



1 Peter 1:6-12
The Role of Trials

Summary: Christians are able to rejoice in trials because they test, focus, and strengthen our faith.

Last week, as we began our study of 1st Peter, we noted Christians have received a living hope as we navigate life in this hostile world. Today we dig a little deeper into that. We talk about the fact that life is full of difficulties; we'll discuss where they come from; and the unique ability of Christians to rejoice in the midst of difficulties because they test, focus, and strengthen our faith.

So read with me if you will:

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice (he's pointing back to that living hope we have received from God), though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, *being* much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

So, we start this morning by affirming the obvious: trials are real, there are difficult days in life. And we remember, this was written *to Christians*. So, the Bible expects there to be trials, seasons of difficulty in your life, even if you claim the name of Christ. Jesus doesn't keep you from experiencing hard things, in fact, sometimes He leads you straight into them.

We'll talk about where the difficulties come from in just a minute, but for now, I want us to sit and see that they're real. Peter tells them – *you have been grieved*.

And maybe that 'you,' includes you listening this morning, and your family or friends. You have been grieved, frustrated, angered, aggravated, depressed, or some mix of all of it. Is there anyone among us who hasn't shed a tear or felt a surge of rage in the past year? Is there anyone who is fine with things just as they are?

My friends, **you have been grieved** and it's OK to say that. You don't have to put on this plastic eternally optimistic smile and pretend like, well, it's certainly been challenging, but we're making it through.

No, it's OK to say you've been through **various trials** and you've been **grieved** by it.

The fact that trials exist should not surprise anyone who understands the basic doctrines of the Christian faith. You only have to read the first three chapters of the Bible to understand that God made a perfect world and gave it to us to enjoy, but sin ruined it and now we live as broken people, on a broken planet, where disease and drought, sickness and storms affect our lives seemingly without warning or reason.

We're also surrounded by other broken people who provoke, deprive, or otherwise harm us by acting on their self-centered impulses, desires, prejudice, fear and desire to control. Meanwhile, behind it all, there is a very real Satan working to draw people away from a very real God through active opposition to good works and active temptation toward things that are morally corrupt.

If all of that is true, how could we not have seasons of difficulty, conflict, and trials in this life?

But, life is not all struggle. God did design beauty. It has been corrupted and infected, but it's not all bad, trials are often seasonal or spasmodic in nature – Peter says you've gone through them **for a little while**.

For us, there is a tendency to call the difficulties of the past year unprecedented. But that's not true. There have been difficult times in the past and there will be difficult times in the future. Our challenges may seem unrelenting right now, but they're not unprecedented.

We need to be reminded of that. And, we need to be reminded that in the big picture, the raging dumpster fire that was 2020 and lingers into the new year, will only have been **for a little while**.

David wrote many of the Psalms, including Psalm 30 where we find him reflecting on the blessing of answered prayer – that he needed something, cried out to God about it, and found relief.

He says,

**Ps 30:2 O LORD, my God, I cried out to You,
And You healed me.
3 O LORD, You brought my soul up from the grave;
You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.**

He went through a trial, a time of difficulty. And in the trial, he called out to God. Now, he's able to look back and say:

Ps 30:5 Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy *comes* in the morning.

Sooner or later, your pain will pass. The dark night will end, the tear will dry, the sun will rise, and there will be joy again. Your trial may last a week, a month, or a year or two, but it will come to pass. Some may have a trial or burden that stays with you for a decade or two. A rare few have been asked to endure a lifelong trial of disability or circumstance, but even if you last 80 or 90 years, the time will come when you are freed of it, and there will be all of eternity to appreciate the change.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning. Our grievous trials will only last **for a little while, if need be.**

And, regardless of their source, intensity, or duration, notice that Peter says Christians are able to rejoice as they endure trials because they test, focus, and strengthen our faith.

Let's talk about each of those. Look with me again at the text:

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, **7** that (that's a conjunction, an important linking word that tells you there's a relationship between two clauses here) **the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8** whom having not seen you love.

Trials test our faith; they ask us if we really believe what we say we believe. They take us out of the classroom and into the field, asking us to apply what we've learned or prove what we say we know, believe, or can do. Trials are time to put up or shut up. They test us.

And that can be good. Think of the times you have been pressed, challenged, tried, professionally or academically, athletically or musically – whatever your thing is. If you faced the challenge, and rose to it, or made it through, how did you feel afterward?

Chances are you grew in your confidence. You might not ever want to do that again, but you survived it, you made it, and you're better for it. Most people look back and speak of how much they learned or how much they grew when they were faced with a challenge.

The reason that happens is that trials teach us more about ourselves and about the ways God appears in our lives to give us strength. The apostle Paul reflected on the strength, maturity, and personal improvement that can come from trials in one of his letters to the Corinthians. He wrote:

2 Cor 4:16 ... we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. **17** For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory,

Notice, he does not deny the trials, they're very real. But also notice two other things. Like Peter he points out the temporary duration of the trial - it's a **light affliction** which is only **for a moment**. And, it's producing something of eternal worth and value in us.

Paul believes trials are teaching him something, improving him, making him better for all of eternity. He sees a difference between what is happening on the outside and the effect it's having on the inside. "**Our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.**"

Or, as Peter says, trials are refining us like heat refines gold, separating the impurities and increasing the value of what's left behind. It's a picture that has been taken up time and time again in church history.

Thousands of years ago, Job, a man famous for the trials he endured, was able to say:

Job 23:10 [God] knows the way that I take;
When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.

Can you say the same thing, with confidence? Do you believe that God sees, and knows, the path you take? And, do you believe, that you will emerge from your current trials, as gold that has been refined?

A hundred years ago, Amy Carmichael, the famous missionary to India wrote of seeing a refiner in action. In her book *Gold Cord*, she writes:

"One day we took the children to see a goldsmith refine gold ... He was sitting beside his little charcoal fire... [and he lifts] the gold out with a pair of tongs, lets it cool, rubs it between his fingers, and if not satisfied puts it back again... This time he blows the fire hotter than it was before, and each time he puts the gold into the crucible, the heat of the fire is increased; ... "How do you know when the gold is purified?" we asked him, and he answered, "When I can see my face in it then it is pure."

Well, immediately we're able to make the connection with Peter's words. God is the refiner looking to see Himself reflected in us as we experience the purifying presence of fiery trials.

It can be a painful, exhausting, process that we say "I never want to go through again." But the Divine intent is to test us, refine us, through the heat of trials that produce His reflection in us.

So, trials test us, but they also focus us. Peter says the trials his original audience faced had turned their eyes to Jesus, **Who**, he says in verse 8, **you have not seen, and yet you love**.

Our trials should do the same for us. The problem is, here in Northern Virginia, leaning into God isn't usually our first option, it's not the default reaction, it's not our instinctive

response because we think we can do anything. We have grit. We have determination. We've faced challenges before. We're smart enough to figure this out. We can do this!

And you can get through a certain amount of trials that way. Grit works. But it's not what's supposed to happen.

Instead, trials should teach us to lean in to God, to call on His name, to ask for His help. And, trials are meant to push us closer to each other, to rely on one another. When life is tough, we're supposed to turn to our Heavenly Father and the community of faith for help to get through. But pride, P-R-I-D-E is often what keeps us from doing that. And if you just grit through the trial on your strength and endurance you miss something important.

Peter says, *you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love.*

Just getting through the trial by your own grit doesn't bring God glory. It doesn't test your faith, it doesn't *praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ*. It glorifies you. Or scars you. But either way, it's *'Look at you! Scrappy ol' you, you made it.'* That's not God's best.

God's best is for you to face your trials by leaning into Him, and locking arms with the church.

And yet, everything else in your life is teaching you to go it alone. That's been one of the worst parts of the pandemic – people don't need to rely on people as much, they've got apps. Apps to deliver dinner, apps to deliver groceries, apps to deliver entertainment, even apps to stream your church service. And now it's possible to isolate yourself in your home and not go out for days, or weeks and make everyone else bring stuff to you.

Now, some parts of it are good, they are legitimately helpful, but there's a toxic downside to all this that is being doing in the name of 'convenience.' Because, we're meant to be dependent, on God, and on each other, especially as we face trials.

And notice something else important here – sometimes, especially in the middle of trials, people think "I just need God to show up. If the heavens would open and I could see God's face, that would bring me comfort or strength, that would get me through."

And hey, we believe all of the Bible, we believe God can do that. We believe God can do miraculous, spontaneous, things in your life.

But if He doesn't. You'll still be fine. He knows what you're going through and He knows what you need. Peter says, they were leaning into Jesus "whom they had not seen and did not see."

You can lean on, trust in, and rejoice in God without actually seeing Him with your eyes.

Let your trials push you deeper into the Lord. Let them press you right up against Him. Let the pressure, the fatigue, the conflict drive you to worship and to the Word of God daily in your home and weekly with the church. Keep calling out to Him, “God give me strength.” “God help me rest.” “God help me trust.” “God help me reflect You and Your character to my family, to my office, to my team, to my neighbor, even in this.”

And keep inviting Him in. “OK, God, how do I respond to this now? How do I make it through that?” Ask: “God, where are You in this, and how can I shine for You?”

Let the trials test your faith. Let the trials focus your faith. Let the trials strengthen your faith.

Romans Five says

Rom 5:3 ... [we] glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

If we understand them properly, we can welcome trials the way an athlete welcomes practice, the way an artist welcomes rehearsal, the way a way a professional welcomes a new project – it’s going to be work, it’s going to be challenging, but we’re going to grow through it. We’re going to get stronger, better, as a result.

Christian, you have to know that trials are not meant to take strength out of you, God allows them to pass because, if we lean into Him as we go through them, they will put strength into us. They will teach us more about God and about ourselves than we ever would have learned in times of peaceful reflection, again, especially here in Northern Virginia where few of us take time for peaceful reflection anyway – we mean to, one day, when we take that vacation time, but not yet ...

Meanwhile, trials help us grow, but when you face them, remember all that God has given to you as you face them.

Reflect back on what we learned last week. Remember that you have been chosen by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, and saved by the blood of Jesus. You are born-again, made spiritually alive by God who knows you and keeps you. You have been given an inheritance, and a living hope.

Now add to that what we see this week.

Peter says God sent prophets to signal what He would do before Jesus came – they inquired, searched diligently, and prophesied of the grace that would come *to you*. And then He sent preachers, filled with the Holy Spirit to declare what Jesus had done once it

happened. They proclaimed the gospel *to you* and the Holy Spirit *moved you* to receive it. *You* are the envy of angels who desire to understand what God is doing in, with, through, and for *you*.

All of these things have been directed by God for your benefit, even **though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.**

I know that you know the details of your particular trial. You know all the points where it pinches in your life and shows you your weaknesses. But do you know all that God is doing for you? Do you know all that He is providing? Do you know what He has made happen for you? Do you see all the ways He is using the trial to strengthen, mature, and refine you?

So what do we do with all this that we've discussed this morning? What do we do now that we understand how trials test us, focus us, and strengthen us? We apply it and we let it teach us to rejoice.

One of my favorite tools for facing trials is

1 Cor 10:13 No temptation (or, trial, same word as 1 Peter 1:6) **has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted (or tried) beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.**

I love this verse because it's either true, or it's not. God is either telling you the truth here, or He's lying.

So, look at the temptation or trial you face, the thing you feel right here, right now, up close and personal, and remember, God says there's a way out. God says you should look for Him, right now. You should look for the way of escape, the way to move closer to Him, *even in this*.

Christian, some of you are stuck because you see everything that feels like it's against you but you're not looking at all the things that God has done for you. You look at all your weaknesses, you're tired, you're weary, you're sick of it all, but are you looking at God and leaning on His strength? Are you turning to brothers and sisters in Christ and sharing your burdens? Are you giving *and* receiving ministry?

Christian, do you think more often about all the things that are against you in the trial, or all things that God says are for you, forever? Do you see yourself as fundamentally weak and broken or fundamentally safe, secure, and strong in Christ?

Let your trials turn you toward God and the body of Christ where you will find strength and let that discovery provoke you to worship.

Peter says his original readers **have been grieved** – life was hard, there were tears, it was frustrating or unfair, but they also had faith, joy, love and salvation as a gift from God and so they were able to rejoice, **with joy inexpressible**, full of glory as they looked to Jesus.

They didn't have to wait for Heaven. And neither do you. We have a living hope, a real and present relationship with God the Father, through the Spirit, because of the Son. So let us recognize our connection with Lord and with His people, those who have gone before and those who surround us now – they are our companions as we endure trials, for a little while, and they are the voices that join with ours as we rejoice. Let us turn to the Father in prayer now and then rejoice together in light of our living hope.

Let's pray.

For nearly 250 years the church has been singing the classic hymn How Firm a Foundation which further expands the idea of trials testing us, like fire, refining us:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word
What more can He say than to you He hath said
To you who for refuge to Jesus have fled

Fear not, I am with thee; oh be not dismayed
For I am thy God and will still give thee aid
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand

When through the deep waters I call thee to go
The rivers of sorrow shall not overflow
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless
And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie
My grace all sufficient shall be thy supply
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose
I will not, I will not desert to its foes
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake
I'll never, no never, no never forsake.