

Harris Creek

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Series: Forged

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Facing Persecution

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 inasmuch 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.

Harris Creek, how are we doing? Let's go. Hey if you're a guest with us, welcome home or to a home away from home if you're visiting Waco this weekend. We're so glad that you would entrust us with your Sunday morning. If we haven't met yet my name is JP, or Jonathan Pokluda, and I have the privilege of serving this incredible church. I'm curious how many of you, your

conversion was public? And what I mean by that is you responded to an altar call, or raise your hand, or stood up. You know, you came forward. There was something where you made this kind of public profession and there was a celebration around that? Anyone here, that's a part of your story? I imagined that that's a part of a lot of our stories. It was a part of my story a few times.

And so I can remember, I grew up in a small town in South Texas. I grew up Catholic and my mom was Lutheran. I would kind of bounce back and forth between those two churches. But the only church in our town that really did anything to reach and disciple and equip the youth was First Baptist Cueros. So I would go to the youth group there called Teen Time. And that's where it was fun, they would do events after the football games, that's where the good snacks were, Teen Time. And they were going to take a bus to Corpus Christi for a Christian conference—I had never been to one—called Dawson McAllister. And so I'm like, "I'm in!" We all load up on the bus. We go travel down south to Corpus Christi, we stop at Wendy's on the way—it's a great time. We go into this kind of conference center auditorium thing, thousands of kids my age. This is great! Great music, great energy, lots of just fun things happening. And really great worship, I'm emotionally stirred. My heart is moved, my crush is there, ya know? And so it's all good.

And this guy says something—I don't remember what he said—but it was something that I remember like, "Hey and if you don't want to go to hell, and you want to live forever in paradise with God, come forward." And I'm like, I'm looking around like, "How come everybody's not rushing the stage...I'm in!" And I'm thinking my crush, she's probably going to like me more if I do this. And everybody that went forward got a big hug and a high five, and it was a

celebration. And I'm like, "Who doesn't want that kind of affirmation?" So I march forward, and sure enough there were high fives, hugs, on the bus ride home it was like "You're one of us now!" I'm like, "I'm in guys, I'm in!" And you know it felt the same as when I went down there but like, now I'm in.

And so kind of as you follow me along with that journey, then came the prodigal years. And so college and lots of rebellion—running from God. And then sometime after that there was a legit conversion where I would say I believed upon Jesus's death and resurrection for the forgiveness of my sins, and the Holy Spirit came into my life. And then it was time to be baptized. And so I went to baptism and it was a party. There were bounce houses and hamburgers, and so I go down, raised to new life, and it's again high fives and hugs! It's a celebration, right? And I grew up in a culture where everybody had a Bible. And a lot of people had a cross around their neck. And the James Avery ring. I'm not talking about *a* James Avery ring, I'm talking about *the* James Avery ring. Some of you are here, you've got *the* James Avery ring. And we had the ichthus on our car. Right underneath that stick figure family, right? Underneath is the fish, that we follow Jesus—look at us! We are a Jesus follower. Some of you got the Hebrew tattoos, you're hoping that tattoo artist knows Hebrew, because it says "Jesus my faithful Lord" or something like that, supposedly. And we had the letter jacket with Philippians 4:13 to remind us at the plate, we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. That's the culture we grew up in.

And here's my point, that is incredibly different than the culture that 1 Peter was written into. Okay, so as we read these texts there's a temptation for us to think, "Oh yeah. I suffered once, ya

know? Someone passed over me because I had....my resume, they looked at the next one!”

Different. Different than what 1 Peter is speaking to, the suffering and the persecution. In fact, I can remember going to a church event when I was younger. And I think, how young? I think you're than I shouldn't remember if that makes sense. And I don't remember where we were, I don't remember what church was there. I just remember this context, that there were brothers from Romania and they were speaking about their grandfather, and the persecution that he endured under the communist regime; and that he—you could not have a Bible there. It was illegal to have a Bible. And these are the details that I remember, everything is pretty foggy but this is what I remember: That he would have to hide the pages of his Scriptures in hollowed out potatoes. And they found them—the soldiers found his pages of Scriptures. And so they take him and they chain him and they ask him to recant on the gospel. To say that he doesn't believe in Jesus, and he says “I can't.” And they take a knife. And they heat it up until it's white hot, the blade is white hot. And they pull it out of the fire and they say, “You must recant. Denounce Jesus Christ.” And he said, “I won't.” And these brothers talked about their grandfather. What happened next is these soldiers took that white hot blade and lodged it underneath his fingernails and began to peel them back, telling him to denounce Jesus Christ. And the men talked about how their faith was strengthened in that moment because what they witnessed with their own eyes in their grandfather, and I have never in my life seen a faith like that.

In fact, never have I been afraid at any moment in my 42 years of existence to say that I'm a Christian. I have never been in a situation where I am legit afraid to tell you that I'm a Christian. That's different. And so I'm going to speak on Christian persecution today, and here is the challenge that is before me as we're just moving verse by verse through this book of the Bible—

1 Peter—we're in chapter 4 starting in verse 12. And the challenge before me is that I'm going to speak to something that the vast majority of us have never experienced—not one time. And I'm sure that there's somebody in the room today, that they lost the job because they were a Christian. Maybe that person is here, maybe there's three of you. Maybe once upon a time you shared the gospel with somebody boldly and they swung on you and gave you a black eye. Maybe. But for most of us, probably not.

And as I told the team that this week they were like, "Well you've experienced persecution." And I was like, "When?" And they're like "Oh man, people have come after you. We've seen them say terribly things about you and your family and your children and all the things." I'm like, "Oh no no no, those were Christians. Those were Christians man." This is, when we talk about suffering today, we're talking about suffering at the hands of people who are anti-Christ. They are bringing harm to you because you follow Jesus and they don't. They are opposing. When you hear the word suffering today, that's the kind of suffering that I'm speaking to. And what is hard for us to relate to that—it is a kind of suffering that the vast majority of us will never experience. But we need to know the word. And as we read it we have to think how this can apply to us. Because here's what we need to know: Christianity does not grow well in seasons of comfort. It just doesn't. It grows fast and it grows big, but it does not grow strong.

This week I read about a biosphere. That these scientists had created a perfect environment to grow these plants in, and that the trees in this environment—with the perfect soil and the perfect sunlight and the perfect condition and perfect watering—these trees grew up fast. But then they fell over. And they were trying to figure out why? Because there was no wind. Their roots

system was not strengthened in the soil. And you wonder why you're hearing the word deconstruction all the time. Because we've grown up in an environment where it was totally fine to carry a Bible, walk into a room, sing songs, walk out, go get mexican food afterward, and talk about whether or not we like the sermon or the worship. And when someone comes and opposes you, seeks to cancel you, or speaks ill will of you, you wonder why you fall over like a tree with no roots. Because our Christianity grew in seasons of comfort.

Now, you don't need to feel bad about that. I'm not here to shame you for that. We can't control when and where we grow up in the faith. That's not up to us. But we do need to make sure that we strengthen our faith and our belief in God through the spiritual disciplines. Because trouble might come. It most likely will be very different than the kind of trouble this church is facing. But it might come, and in that moment you're going to need to be strong. So Peter is going to share a word with you. Specifically, five things that you're not to do in times of suffering. So there's going to be a list of five things, five do-nots. And the word suffering is going to be repeated throughout this text, and I want to remind you that I'm talking about persecution. When we talk about suffering, we're talking about persecution.

Peter wrote this letter to the church in about 64 AD, the church is scattered throughout Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. The church is made up of both Jewish converts and pagan converts alike. They've come together with Jesus in common. And the persecution that they're about to face as Peter pends this letter is heating up. No pun intended. It is getting very difficult to say, "I follow Jesus." It was a death sentence. And Peter writes this book, this letter. We'll start in verse 12, "**Dear friends**" yours might say beloved or loved ones, αγαπητοί. Loved ones, I love that he

starts off, hey I'm about to say some hard truths, so just know I love you.

I'll say this here, when I talk about—remember the iron, the knife and the fingernails, what not. It's a little bit the nature of the message. And I have a lot of grace for someone who says “Hey I can't hear that kind of stuff.” Or “I brought my first grader in today.” And so if you're thinking—this is a trigger warning because we're kind of just getting started on the topic. And so if you're like, “I don't know if I can stomach that...” I'm going to pray, and that would be a great time to figure something else out if you need to. My kids will hear. Just because I know that's just like a “Wait hold on. What are we doing?” My kids will be in the room today, I've got no problem with that. And that doesn't mean that you can't or think otherwise. And so Lord we do just ask that you would protect us, bless us, keep us in this time. Father as we read these ancient texts, I pray God would you please, stir in us the change that is necessary. Would you bring about in us a real conviction, a truth that we can't deny? A work of your spirit that we look back on and say, “Man that was a pivot—that was a change, that was a shift.” And I pray that we would hold on to the right information, dismiss the wrong information. If I say something, if I misspeak, if I inaccurately represent you Lord, that that is not what they would leave with. But anything that is consistent with your spirit, that they would leave with it. In Jesus's name. Amen.

As I was praying I was just thinking about the irony, and this really kind of hits home my point. The irony that today in 2023 there will be people in this room that are here because it's good for business. Okay? This is a great time of networking. That's different. That's different than the church that he's writing to. Let me go. **“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.”**

Peter writes in a circular way. He addresses ideas and he brings them back up. We've talked about this, that there are fiery trials that God uses to test you—that they serve a purpose in your life. And this fiery ordeal, it's the Greek word *πυρώσει*. *Πυρώσει*. It sounds like the English word purify, because that's what it means. That there's a challenge, something that happens to us here, that we're purified in. That we're strengthened in. And he says, "I don't want you to be surprised by that." It's the same word that Jesus uses in Revelation 3:18, he says, "Gold I have refined by fire." That there's a refining that happens through the fiery challenges here, and he says don't be surprised. That's my first point. Do not be surprised in suffering.

1. Do not be surprised in suffering.

Five "do not's" as it relates to suffering, and the first one is do not be surprised by suffering. Why would he say this? Well because it's helpful. You know, as you leave here today and you experience persecution you shouldn't be like "Woah, woah, woah! I must be doing something wrong! This isn't how the faith is supposed to play out." And Peter's like "No, no. Don't be surprised when that happens." Really helpful to them. In fact, most experts agree that Peter sent this letter out just before Nero kind of lost his mind when it comes to Christians. And by historical accounts, would take Christians and as we've said many times now, would light them on fire. And he would use them as lanterns along the road. This wasn't a one time event. In fact there's historical accounts of Christians just spread out along the road. Christians that he used to light his garden. That's crazy. Now you can imagine that if you read Peter's letter, "Do not be surprised at a fiery ordeal when it comes your way..." and all of a sudden you're walking along the path and you see your friend there. You're like, "Woah. He warned me about this."

It's kind of crazy to think about the timing of when this was written. And in chapter one we talked about this phrase, about how a silversmith would take some silver, put it in the furnace, bring it out, wipe away the impurities—dross, the scum—put it back in the fire, heat it up, bring it out, wipe away the impurities... And he would go through that process until he was able to see his own reflection in the silver. That God has each of us in this same process. That as we go through challenges and struggles, and we do that with faith—believing on him and trusting him—that he is conforming us to his image and character. And Peter just says, “Hey don't be surprised by that. I don't want you to be surprised by that.”

Verse 13, **“But rejoice inasmuch 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.”** He says you are blessed in suffering. And in fact, my second point is do not be discouraged in suffering.

2. Do not be discouraged in suffering

Do not let the suffering or the persecution that you come face to face with remove courage from your life. But be strengthened in it. Be encouraged in it. And even—he has the audacity, the craziness to say—you are to rejoice in it! And I bet very few of us ever have. It's just not our first inclination when we face trials, like, “Ah! This is good—He told me about this! This is the good stuff! Right here, this is what I've been waiting on.” When it is really clearly what the Scripture calls us to. He says inasmuch; you're to experience joy inasmuch as you suffer. Why? Well, I can think of two reasons, plain and simple. One, because Jesus suffered, and you want to be like Jesus. And so to be like Jesus you would suffer like Jesus. And two, because the suffering

that you experience under the sun reminds you that you're not home. Like, one day you're going to be in a place forever and ever and ever where no one ridicules you because of your faith because they all have the same faith. Every knee has bowed, every tongue has confessed, you are surrounded by people who share the same belief that you do in God and his son Jesus Christ and his holy spirit forever and ever and ever and ever. So when you wince at pain and when you experience grief because of death or loss, they serve as reminders to you that you're not home. And in fact they serve as evidences to you that you were made for another world. Why do we cry at death? Because you were intended to live forever. Why do we wince at pain? Because you were not made for it. One day you will be somewhere where there is no death and there is no pain. And can I tell you something friends, that's a real homecoming. You want to talk about homecoming? There's a homecoming in front of you that you're going to be reunited with your savior in his presence forevermore; he's going to wipe away every tear and there's none of that here. The only kind of crying that exists here is the tears from belly laughter. Where you're just doubled over and are like, "No more, too much joy." And it's just a commercial of that place. His glory is to come and suffering reminds you of that. And he says when you're insulted consider yourself blessed. Consider yourself blessed. Matthew 5:11, the beatitudes says, **"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me; rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

That feels like a weird mind game to me. Oh, blessed are the...Like, whose like, "You stupid Christian!" and I'm like "Oh...blessed am I!" When I was in sales, first sales job I had was over the phone sales. 250 phone calls a day, I was the guy that interrupted your dinner. I'm sorry,

please forgive me. And that's tough because we're not too nice to those people a lot, "Hey—remove me from your list!" "Stop, forget my number!" Sometimes with expletives and name calling and such. So it's really easy to lose heart in that. And they would say, "Hey, with every no you're closer to a yes." They'd play these mind games, "Hey, when someone tells you no it's because a yes is right around the corner!" And so it's like, somebody cusses you out and you're like "Oh yes! I'm right there!" And that feels kind of like what he's saying, "Oh, blessed are you when others persecute you or insult you or say all kinds of evil things about you because of me. Allow that to serve as a reminder that you are blessed. They did the same for him, and we talked about—you guys remember this this. Today's going to serve a little bit as a review; remember Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—wouldn't bow down to the golden statue? Nebuchadnezzar throws them in the fire and heats it up nine times hotter. And says, "Wait, I put three men in there why are there four and the fourth one looks like the son of God?" And in their suffering the experience intimacy with Christ in a real way. Stephen, being stoned to death they're throwing rocks at him until his life is going to leave. And he looks up—the sky opens up and right there in his presence is Jesus Christ standing right there at the right hand of the Father. He's in Christ's presence. That through suffering we experience an intimacy with Christ that isn't available to us by any other means. Paul says I want to know him and I want to fellowship so closely with him that I would experience the same kind of suffering that he did. And he's telling us something there, "Hey, there's an intimacy that comes with God when you suffer for Him."

He says verse 15, "**15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.**" Which one of these do not belong? It's like, hold on: if you suffer, you shouldn't do so because you killed somebody or you stole something, or you

committed crimes, or you're a Karen. Listen, if your name is Karen I'm sure you're a wonderful person; I'm sorry they did that with your name. It's weird though, he throws in this meddler here. And we've talked about this word, this is a hapax, or a hapax lagamina. It's the only time this greek word shows up in the entire Scripture, and it means someone who—I'll give you a direct translation. Another person's overseer. And what he's hinting towards is this idea that we would meddle in the affairs in unbelievers. Okay? This is a 1 Corinthians 5 issue. At the end of 1 Corinthians 5 Paul talks about this, he says, "Are we to judge those outside the Church?" And what he's saying is someone who doesn't have the Holy Spirit should act exactly as though they don't have the Holy Spirit. And do not under any circumstance train someone without the Holy Spirit to act as though they have the Holy Spirit. And I might argue that is what the Church has been doing for the past several decades. We've taken people and we've tried to teach them how to pretend to be Christians. That's not what we do. The Holy spirit comes in your life, convicts you of sin, and shows you how to live as a Christian.

Now, for believers—brothers and sisters who claim Christ—to them he says, "Are we to judge those outside of the church?" But we are to judge those inside the Church. This is a common misunderstanding. If someone claims to be a believer we come alongside them and say "I thought you follow Jesus." And they say, "I do," and we say, "That's so confusing because I saw you getting high the other day. I don't think you do follow Jesus, and in fact you're not following Jesus." "No I follow Jesus." "Well that's interesting because the locker room conversation is that you slept around and did this and that...you're not following Jesus! I thought you did follow Jesus?" "I do!" "Well that's interesting because the way that you're stewarding God's resources, it says you're not following Jesus. The way that you talk, the way that you were mean to that

person, unkind, that's not what Jesus followers do." And to people that claim the faith, we are to meddle in—if you will. But he's saying, plain and simple. If you suffer, don't be guilty. That's my third point, do not be guilty in suffering.

3. Do not be guilty in suffering.

Do not be guilty in suffering. He's saying if you suffer do not suffer for any wrongdoing. He's saying—this is interesting, this is really a good summary statement. If you receive a punishment, make sure you didn't deserve it. So if you're ever faced in a situation where you're like "This isn't fair!" This is where you're like "Oh yeah. God in his kindness told me that this would happen." That if I am to receive any sort of punishment or condemnation, I should only do so as an innocent person. In fact, the only kind of punishment that a Christian should experience is an unfair kind. Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, what did they do wrong? They didn't worship a false idol. That's not wrong. Daniel? What did he do wrong? He prayed. That's not wrong. Right? Stephen, what did he do wrong? He preached the gospel. That's not wrong. Paul, what did he do wrong, he got his head cut off. What did he do wrong? He shared the gospel. That's not wrong.

If you ever receive a punishment, do so as an innocent person, make sure it's not something that you deserve. Make sure it's not like, "Hey, I got fired because I was a Christian." And they're like, "No, you got fired because you were lazy." You never showed up on time. You didn't turn in your work. You're like, "No, but I'm a Christian. It was a really hostile environment to Christians." No, it's a hostile environment to lazy people—that's different. That's his point here; is make sure that you're innocent in any consequence or punishment that would come your way.

Jesus, by the way, suffered innocently. Never committed any wrong. And we're here and are like, "I wanna be like Jesus!" Well how much like Jesus do you want to be? You know what I mean? I want to be just like Jesus! Make sure you're signing up for some real unjust outcomes. Make sure you know that that's what you're signing up for. And so don't be guilty of wronging, but, verse 16, **"16 However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name."** He's saying if you suffer as a Christian, don't deny that you're a Christian. And in fact, understand that it is a wonderful thing to be identified as a follower of Jesus Christ. Peter is saying this from some experience. The same Peter who suffered for Christ was crucified upside-down, was murdered because he followed Jesus, and recall when he writes this letter that there was a time when he was ashamed of him. "Do you know him?" "No I don't." "Yes you do!" "No I don't." "Yes, you do!" "No, I don't." Right? He's saying don't let that be you. And so number four, do not be ashamed in suffering.

4) *Do not be ashamed in suffering.*

Do not be ashamed in suffering. Do not turn your back on Jesus. Right? Don't come here Sunday mornings, open the Bible, sing songs, and go through those doors, and be afraid to be like, "Yeah, I follow... Yeah that's my King! Yes I follow. That's my King! I'm going to go wherever he goes! No I'm not going to do that, because I follow—that's my King! That's the one I follow. No I'm not going to talk like that. That's my King! Do you not know? That's my King!" And you put your chin up and your chest out and you say, "That's my King! I'm going to go anywhere he asks me to go. I'm going to do anything he asks me to do. I'm going to say anything he asks me to say because that's my King. I'll tell you and you and you and all of you

about him because I'm unashamed that that's my King. You can think I'm uncool; I'm not going to vape that, snort that, smoke that, drink that, I'm not going to say that. That's my King." Are we clear? We good? I just want to make sure, I follow Jesus. I'm not—no. That Ichthus, the tattoo, Philippians 4:13... you didn't know? Man, I thought it was clear. I follow that King. That's my King. Right?

There was a story told when Russia was at war. And there was a search, a purging of the underground church that these Russian soldiers burst into this house—they invaded this house that was known as a place of worship. Underground worship of Jesus. And they invade the house and they say, "All the Christian—against the wall!" And everybody gets against the wall. And they say, "Okay, if you're an informer you can leave." And people left. They're like, "Oh, this is... you're not checking ID's? All we've got to do is say we're with the other team and we can go? We can leave?" "If you're an informer you're free to go." And people left. And after those people—after everyone had left those Russian soldiers said, "Hey, here's the deal we're Christians too. But we couldn't risk getting caught. So we knew the only true Christians that would be here were those worthy or willing to suffer for Christ. And so now that you're here and they're gone—the false converts are gone, the easy way out people are gone—can we study the word of God together?" Let that serve as a reminder that God's doing something. He's looking for people. The eyes of the Lord go to and fro, searching for hearts that are fully his the Scripture says.

Verse 17, **"17 For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household;"** It's going to start with us guys. **"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?’” It’s an adaptation of Proverbs 11:31. Peter takes that proverb and he changes some words and he’s saying something clearly. Here’s what he’s saying, he’s saying “Hey, being a Christian—a Jesus follower—it’s not a free pass in the world. You’re still going to face some really difficult things. So you need to know it’s difficult to be a Christian. But it’s a lot more difficult to not be a Christian.” He says, “Listen guys, you can face your fiery ordeal here on earth for 70 years, or you can face your fiery ordeal in eternity for 70 million years and just be at the starting line. You’re still at the starting line.” He goes, “You’ve got to understand, make sure you maintain perspective. We win. This goes really really well for us, even in the midst of hardship.” **“So then,”** verse 19, **“this who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.”** Those who suffer according to God’s will he says, which is my fifth point, do not suffer outside of God’s will.

5) Do not suffer outside of God’s will

Which brings me to two very important observations of this idea, do not suffer outside of God’s will. Is one, it can be God’s will that you suffer. And that’s like—woah; for some of you it’s like, “Woah. Hold on. Hold up.” Now if you’ve been traveling with us through 1 Peter, hopefully that’s not new information. But for some of you it’s like, “Woah, why would God ever allow us to suffer?” I mean, it does something to you; it produces something in you. He disciplines those he loves. He’s sanctifying you, He’s changing you. So as you suffer you lean into Him. But you’ve also got to understand that He controls eternity. That’s the great equalizer of all things. Not just equalizer, like He can make eternity in such a way for you that you would say to Him in eternity, “I would have suffered a million times more down there if I knew this is what I got.”

Does that make sense? Like, you bump into Job if you're familiar with the story—who suffered a great deal under the sun— and you're like, “Job, man, how did you endure that?” He's like, “Endure what?” You're like, “The suffering.” He's like, “I don't remember suffering.” You're like, “Nah, I read your book and you lost everything.” He's like, “Oh man, I forgot about that. Let me see that, I forgot about that. Because I've been up here for a thousand years. Like, check out my house...” You're like, “Woah, that's a big house...” Eternity, God can fix anything that you endure here.

And I want you to know that if you're in a place where God does not have permission to allow you to suffer, he's not your God, you are. You're god. You're your own god. Like, if you're telling God how to do His job, and the second that suffering comes your way you're like “Nuh uh! Not gonna!” He's not your God. Never was. You always were. He's God. For all things work together for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28. He can fix it. And so don't like—it would just be foolish, it would be illogical, not smart, for—in the midst of suffering—for you to turn your back on the only one who can make it right. You don't win. You don't win in that, that doesn't even make sense. And yet so many people do. I'm just encouraging you not to. Don't do that.

So one observation is it can be God's will that you suffer. But the other observation is the only suffering outside of God's will is caused by sin. And so don't sin. Live a righteous life. Leave here and do not invite suffering into your life. I do a Friday Q&A and I get this question, it's like, “Hey, I dated this boy that was no good for me and I knew he was a bad guy and now he's left me. How could God do this to me?” I'm like, you don't understand. God has been jumping

up and down, waving his arms like, “Please don’t, no no!” And then we blame Him for the outcome. And it’s easy to laugh at somebody else’s example, but each of us do that in our own way. Right?

And so live a righteous life. Listen, young people if you’re here and you’re in high school, if you can hear me. 6th grade, 7th grade, 8th grade, 9th grade, 10th grade, 11th grade, 12th grade, it’s an amazing thing. Listen, I was in high school too. I know that’s crazy, but I was. It’s an amazing time right now to be odd for God. Okay? I know that you’re utterly convinced that these are going to be your best friends forever and ever and ever, but start asking some older people, “When’s the last time you hung out with your high school buds?” You know. Start gaining perspective on that, because I know that these things feel like the most important thing in the world, and to be uncool is crazy; and I would just say man, embrace it. Like, you don’t have to be cool right now. And I would say at some part in the journey the people who thought you were uncool are going to realize you were the coolest person there was. Because you weren’t so insecure that you needed to vape anything that was put in your face, or to ride, or to say, or to do, or to walk with or to sleep with, or to look at all the things that they said you needed to look at in order to be accepted. If you just go right now and say, “It is utterly okay if I’m not accepted by any of you because that’s my King.” If you make that decision right now, you will save yourself so many scars.

College friends, you are living within a four year window where the vast majority of people make mistakes that they regret for the rest of their lives. But, I have had a front row seat, I have been able to observe people that used those four years as the greatest opportunity for growth and

discipleship. We will come alongside you and pour into you, if you would just choose Jesus more than the world, it can be a really rich sweet time, where you get to the end of it and your story for the rest of life is not one of regret like mine, but one of rich discipleship like some friends of mine that say, “Man that was a really sweet time. I learned to be an amazing dad and an amazing mom, an amazing husband, an amazing father, an amazing community member. I learned to resist sin in that time.” And that’s available to you.

Young adults and parents, please don’t come in this room and say, “We love Jesus, and we follow Jesus and we sing to Jesus. I’m going to do...I read his book and sit under the teachings of the word.” And then walk out of those doors and do whatever you want, and say whatever you want, and spend however you want, and drink whatever you want, and go wherever you want. Don’t be like, “Hey, I used this mouth to worship Jesus.” And then you leave here and you curse at the refs. You’re a hypocrite. And what you need to do when that happens, is you need to say, “You know what, when I acted in that way it was inconsistent with who I said that I worship, and I’m really sorry, will you please forgive me.” And in doing that you set the example. And that process is available to everyone. You can say, “That’s not who I desire to be.” And you own it fully. And you know what, I’m going to lead up here and I may miss it, and when I do, I’m going to stand right here and say, “Guys, will you please forgive me?” Here’s what I did, and that’s not who I want to be. If I cuss at the refs, do you know whose going to know? All of you, because I’m going to tell you. I’m going to tell you. And you don’t have to do that, you don’t have to come on this stage; but in the context of your family, it would be good for you to own your misses. And cussing at the refs is just a metaphor for insert your sin. Insert your shortfall and live a righteous life.

We all went out for pizza this week—our family. And I saw the spirit of God just stirring in one of my kids to share the Gospel with the server, and I watched—I was amazed like, is no one going to share the Gospel. And she's the shy one. And I don't know if you can imagine how difficult it would be to be shy and my child, but there we are and I watched her push through those fears and insecurities and discomfort and say, "Hey can I ask you something? Do you have a faith?" And have a conversation and say, "I would love to invite you to this place where you can experience God and his work in the lives of people. We're there every Sunday." And I was so encouraged. And what I knew she did in that moment is removed all of our excuses. Because for some of you that's the only kind of persecution you're going to experience, is just getting over the discomfort to talk about Jesus to someone who might think you're a big old weirdo for doing it. And it's not finger nails, you know. It's just like, "Oh, you're weird. Nah. Don't like Jesus." And you get in the car and you lick your wounds and you move on, and do it again.

And so what's our application? One, that. Two, pray; because while we won't face persecution here—we sit in the city of comfort—people, brothers and sisters all around the world do.

According to the advocacy group Open Doors in 2022, 360 million Christians experienced high levels of persecution and discrimination. There's 20 million more than in 2021. And so in 2022, 5,898 Christians were killed for their faith, up from 4,761 in 2021. More than 6,000 Christians were detained or imprisoned. Over 4,000 Christians were kidnapped. On average every day 13 Christians are killed for their faith. Twelve churches or Christian buildings are attacked. Twelve Christians are unjustly arrested, detained, or imprisoned. This is every single day. Five Christians are abducted for faith related reasons. In 2023, 76 countries faced high to extreme levels of

persecution, nearly double the 40 countries in 1993. Christians are the most persecuted demographic worldwide. And we can't see them, but if their bodies were to be piled up in our cul-de-sac, we would want to change something. We would probably pray some more. And so while we don't face persecution—and make no mistake about it, somebody giving you the bird on the highway is not what he's talking about. It's different. It's different, right? Our brothers and sisters throughout the world, they're hiding. They're hiding Bibles. They're not able to meet like this, and we should pray for them.

And so in summary, there are lots of do-nots. Lots of don'ts when it comes to suffering as a Christian. And many of us never will. But, I remember April 1999 when one Eric Harris invaded a school in Columbine, CO. Went in and found one Rachel Scott, put a 9-mm to her head and said, "Do you still believe in God?" And she looked up at him and said, "You know I do." And he said, "Well then go meet Him." And he squeezed the trigger. And I remember in 2015 when Isis marched 21 coptic Christians onto the beach and they put a sharp blade to their neck, and they beheaded each of them because of their faith. And while I've never, ever in my entire existence been afraid to say I'm a Christian—not because I'm bold, I just haven't even had the opportunity. Like, I've never been in a situation where it was dangerous for me to follow Jesus, ever. At the center of everything I believe is one of the most heinous persecutions I've ever seen. And in fact, just as reminder to all of us, would you watch this. (The Passion of the Christ movie clip)

Alright, you're probably like, "How long is he going to let that play?" I'm sure there were guards there thinking the same thing. It's just the beginning. It's just the beginning. And look around us.

Don't we dress this up? Don't we make Christianity look beautiful and clean and easy and comfortable? And I think it's so easy to forget that at the center of everything that we believe and trust, our God died. You need a new reason to say no to someone inviting you to do something stupid or to say no to sin or to turn your back on him. Remember what he paid. I don't show it to guilt you or to shame you, I show it because it happened, and it was probably worse than that. It was probably worse than that.

And so right now, just as we sing, ask yourself, "Did it happen?" If he suffered and died, why did he do it? Because he loves you. Because he loves you. Motivated purely by his love for you. He endured that. He endured the cross, scolding, and shame. So let's just remember.

Father, would you help us remember? As we worship you now, would you fill our hearts with truth and remind us of who you are and what you've done? And when we face people who hate us because of you, help us to not be surprised. Help us to rejoice and not be discouraged. And help us to not be ashamed of our Lord. And help us to not be guilty, but help us to walk right in the center of your will. Strengthened by your spirit, called to do everything that you've asked us to do, because you are our King. We'll follow you. We will follow you. I pray we would, in Jesus's name, Amen.