has a way of bringing us onto unfamiliar paths. Sometimes it comes through a diagnosis we never expected. Sometimes it comes through a broken relationship, financial pressure, grief, disappointment, or a prayer that seems to go unanswered. Sometimes it comes through the pain of being misunderstood or mistreated even when we're trying to do the right thing. Sometimes it comes because following Jesus costs us more than we thought it would.

And in those moments, we find ourselves asking, "Lord, where do I step now? How do I follow You here? How do I trust You when I can't see what You see?"

That is exactly where Peter takes us today.

Peter is writing to believers who are discovering that following Jesus does not remove suffering from life. In many ways, their faithfulness to Christ is creating hardship. They're being misunderstood, marginalized, pressured, and opposed because of their allegiance to Jesus.

And Peter's answer is not to promise them a quick escape. He doesn't tell them to pretend everything is okay. He doesn't promise that God will immediately remove every hardship.

Instead, he points them to Jesus. Because when suffering comes, what matters most is knowing who is walking ahead of you.

Would you stand with me for the reading of God's Word?

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Peter 2:18–25 (NIV)

Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ²² "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." ²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate;

when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.²⁴ "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."²⁵ For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

"This is the Word of the Lord."

You may be seated.

BIG IDEA

As we walk through this passage today, here's the truth I want us to hold onto: **Because Jesus suffered for us, we can remain faithful when following Him costs us something.**

And if you remember nothing else from today's message, remember this: **Following Jesus does not exempt us from suffering—it gives our suffering purpose.**

TRANSITION TO THE TEXT

Before Peter tells believers how to respond to suffering, remember what he has already spent two chapters doing.

He's reminded them who they are. They have been born again into a living hope. They are chosen by God. They are living stones being built into a spiritual house. They are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession.

Peter always places identity before conduct. Before he tells believers how to live, he reminds them who they are. This is one of the beautiful truths of the gospel. God does not say, "Behave your way into My

family." He says, "Through My grace, I have brought you into My family. Now learn to live as My children."

As Free Methodists, we have always believed that grace comes before obedience. God pursues us before we pursue Him. God awakens us before we respond to Him. God saves us before He transforms us. We don't obey to earn His love. We obey because we've already received it.

Now Peter asks a difficult question. What happens when living as one of God's people costs you something? What happens when following Jesus leads to suffering? Let's look at what Peter says.

Faithfulness in Unjust Suffering - 1 Peter 2:18–20

Peter begins this section by addressing servants who were experiencing difficult and often unjust treatment. For modern readers, this can be a challenging passage because we immediately encounter language connected to slavery. It is important to understand that Peter is not endorsing slavery, glorifying oppression, or encouraging people to remain in abusive situations. Instead, Peter is speaking into the reality of a broken world and helping believers understand how to remain faithful to Christ when they are treated unfairly.

At the heart of this section is a phrase Peter uses in verse 19: "unjust suffering." That phrase becomes the key that unlocks everything that follows. Peter is not talking about suffering that comes because of our own poor decisions, sinful choices, or foolish actions. In fact, he explicitly distinguishes between those things in verse 20. Peter's concern is with the believer who is experiencing hardship precisely because they are trying to do what is right.

If we're honest, this kind of suffering often confuses us. We expect obedience to produce comfort. We assume that if we're following God faithfully, circumstances should improve and life should become easier. Yet throughout Scripture we encounter faithful men and women whose obedience led them into hardship rather than away from it.

- Joseph's integrity landed him in prison.
- Daniel's faithfulness placed him in a lion's den.
- Jeremiah's obedience left him rejected and isolated.
- Paul followed Christ into beatings, shipwrecks, and imprisonment.
- And Jesus Himself walked the path of perfect obedience all the way to the cross.

Peter wants believers to understand that hardship is not always evidence that something is wrong. Sometimes suffering comes because we are walking faithfully with God. The measure of faithfulness is not whether life is easy. The measure of faithfulness is whether we continue to trust and obey God when following Him costs us something.

There is a message that occasionally creeps into modern Christianity that says if God is pleased with you, your life should become increasingly comfortable. Peter knew nothing of that kind of theology. Neither did Jesus.

Faithfulness and suffering are not always opposites. Sometimes they walk hand in hand.

Faithfulness is not proven when obedience is easy.

Faithfulness is proven when obedience is costly.

Peter wants suffering believers to know that their faithfulness is never invisible to God. There are moments when obedience goes unnoticed by everyone around us. Nobody applauds the integrity that costs us something. Nobody celebrates the quiet decision to forgive when we have every reason not to. Nobody sees the prayers whispered through tears or the choices made simply because we want to honor Christ.

Yet Peter reminds these believers that none of that faithfulness escapes the attention of God. The Lord sees what others overlook. He sees the disciple who continues to trust Him when life doesn't make sense and who continues to obey Him when obedience is costly.

Following the Footsteps of Christ 1 Peter 2:21-23

After acknowledging the reality of suffering, Peter immediately points believers to Jesus.

Verse 21 says: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

This is one of the most powerful transitions in the entire passage. Peter does not answer suffering with a philosophical explanation. He answers suffering with a person.

Jesus.

The word translated "example" is the Greek word *hypogrammos*. It referred to a writing template used by children learning to write. The teacher would place letters before them and the child would carefully trace over the pattern until it became their own.

Peter says Jesus has left us a pattern to trace.

He has left footprints. And disciples are called to walk where He walked.

Peter then begins describing the character of Christ. Quoting Isaiah 53, he reminds us that Jesus "committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

Jesus suffered, but He suffered innocently.

He was not suffering because of wrongdoing.

He was suffering because of righteousness.

Then Peter tells us something remarkable: "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats."

Think about who Peter is describing. This is the Son of God.

- The One who spoke galaxies into existence.
- The One who calmed storms with a word.
- The One who raised the dead.
- The One who could have called down legions of angels.

Yet when insulted, He did not retaliate. When suffering, He did not threaten. Why?

Because Peter says: "Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

That phrase sits at the center of the entire section. Jesus trusted the Father.

The cross was not passive weakness. The cross was active trust.

Jesus wasn't helpless. Jesus was surrendered.

He knew that the Father would ultimately bring justice, and because He trusted the Father's justice, He did not need to seize justice for Himself.

Church, this is what holiness looks like.

Holiness is not merely avoiding bad behavior. Holiness is becoming like Jesus.

As Free Methodists, we believe the grace of God does more than forgive sinners. The grace of God transforms sinners. The Holy Spirit forms the character of Christ within us.

The goal of discipleship is not merely getting people into heaven someday.

The goal of discipleship is Christlikeness.

Peter is not telling us to grit our teeth and try harder. He is reminding us that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead now lives within believers and empowers us to become like Him.

The deepest evidence of spiritual maturity is not how loudly we defend ourselves.

The deepest evidence of spiritual maturity is how completely we trust God.

Saved by the Suffering Savior 1 Peter 2:24-25

At this point, Peter makes a dramatic shift.

Up until now, Jesus has been presented as our example.

But Peter does not want us to stop there.

Because if Jesus is only an example, we're left with a burden we cannot carry.

We need more than a model. We need a Savior.

Peter writes: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed."

Notice how the focus changes. Peter moves from what Jesus did before us to what Jesus did for us.

The phrase "He himself bore our sins" is loaded with Old Testament imagery. The word "bore" points to the sacrificial system where offerings were brought before God on behalf of the people.

Peter is once again drawing from Isaiah 53.

In fact, this entire section is saturated with Isaiah's vision of the Suffering Servant.

Isaiah wrote: "He was pierced for our transgressions."

Peter says: "He himself bore our sins."

Isaiah wrote: "By his wounds we are healed."

Peter says: "By his wounds you have been healed."

Isaiah wrote: "We all, like sheep, have gone astray."

Peter says: "You were like sheep going astray."

Peter wants us to understand that Jesus is the fulfillment of everything Isaiah foresaw centuries earlier.

Jesus is not merely showing us how to suffer. Jesus is carrying our sin.

He is taking our place. He is bearing the judgment we deserved.

Jesus suffered not merely beside us. **Jesus suffered for us.**

That is the heart of the gospel.

The gospel is not, "Try harder to be like Jesus."

The gospel is, "Jesus did for you what you could never do for yourself."

He carried our sin. He carried our guilt. He carried our shame. He carried our condemnation. He took our place so that we could be reconciled to God.

And then Peter tells us why: "So that we might die to sins and live for righteousness."

This is where Wesleyan theology shines.

Jesus did not die merely so we could be forgiven. Jesus died so we could be transformed.

The purpose of salvation is not only pardon. The purpose of salvation is holiness.

Not perfection in the sense of never making mistakes. But a life increasingly surrendered to Christ.

A life increasingly shaped by love. A life increasingly formed by the Holy Spirit.

The same grace that justifies us also sanctifies us. The same Savior who forgives us also changes us.

Jesus did not die merely to forgive your old life. He died to create a new one.

Then Peter says: "By his wounds you have been healed."

In context, Peter is primarily speaking about spiritual healing. The deepest wound in humanity is not physical. It is spiritual. Sin has fractured our relationship with God and distorted the image of God within us.

Through the wounds of Christ, healing has come.

Forgiveness has come. Restoration has come. New life has come.

And then Peter concludes with one of the most beautiful images in the entire letter: "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

Notice where Peter ends.

Not with suffering. Not with hardship. Not with pain. He ends with a Shepherd.

We Follow a Shepherd Who Understands Suffering

Peter wants suffering believers to know that they are not alone.

The One who leads them understands the road they are walking.

He knows betrayal. He knows rejection. He knows grief. He knows injustice. He knows physical pain. He knows what it feels like to be misunderstood.

There is no valley we enter where Jesus has not already gone before us. That is why Peter calls Him the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.

The One who suffered for us is now watching over us. The One who died for us is now leading us. The One who carried the cross is now carrying His people.

Some of you need to hear that today. **You are not walking through this season alone. The Good Shepherd walks with you.**

RESPONSE & GOSPEL INVITATION

Some of you came into this room carrying something heavy.

A difficult marriage. A prodigal child. A health battle. Financial pressure. Loneliness. Grief.

Questions that still haven't been answered.

Peter's invitation is not to deny your pain. Peter's invitation is to entrust yourself to the One who judges justly.

To place your life into the hands of the Shepherd. To trust the One who carried the cross and still carries His people.

And perhaps there are others here today who realize that the issue is not simply suffering.

The issue is that you've never surrendered your life to Jesus.

You've been trying to carry what only Jesus can carry.

Your sin. Your guilt. Your shame. Your burden.

The good news of the gospel is that Jesus already carried it. The King became the Servant. The Shepherd became the Lamb. The Sinless One bore our sins so that we could become children of God.

Today, the Shepherd is calling you home.

Maybe for the first time. Maybe after years of wandering. Maybe after a season of drifting. But He is calling. And His grace is greater than your failure.

ALTAR RESPONSE

If you're weary, come. If you're suffering, come. If you need healing, come. If you've wandered from God, come. If you need prayer, come. If you want to surrender your life to Jesus for the first time, come. The Shepherd and Overseer of your soul is here. And He has not forgotten you.

CHALLENGE

This week, when suffering, disappointment, frustration, or opposition comes, ask yourself one question: **What would it look like to trust Jesus here?**

Not retaliate. Not quit. Not run. Trust. Trust the Shepherd. Trust the One who walked this road before you. Trust the One who carried your sin. Trust the One who conquered death. Because following Jesus does not exempt us from suffering. It gives our suffering purpose. And the Shepherd who walked to the cross is still leading His people home.

BENEDICTION

