

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, May 8, 2019 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



FINDING HOPE IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING – PART 2 1 Peter 1:6-9

“Christianity does not provide the reason for each experience of pain, but it does provide deep resources for actually facing suffering with hope and courage rather than bitterness and despair.”
–Dr. Timothy Keller

“Christianity doesn’t deny the reality of suffering and evil. Our hope is not based on the idea that we are going to be free of pain and suffering. Rather, it is based on the conviction that we will triumph over suffering.”
–Brennan Manning

Discussion Questions

1. *Someone in a terrible trial says, “How can a loving God allow this to happen?” How would you respond?*
2. *Should we express anger toward God? Defend biblically.*
3. *Is it sin to be depressed? Defend biblically.*

We began our study through 1 and 2 Peter a couple of weeks ago entitled “Full of Hope-full: How to Make the Best of Time Out of Your Worst of Times.” The question is how do I develop that kind of life and faith that enable me to be full of “hope-fullness” even in the midst of the “worst of time”... in times of hardship, suffering, and the struggles of this life or as in the case of those in Peter’s day, extreme persecution. That is where First Peter comes in. The Christian life is an overcoming life. Even though we will definitely have problems and personal struggles in this life (trials of many kinds), we will be able to overcome because of Jesus. Because of Him, we have victory over the world, including sinful habits, bitterness, loneliness, guilt, fear, and discouragement. God desires for you to live an overcoming life! Jesus, Himself, said in John

16:33, “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” And in 1 John 5:4-5, “⁴For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” Christians are overcomers and truly are to live hope-filled Christian lives every day, but let’s be honest, there are many trials and struggles, heartaches and difficulties along... times of suffering that can daily rob us of our joy and paralyze our faith, steal our hope, and destroy our relationship and weaken our walk... times of suffering can embitter and defeat us if we let it. 1 Peter was written to help believers believe and grow even in times of suffering... to be “Full of Hope-full.”

Before we study the details of this fascinating letter... one of only two books in all of the Bible written by Jesus’ closest disciples and a leader of the disciples, and both very short... before we get into our study let’s be reminded of some of the most important background information for the book.

5 Important Background Information for the Book of 1 Peter:

- 1. The author of the book of 1 Peter is the **APOSTLE PETER**, the head and lead spokesman for Jesus’ twelve disciples** - The New Testament had four different names for Peter: Simeon (the Hebrew for Peter’s original name, Acts 15:14, 2 Peter 1:1), Simon (the Greek name for Simeon applied 49 times in the New Testament), Cephas (a Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word for rock [כִּפְּאָס Κηφᾶς]; this is used to play off of πέτρα), Peter (Πέτρος) the leader and spokesman for the early disciples. This is how he is addressed in the greeting emphasizing his authority to speak. The early New Testament Church almost exclusively regarded Peter as the author of the letter. And of course there is the internal evidence supporting Peter’s authorship, the letter claims to be from “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:1), the writer claims to be the readers “fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed” (1 Peter 5:1), the writer identifies “Silas” (Silvanus) as one who helped him to write the letter (1 Peter 5:12; see also Acts 15:22 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1), the writer also sends greetings from Mark (1 Peter 5:13; see Acts 12:12).
- 2. The book of 1 Peter (like Paul’s letter to the Galatians) is actually a **CIRCULAR LETTER**, meant to be circulated to multiple early New Testament churches and believers** - Peter is a letter written in normal epistle form and style. The rhetorical and didactic nature of the letter may mean that it was intended to be read aloud to the congregations. It is best to see this letter as a circular type of letter in its present form which was directed to all the churches in the areas mentioned in northern Asia minor.
- 3. The recipient of Peter’s letter (also like Paul’s letter to the Galatians) were probably a mixed group of **JEWISH** and **GENTILE** believers who were scattered throughout the five Roman provinces of **ASIA MINOR** in what is present day Turkey** – This is a circular (or general) letter, but unlike the others, it identifies its recipients. The letter is addressed to those who are from places in northern Asia Minor or modern Turkey (1:1): Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia.
- 4. The letter was written around **AD 64**, either before or during the Neronian persecution, which helps to date the writing** – Tradition holds that both Paul and Peter were victims of persecution under Nero at Rome after the disastrous fire in the city of Rome on July 19 of

AD 64. The death of Paul is considered to be before Peter's. The timing of Paul's death does not really affect the date of 1 Peter. The letter was written from "Babylon" (1 Peter 5:13) which was probably a cryptic title for Rome... the head of the then pagan, anti-God world (see Rev. 14:8, 17:5&18).

5. **The purpose of 1 Peter is to encourage and enable Christians/believer to face PERSECUTION and SUFFERING with hope in the grace of God** - Although 1 Peter does bare the form of a letter, the tone is that of a homiletical, teaching, instructional sermon designed to provide direction for believers under persecution; at times it also includes theological considerations which support the ethical exhortations, and to exhort his readers under persecution to follow the example of Christ whose life was characterized by patient suffering

Now with those brief reminder of the background to Peter's great letter, let look at Peter's word in the first chapter of his letter... pay close attention to verses 6-9, that is where we will be focusing our attention in this study.

"¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that 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, ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls."-1 Peter 1:1-9 (NKJV)
*focus vv.6-9

I find that there's a lot of confusion among Christians about how we're supposed to deal with suffering.

1. **Suffering shows a lack of faith** - Some say that if we suffer it's because we lack faith. We're supposed to claim healing by faith and deny all negative thoughts. This is clearly unbiblical, yet it persists.
2. **Suffering should come with a smile on your face** - Others say that Christians must go through suffering, but they're supposed to do it with a smile on their face. They quote verses to suffering saints like, "Rejoice always.... In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:16, 18); "All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). A few years ago I did a funeral for a man in his thirties who left a wife and two children. In the lobby after the service, the widow's former pastor came bouncing up to her and said, "Praise the Lord, he's in glory now!" I felt like punching him! That approach to suffering leads to hypocrisy and emotional problems, in my opinion. People put on the phony smile and mouth cliches, like "Praise the Lord," but

inside they're hurting and not praising the Lord. They're denying the grief and pain that are really there. It's neither a biblical nor an emotionally healthy approach to suffering.

3. **Suffering should be vented with anger, rage... let it out** - In reacting against that approach, some say that we need to express how we feel. We're supposed to work through all the stages of grief. We're told to vent all our anger, rage, and bitterness. If we don't feel it, we're in denial. People are even encouraged to rail at God, with the assurance that "He can take it. Tell Him how ticked off at Him you really are." We're told that if we don't do this, we'll create emotional problems for ourselves.

5 Myths on Christian Suffering:

Christians suffer too. There is no getting around that. The healing which never comes despite our prayers and pleading with God for His healing... the relationship, which despite everyone's best efforts just fell apart... the death of a loved one... the financial crisis which seems insurmountable... the impossible job situation... the desperate prayer which seems unanswered... not to mention the persecution and suffering that can come to some just for being a Christian as is the case of the recipients of Peter's letter. It seems that a lot of Christians want answers to suffering. I'm not too sure that there are many. But sometimes in our search for a reason to that heartfelt "Why?" we can fall prey to one of these five main myths about suffering. Unfortunately, some of them are even put on us by other well-meaning Christians. We must be careful not to buy into these myths about suffering. Have you ever believed any of these myths?

1. **MYTH NUMBER 1: Christians should NOT GO THROUGH times of suffering** - Deep down inside, there is a part of us which protests, "But I'm a Christian. I love God. He loves me... so bad things shouldn't happen to me because God protects His children. Right!" **How would you respond to this?** I believe that God does love His children, and sometimes He does protect us from terrible things. But we still live in a fallen, messed up world, and sometimes Christians experience the consequences of living in a fallen world just like everyone else! The Bible actually tells us to expect trials and difficulties. After all, God doesn't cause suffering – and would not cause suffering for anyone, Christian or not. Life just happens, and sometimes it hurts. The only place we will ever be safe from suffering is when we get to heaven. Then, the Bible says, 'He will wipe away every tear' **Scriptural answer – John 16:33** *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*
2. **MYTH NUMBER 2: If Christians suffer it is because they have done SOMETHING WRONG** - We hear some say things like, "I must have really done something bad to be going through this. God must be punishing me." **How would you respond to this?** Is our suffering because we have done something wrong? Not necessarily. Of course there are consequences to wrong doing and sometimes suffering can be the result. God does discipline us for things that we do wrong too, BUT we usually know why it is happening. Right? What sort of parent would shout at their child and send her sobbing to the bedroom without ever telling them what they did wrong? That would be both cruel and pointless. God is a good Father, and never disciplines us without telling us what we have done wrong and what we need to do to put it right. So if you are suffering the consequences of a broken relationship because of your unkind words, God probably is disciplining you. But if, on the other hand, you are suffering with an illness and have been for a long time and you don't understand why, that is not discipline. That is living in a fallen, messed up world and God wants to pour out His mercy on you, not His judgment. Furthermore, God can actually use that kind of

suffering in the life of a believer as a great witness. If a suffering Saint can exhibit a hope and a peace in the midst of this kind of suffering it can actually be contagious to a hurting world. **Scriptural answer – John 9:1-3** *“As he (Jesus) went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.’”* What “work” of God do you suppose Jesus might be referring to?

3. **MYTH NUMBER 3: If I had ENOUGH FAITH, this would not be happening to me - How would you respond to this?** *“If I had enough faith, this would not be happening to me.”* Pure condemnation. Yes, God does look for and reward faith, but suffering comes even to people who have the most enormous faith. Look back at some of the early Christian martyrs: they had the faith to die for what they believed, and they suffered for it. Sometimes we just have to walk through things and our faith will actually increase, even though we don’t immediately see the answers to prayer that we most want. We must hold on to our faith through times of suffering, because God does reward faith, but sometimes the reward will come later and for now we just have to keep pressing on through. **Scriptural answer – Hebrews 11:1** *“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”*
4. **MYTH NUMBER 4: This is POINTLESS.** I’ve heard it said this way, *“None of this makes sense. It just seems so pointless.”* **How would you respond to this?** Pain and suffering rarely does make sense to us in this life and it usually does seem underserved and pointless. Let’s face it, undeserved suffering can just seem pointless, difficult, painful and beyond our understanding. But the problem with this myth is that it fails to acknowledge that nothing that ever happens in the life of a believer (one of God’s children) ever escapes God’s eyes. He sees it all. He knows what we are going through. And there is nothing that happens to you or I that God doesn’t intend to use for our benefit and His glory. I believe that. Remember the Bible says that we should *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its works so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”* Wow! That is difficult to do sometimes. God does not cause suffering but He will always teach us through it. C.S. Lewis once stated that *“Pain is the classroom of God”* and there is always more we can learn of Him when we are hurting. We might not want the lessons at the time, but later we will value them because they came at such a cost. **Scriptural answer – James 1:2-4** *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its works so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”*
5. **MYTH NUMBER 5: God has ABANDONED ME.** **How would you respond to this?** God has never abandoned you. Not for a second. He has wept with you, felt your pain, sung His love song over you, been with you every painful, heartbreaking step of the way. Sometimes, in the darkness, we can feel that God is distant, or uncaring. It is so important in those times to cling to what we know is the truth of who He is, rather than relying on our emotions. We cannot trust our emotions. We can always trust our God. Keep tight hold of your faith in Him. You will not always feel this alone. He has not and never will abandon you. He loves you far too much to ever be able to do that. **Scriptural answer – Hebrews 13:5** *“...God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”*

With all of that said, let's go back to something I said a minute ago, "I find that there's a lot of confusion among Christians about how we're supposed to deal with suffering." How should we respond to suffering, trouble, trials, struggles that are sure to come in this life? How should we react in time of suffering? The Bible has a lot to say on the subject, beyond what Peter tells us in his letter to those going through it. It may be helpful to establish some of what Scripture tells us about Christian suffering as a backdrop to Peter words in 1 Peter. Here are some clearly laid out principles on Christian suffering as found in the Bible.

5 Scriptural Principles on Christian Suffering: The Christian will never have any pain or suffering. Listen, let's be honest... isn't that a great thought? It sure sounds great, and we may like to think on some level that this is how it should be, but it's also one other thing... WRONG! There are many places in Scripture that deal with the reality of pain and suffering... and the pain and suffering that we experience. Let's take a look at a few of these verses and passages of Scripture, and see if we can glean some great Scriptural principles that may give us a more realistic and healthier perspective on pain and suffering... our pain and suffering and particularly how we might gain ground in our faith walk even in the midst of the pain of suffering.

1. **We may experience suffering for doing what is RIGHT (Philippians 1:29)** - *"For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him."* This passage refutes the faulty notion that all suffering is the result of personal sin. On the contrary, we may experience hardship for doing what is right, for carrying out God's desired will.
2. **Part of the Christians life includes SUFFERING (2 Corinthians 4:8-10)** - *"We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carrying around our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body."* Here we learn that part of the Christian life includes, affliction, perplexity, persecution, and near-knockout blow. Why? So that the *"life of Jesus... may be manifested in our body."* Do you know what a powerful witness that can be? These kinds of believers leave the world scratching their heads and wondering, "How do they do that... how do they endure that? How do they get through these seemingly impossible heartache and hardship with such joy, hope and peace? The answer, of course, is JESUS!
3. **We should not be SURPRISED when suffering comes (1 Peter 4:12-16)** - *"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering as though something strange were happened to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name"* These verses teach us not to be surprised when affliction (suffering) comes upon us. In fact, if we are suffering because we are Christians, then we should *"rejoice,"* as Peter says, realizing that we *"blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests"* on us. Our difficult, painful times can be evidence that we are being obedient to Christ and His commands. And since we live in a world where there are many people who are still in rebellion against God, it should not surprise us when we are victimized by them simply because we are citizens of God's everlasting kingdom.

4. Sometimes God uses suffering for the purpose of **INSTRUCTING** us more fully in His ways and training us to follow Him more **COMPLETELY** (Psalm 119:67, 71, 75) - *Psalm 119:67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your Word." Psalm 119:71, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." Psalm 119:75, "I know, O Lord, that Your laws are righteous, and in faithfulness you have afflicted me."* Many times God will use the tool of affliction for the purpose of instructing us more fully in His ways and training us to follow Him more completely. It's difficult when God must make us to "lie down in green pastures" (Psalm 23:2a), but many times there is no better way for Him to gain our attention.
5. **Suffering should cause us to take a scrutinizing LOOK at OURSELVES as we really are (Ecclesiastes 7:13-14)** - *"Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future."* Another purpose of adversity is evaluation. Suffering should cause us to take a scrutinizing look at ourselves as we really are. That's the idea tied up in the use of the Hebrew word translated here as "consider." Though a self-evaluation will not guarantee what route our future will take, it will help us to understand where we have been and what improvements we can make.

Again, although that make it pretty clear, I find that there's a lot of confusion among Christians about how we're supposed to deal with suffering. **Some say that if we suffer it's because we lack faith.** We're supposed to claim healing by faith and deny all negative thoughts. This is clearly unbiblical, yet it persists. **Others say that Christians must go through suffering, but they're supposed to do it with a smile on their face.** They quote verses to suffering saints like, "Rejoice always... In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:16, 18); "All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28). People put on the phony smile and mouth cliches, like "Praise the Lord," but inside they're hurting and not praising the Lord. They're denying the grief and pain that are really there. It's neither a biblical nor an emotionally healthy approach to suffering. **And then, in reacting against that approach, some say that we need to express how we feel.** We're supposed to work through all the stages of grief. We're told to vent all our anger, rage, and bitterness. If we don't feel it, we're in denial. People are even encouraged to rail at God, with the assurance that "He can take it. Tell Him how ticked off at Him you really are." We're told that if we don't do this, we'll create emotional problems for ourselves.

I would argue that none of these are Biblical or emotionally healthy ways to deal with suffering. The biblical way is not to deny the pain or grief, but at the same time to have genuine joy and maintain our hope in the Lord from the pits.

Hebrews 12:11 states plainly, *"All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."* Paul spoke of his own experience through trials as being *"sorrowful yet always rejoicing"* (2 Cor. 6:10). He modeled it many times, but perhaps no where as clearly as when he and Silas sang praises to God at midnight from the Philippian jail, as their backs were laid open from the illegal scourging they had received (Acts 16:25).

Peter, in writing to suffering Christians, tells them that they greatly rejoice at the same time that they are distressed by various trials. Here it is again in 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.*”

Listen, he is not denying the distress... the word means grief or pain. But neither is he discarding the genuine joy that a Christian can experience in the midst of the pain if he has the right perspective. Peter himself had felt it. After being flogged and warned to speak no further in the name of Jesus, he and the other apostles “*went on their way ... rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name*” (Acts 5:41). That’s joy from the pits! In our text, Peter tells us how to have it:

KEY TAKE AWAY: Because the Savior uses trials to refine our faith we can have joy and hope in the midst of our suffering by LOOKING to Him and His SALVATION.

So look at our passage and notice: (1) 1 Peter 1:3-5 points us to our future inheritance in heaven; (2) 1 Peter 1:6-9 directs us to our present joy and hope in the midst of trials and suffering. From 1 Peter 1:6-9, I want to make three main points:

3 Main Points in 1 Peter 1:6-9:

- 1. The Savior takes all whom He LOVES through TRIALS/SUFFERING**
- 2. The Savior takes all whom He loves through trials to REFINE their FAITH**
- 3. We can have joy from the pits by looking to the SAVIOR and His SALVATION**

THE SAVIOR TAKES ALL WHOM HE LOVES THROUGH TRIALS

May I state it a little different way that may make what I am saying more clear... just because you are going through time of suffering, hardship, struggle and trial does not mean, nor is in no way an indicator that God has forgotten you or that He doesn’t love you. Everyone goes through times of suffering and hardship to varying degrees, but everyone will have struggles in this life. As Jesus, Himself, said it in his Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:45 that it “*... rains on the just and on the unjust.*” In other words storms and the rains of life fall on everyone... all go through suffering, and it’s not a commentary on love or lack of for us. He love us! He loves us! He loves us! Scripture and His own actions on the cross prove it so!

3 Comforting Truths for Those Going Through Trials:

- 1. He doesn’t stop loving us when we are going through trials and struggles –** It’s not like God says, “We’ll now you will get what you deserve!” “You made your bed, now lie in in it!” “I loved you! You spurned my love! Now you get to pay the price and I’m out of here!” No! Rather God says to us in Hebrews 13:5, “*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*” Not even in times of trial and suffering. Peter, himself, will tell us a little later his letter... in one of my favorite verse, 1 Peter 5:7, “*Cast all you care upon Him, for He cares for you.*” He says to us, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. Cast all your care on Me for I cares for you.” It not like we can say, “Well, God did love me when life was good, but now that life has turned bad God must not love me anymore!” That makes love, particularly God’s love conditional, as if He is saying, “I will love you only if ...” His love for us is everlasting, and unconditional! He has declared His love for us, and His love knows not end.

2. **Our trials and struggles are not a sign that that He doesn't love us** – Sounds similar to what we just said, but it's actually a little different. Not only can we not say that my suffering means God has stopped loving me (He did, but now He doesn't), we also can't say that when we struggle and suffering it means God is mad at us and doesn't like us (love us) anymore. In other words, we cannot say, "Well God must not love me or He would not allow me to go through this!" or "God takes care of those He loves, therefore He must not love me because I'm going through this suffering and He is not taking care of it!" This view is critically detrimental to our gleaning the truth and maturity in our own faith that can come from times of trial and struggle and hardship. It fails to take into account what Scripture says and teaches about suffering and trial and what God can actually do in our lives through these challenging times and circumstances.
3. **God loves us so much that He enters and goes through our trials and struggles with us** – When we go through trials and struggles, He enters our struggles with us and goes with us through them... actually carries us through them. The very famous poem "Footprints in the Sand" beautifully illustrates this truth, and it bears our hearing it again:

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SAND

One night I dreamed a dream. As I was walking along the beach with my Lord. Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me, I looked back at the footprints in the sand. I noticed that at many times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it. "Lord, you said once I decided to follow you, You'd walk with me all the way. But I noticed that during the saddest and most troublesome times of my life, there was only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed You the most, You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you Never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you."

This truth, that not only does God not desert us or stop loving us in our times of suffering and trial, but He actually enters our trials and goes with us (carries us) through them is abundant in Scripture. The Shepherd's Psalm, Psalm 23 communicates this in Psalm 23:4, "*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear not evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*" The writer of Hebrews tell us in Hebrews 2:14-18 "*14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. 16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. 17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation*

for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ *For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.*” And again in Hebrews 4:14-16, ¹⁴ *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*”

Let me share some precious promises from Scripture you need to be familiar with:

5 Precious Promises from Scripture on Suffering:

- 1. Hebrews 5:1-8... God/Jesus empathizes with our suffering** – But “empathizes” we mean He understands, sympathizes, identifies with, has compassion for, commiserates, can relate to our suffering and what we are going through. Here is the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 5:1-8... listen close and pay close attention to what he is saying about Jesus and our suffering, *“For every high priest taken from among men is appointed for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can have compassion on those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness. ³ Because of this he is required as for the people, so also for himself, to offer sacrifices for sins. ⁴ And no man takes this honor to himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, but it was He who said to Him: “You are My Son, today I have begotten You.” ⁶ As He also says in another place: “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek”; ⁷ who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, ⁸ though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered.”* Jesus, loved by the Father, endured suffering (Hebrews 5:8) *“Through He (Jesus) was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”* And why? Well we know He suffered for us... to pay the price for our sin on our behalf. As a side note: we may never say when we suffer that God doesn’t love us. He actually took the punishment and suffering for our sin for us! Here are the other two passages from Hebrews that we just read a minute ago. **Hebrews 2:14-18** *“¹⁴ Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.”* And again in Hebrews 4:14-16, ¹⁴ *Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”* Oh, yes! The precious promise of Scripture and from our God/Jesus is that He can sympathize and

empathize with us when we suffer. He's been there done that, and like no other He gets us when we suffer.

2. **Hebrews 12:1-8... God/Jesus provides us with everything we need in suffering and reminds us that we are His -** *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. ⁴ You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. ⁵ And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: ‘My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastenes, and scourges every son whom he receives. ⁷ If ^u you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? ⁸ But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.”* Those Jesus/God loves endure suffering (Hebrews 12:6-8) Of us (believers) it says, *“For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives.... If you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”*
3. **2 Timothy 3:10-16... God/Jesus gives us help and instruction in His Word for our suffering that is common to all believers—** *“¹⁰ But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. ¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* All believers truly living for Him will go through times of suffering (2 Timothy 3:12) *“All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”*
4. **1 Peter 4:12-19... God/Jesus doesn't want us to be caught off guard by our suffering that is sure to come, but glorify Him in our and through our suffering –** *“¹² Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; ¹³ but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. ¹⁴ If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. ⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ Now ‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’ ¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful*

Creator.” *How does or may our suffering glorify God/Jesus, and does our not being surprise or caught off guard by suffering help in this?* We are able to prepare in advance how we may handle suffering in our life and “purpose in our heart” that our suffering and trials will bring honor and glory to Jesus Christ?

5. **John 16:25-33... God/Jesus give us a peace to endure and hope to cling to in the midst of our suffering -** ²⁵ *“These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father. ²⁶ In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I shall pray the Father for you; ²⁷ for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from God. ²⁸ I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father. ²⁹ His disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech! ³⁰ Now we are sure that You know all things, and have no need that anyone should question You. By this we believe that You came forth from God.” ³¹ Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe? ³² Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. ³³ These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”* Suffering is never without hope for a believer, why? Because this world is not the end for us, our hope is beyond! Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ overcame the world, and those who are His will also. Suffering is, without question, a reality for Christians in this world (John 16:33) ³³ *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”*

Given all of this, it is not surprising that Peter will say a little later in our letter in 1 Peter 4:12, ¹² *Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”*

On one occasion while Jesus was still on this earth, Peter had said to Him, *“Lord, we have left everything and followed You. What then will there be for us?”* (Matt. 19:27). Jesus replied that anyone who left everything and followed Him would receive back in this life a hundred times as much as he gives up--houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, farms. Marvelous! Such a deal! Who wouldn't sign up for such a program? But, then in the same breath, Jesus added, *“... along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life”* (Mark 10:30).

In this life: trials, persecutions, hardships for Jesus' sake--it's part of the deal. Yes, there are untold blessings now, as Jesus makes clear. Yes, it's a truly abundant life (John 10:10). But, yes again, the abundance is often the deep, abiding joy and hope in and of salvation we feel from the struggles and trials and sufferings we endure. **Trials are the mark of Jesus' special love. No one loved by Him is exempt.**

But, why? That's what we always ask, isn't it? **Why does God take us through trials?**

THE SAVIOR TAKES ALL WHOM HE LOVES THROUGH TRIALS TO REFINE THEIR FAITH

Peter shows us the purpose of trials, the perspective needed in trials and the final product of trials. Notice our passage again in 1 Peter 1:6-9, *“⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷that 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, ⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”*

7 Benefits of Going Through Hard Times: Everything God does in our lives is for our benefit, including suffering. Though they never seem pleasant at the time, hard times produce wonderful benefits in our lives. On Monday I mentioned one benefit—affliction drives us to God’s word. Here are seven more benefits of suffering:

1. **Affliction drives us to God in prayer** – James writes in James 5:13, *“¹³Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.”* And the Psalmist said in Psalm 107:6, *“Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them out of their distresses.”* When the sun’s shining and everything’s going our way, we don’t feel our need for God. But desperate times lead to desperate prayer. When we’re helpless to change our situation, we cry out to our Savior who delivers us from our distress.
2. **Affliction humbles us** – Listen to what the Apostle Paul said in regard to his own suffering in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, *“⁷And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited, Paul said. Afflictions remind us of how fragile we are. It keeps us lowly. Reminds us that everything we have is a gift. Pride leads to a fall, but God gives grace to the humble. Affliction positions us to receive grace.
3. **Affliction makes us rely on Christ’s power** – Listen again to Paul’s words we just read in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, *“⁷And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. ⁸Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹And He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”* But he said to me, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”* Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. When we realize how powerless we are, then Jesus can display his might in our lives. When we’ve exhausted all our own resources, Jesus rides in at just the right moment, like the hero in a movie who comes to rescue someone as the train is bearing down on them.

4. **Affliction brings us the comfort of God himself** – Listen to Paul again in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, *“³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any [Ⓜ]trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our [Ⓜ]consolation also abounds through Christ. ⁶Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. ⁷And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.”* Did you notice it in verse 3... *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction...”* As well-meaning as others are, there are times when no human words can comfort. But God himself comforts us when we cry out to him in our pain. The God of ALL COMFORT, the one who knows exactly what our broken hearts need, comforts us in ALL our affliction. The One who fashioned our hearts, who knows our every drop of sadness, knows the exact medicine we need to comfort us.
5. **Affliction gives us compassion for others** – Listen to it again in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7, *“³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any [Ⓜ]trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. ⁵For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our [Ⓜ]consolation also abounds through Christ. ⁶Now if we are afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. ⁷And our hope for you is steadfast, because we know that as you are partakers of the sufferings, so also you will partake of the consolation.”* When someone else has been through the same thing, their words can really comfort us. Though your pain is horrific now, someday God will use you to bring his comfort to someone else who suffers the fury of depression or the agony of a child who rebels like yours. **Dr. Sheet conversation with me after losing the twins twice, losing mom and dad as we did*
6. **Affliction produces endurance and patience** – Listen to Paul’s words in Romans 5:1-5... I love this passage... Paul writes, *“Therefore, having been justified by faith, [Ⓜ]we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. ³And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵Now 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.”* The only way to get patience and endurance is by being placed in situations that require it. But it will be worth it in the end, because it is by patiently enduring in faith that we’ll enter heaven.
7. **Affliction reminds us that this world is not our home** – The great “Faith Chapter” in Hebrews 11 carries these great words for those faithful ones who suffered but endured and for us in Hebrews 11:13-16, *“¹³These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared*

a city for them.” I love the reminder from the writer of Hebrews in Hebrews 13:14, “For here we have not continuing city, but we seek the one to come.” Folks, the world is not our home. As many blessings as this world has, it’s not our home. Affliction weans us from this world, reminds us how transitory it is, and makes us long for heaven, for that day when we’ll see Jesus face to face and he will personally wipe away every tear from our eyes. One of my favorite C.S. Lewis quotes says, “If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that we were made for another world.” Could that desire be that the pain and sorrow, the suffering and sickness, the trials and turmoil of this life would cease and be made right, and could it be that the desire for more than the suffering of this life is an indicator itself that we were made for another world.

Bless the Lord oh my soul and forget none of his benefits. Especially those benefits he brings us through hard times.

3 Truths from Peter on Trials and Suffering:

- 1. The purpose of trials is to refine faith** - The word “*That*” at the very beginning of verse 7 points to the purpose of the various trials mentioned in verse 6. Verse 7 says, “*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.*” Faith is at the very heart of the Christian life.

3 Key Truths About the Important of Faith for the Christian:

- (1) We are saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)** – “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*” What does that mean?
- (2) We walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7)** – “*For we walk by faith, not by sight.*” What does that mean?
- (3) Without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6)** – “*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.*” What does that mean?

Peter both contrasts and compares faith with gold...

Peter’s Compare and Contrast with Faith and Gold:

- (1) The perishability of gold as contrasted with the imperishability of faith** - He contrasts it in that faith is more precious than gold because gold is perishable, but faith isn’t. Back up to verses 3-5 and be reminded of what Peter has just told us about our faith, “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*” Our faith is imperishable. Gold is perishable, faith is not.
- (2) The non-purchase-ability of gold as contrasted to the purchase-ability of faith** - Gold won’t gain heaven, but faith will. All the gold in the world is worthless the instant you die and stand before God. Only faith in Jesus Christ will do in that day. And it’s not

talking about a “faith” of our own or in our own selves. It is saving faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ and what He purchased for us on the cross.

- (3) The refine-ability of gold compared to the refine-ability of faith** - Peter compares faith with gold in that both are refined by fire. The words “proof” and “tested” have the nuance of testing with a view to approval. God does not test our faith to make it fail, but to burn off the dross and leave the pure gold. He does this by putting us in the furnace of affliction/suffering/trials where we are forced to trust Him in ways we never would apart from such trials.

Here James’ words again in James 1:2-4, *“²My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”* What is James talking about here, but the exact same thing Peter is telling us about the refining of our faith. Again, God does not test our faith to make it fail, but to burn off the dross and leave the pure gold... to complete us!

We need to be clear that there is such a thing as false faith that does fail. In the parable of the sower, Jesus said that in the shallow, rocky soil, the seed sprouted, but when the sun came out, it withered and died because it had no root. He explained that this refers to those who first receive the word with joy, but when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, they fall away, thus showing that their faith was not genuine (Mark 4:5-6, 16-17).

But genuine faith will grow stronger, not weaker, through trials.

READ: Hymn #338, “How Firm A Foundation” (v.3) - As the great hymn, “How Firm a Foundation” puts it, *“The flame will not hurt thee, I only design, thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.”*

I read a comment by **Martin Luther** (*Commentary on Peter and Jude* [Kregel], pp. 39-40) where he said that if he had not been attacked as strongly as he had been, he would never have come to the place of certainty or to the full development on the doctrines of faith as he did. In a small way, I could identify with him, in that the Lord used the attacks against me to strengthen my understanding of the basic truths of the gospel which are under attack in our day. **George Muller**, a great man of faith, housed, clothed, and fed over 2,000 orphans at a time simply by faith and prayer. He refused to tell potential donors of the needs of the work, even when directly asked, but instead would take the needs to God in prayer. He went through times of severe trial. For one seven-year period, he seldom had funds for more than three days’ needs for the orphans, and often the need was met on the very day, sometimes at the exact moment the children sat down to eat. **George Muller** wrote, *The Lord gives faith, for the very purpose of trying it for the glory of His own name, and for the good of him who has it; and, by the very trial of our faith, we not only obtain blessing to our own souls, by becoming the better acquainted with God, if we hold fast our confidence in Him, but our faith is also, by the exercise, strengthened: and so it comes, that, if we walk with God in any measure of uprightness of heart, the trials of faith will be greater and greater* (A. T. Pierson, *George Muller of Bristol* [Revell], p. 439). Thus the purpose of trials is to refine our faith.

2. **The perspective in trials is to see that they are temporary, necessary and under God's control** – It helps to gain God's perspective on trials. Peter does that in our passage... gives us a perspective of our trials and suffering that we can often see when we are in the midst of them. See if you don't notice the perspective he is giving us in our passage... look at it again with me in verses 6-9, *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 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, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls."* Peter give us a perspective of our trials in 3 parts:

3 Part Perspective of Christian Suffering:

- (1) **Christian suffering is temporary** – Peter reminds us that our trials and suffering are temporary... *"for a little while."* Maybe you're thinking, "A little while? Good grief, I've been going through this trial for years!" That's a little while compared to eternity. Paul expressed the same thing this way in 2 Corinthians 4:17-18... listen to this, *"For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."* Trials are temporary; salvation is eternal. In a short while, Jesus Christ is returning in glory and we will spend all eternity with Him. Our present trials, no matter how great, will pale in significance in the light of eternity. Thus, in the midst of our pain, we can have great joy if we will focus on the shortness of time and the eternal glory that awaits us when Jesus returns.
- (2) **Christian suffering is necessary** – Listen to verse 6 in our passage again, *"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials."* Peter adds perspective by saying that trials are necessary (if "if need be"). They are necessary, as we just saw, to refine our faith. But also, I think Spurgeon is right when he says that not only the trials, but also the distress, is necessary. He argues ("The Christian's Heaviness and Rejoicing," *Spurgeon's Sermons* [Baker], 5:210-221) that it is needful that sometimes a Christian's spirit even be cast down. Christ experienced distress even unto death in the garden. If a Christian doesn't go through those times when he is depressed, Spurgeon argues, he will grow proud, he won't be able to relate to others who suffer, and he will miss lessons that we learn no other way. He cites Luther as saying that "affliction is the best book in my library." Malcolm Muggeridge, who became a Christian before his death, said late in his life, *"Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, everything I have learned, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness"* (*Reader's Digest* [1/91], p. 158).
- (3) **Christian suffering is under God's control** - The third perspective Peter offers is that trials are *under God's control*. This is the overall implication here... that God is using trials as a goldsmith, watching the molten metal, skimming off the dross until He can see His face reflected in it. To know that God is sovereign is a great comfort when you're going through trials. He hasn't forgotten you. He wasn't asleep or on vacation when your

problem hit. He is working all things, including our trials, for good according to His sovereign plan (Eph. 1:11; Rev. 6:9-11). Thus the purpose of trials is to refine our faith; the perspective we need in our trials is that they are temporary, necessary, and under God's control.

- 3. The product of trials is reward when Christ returns** – Notice verses 6-7 again, *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 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.”* Did you notice it? The result of our suffering/trials will be *“praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Whose praise, glory, and honor is Peter talking about? Since God alone is worthy of praise, glory, and honor in the ultimate sense, we could argue that His praise alone is in view. But there is a secondary sense in which God will reward believers at the coming of Christ with praise (1 Cor. 4:5; Matt. 25:21, 23), glory (Rom. 2:7, 10; Col. 3:4), and honor (Rom. 2:7, 10; 2 Tim. 4:8). We share these because of our identification with Christ (Rom. 8:17), and we will properly cast all honors back at His feet. Yet we can endure trials knowing that we will be rewarded when Christ returns.

Thus the Savior takes all whom He loves through trials; He does it to refine our faith.

WE CAN HAVE JOY FROM THE PITS BY LOOKING TO THE SAVIOR AND HIS SALVATION

Listen to Peter's word again at the beginning of verse 6, *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials”* He says, *“In this you greatly rejoice...”* (1:6). In what? In our great salvation just described in verses 3-5. Even though we are going through times of suffering and hardship, in the pits of life, temporarily distressed by our trials, we can look to our Savior and the salvation He has provided, which we already have begun to enjoy, but which we won't experience in full until He returns, and we will have an inexpressible, glorious joy that floods our souls right there in the pits. How do we gain this joy and hope in the midst of our suffering? Three ways:

3 Ways to Have Joy and Hope in the Midst of our Suffering:

- 1. We look to the Savior with faith** – We've already seen that trials are to purify our faith. Peter says in verse 8 that inexpressible joy in trials comes through believing in Jesus even though we do not see Him. We need to understand that faith is not an automatic response. Neither is it passive endurance. *Faith is actively choosing to trust God in spite of my circumstances.* Faith is putting my weight down on the firm promises of God. Spurgeon said that, *“Trials aren't meant to just burn out the dross, but also to burn in the promises.”* I like that! Don't you?

In a times of trial and suffering and hardship, it seems as if Christ is not there with you. So by faith you must say, *“He promised to be with me even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), He promised never to leave or forsake me (Heb. 13:5), so I lay hold of Him right now by faith.”*

As Jesus told Thomas, who didn't believe in His resurrection until he saw Jesus with his own eyes, *“Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and*

yet believed” (John 20:29). That’s us! We will be blessed when we look to the Savior by faith even when we’re in the pits and throes of suffering. It’s our choice and duty.

- 2. We look to the Savior with hope** – Note the future look of these verses (READ: 1 Peter 1:6-9). I’ve already mentioned the temporary nature of our trials in light of eternity. Peter mentions the revelation of Jesus Christ. That means His coming, but it brings out a subtle nuance that is important to grasp, namely, that Jesus is present but unseen right now, but the day is coming when He will be revealed. (Peter repeats this word, in noun or verb form, in 1:5, 7, 13; 4:13; 5:1.)

Also, Peter emphasizes the future sense of our salvation (1:9). In the New Testament, there are three tenses of our salvation. Once we have truly believed in Christ, we can say, “I have been saved from sin’s penalty” (John 3:36; Titus 3:5-8). But also, all who have been saved must say, “I am being saved from sin’s power” (1 Cor. 1:18; 15:2). Some day we will be saved from sin’s presence (Rom. 5:9-10; 13:11; 1 Pet. 1:9). Thus in a time of trial, we look with hope to the Savior who has saved us, is saving us, and will save us completely when He returns.

- 3. We look to the Savior with love** – Notice Peter’s words in **verses 8-9** of our passage, *“⁸whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.”* Peter said, *“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him”* (1:8). Love for Jesus Christ in response to His ultimate love for us as seen in the cross, is the central motivation for the Christian life. It’s so easy to drift into the place of the church in Ephesus, which Jesus commended by saying, *“I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who called themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.”* Wow! What more could you want, Lord? *“But I have this against you, that you have left your first love”* (Rev. 2:2-4).

It’s easy to drift there in your marriage, isn’t it? You’re faithful to one another. You live together in relative harmony. You function as husband and wife, you raise your children, you pay the bills and do the other things required to run a household. But somewhere the romance went cold. You need to rekindle the delight in your spouse you once knew.

It’s the same with the Lord. We can be dutifully living the Christian life, but we’ve lost the romance with Christ. That’s what our new sermon series on Sunday is about, “Rekindle the Fire”... rekindling the passion we have for Jesus. I’m talking here not just about commitment, which is the core of love, but also feelings which stem from that commitment. I agree with **Jonathan Edwards**, that “The core of religion is emotional. Our hearts need to be filled with love for Jesus Christ.”

CONCLUSION

How do we cultivate and maintain that kind of love for our unseen Savior?

3 Closing Thoughts on Cultivating and Maintaining our Love for our Savior:

- 1. Spend time alone with Him** – First, *Spend time alone with Him*. You can't cultivate love for your mate if you never spend time alone together. If you want to love the Lord more, spend time alone with Him in His Word and in prayer.
- 2. Obey Him** – Second, *Obey Him*. In our day of “sloppy grace,” people think that obedience is legalism and has no place under grace. Those who think so need to read their Bibles. Jesus said, *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love”* (John 15:10). The apostle John wrote, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments”* (1 John 5:3). If you are disobeying God, you will not be able to love Him as you should.
- 3. Come frequently to the Lord's table** - Third, *Come frequently to the Lord's table*. It is a time to look to the Savior and the salvation He provided for us at the price of His blood. He knew that we tend to forget, so He instructed us to do it often in remembrance of Him. It's a time to receive His love and express your love back to Him. As you look to Christ and His salvation, as seen in those elements, you will experience His joy, even from the pits.