



FAITHFUL LIVING IN A FALLEN WORLD

A SERIES IN FIRST PETER



GREETING TRIALS AS HELPFUL GUESTS

1 PETER 4:12-19

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INTRO

As you've just heard in the reading, Peter's advice about suffering in this life is that when it happens, we should not be surprised. When trials come, we should greet them as we would guests that we didn't know were coming, but we are prepared for nonetheless.

The Gentile Christians to whom he writes would have been well-accepted in society prior to their conversion, but now as Christians, they live in ways that are at odds with the world around them. As a result, they experience the mockery and derision of their former friends. They might wonder why. So they are choosing to live their lives differently - why should that induce former friends to now mistreat them?

The reason is this: If you step out of the flow of worldly living to walk in the opposite direction, there is friction and tension. And these new believers now walk in the opposite direction they once did. So there is friction. And there is tension.

In 21st-century Canada, we increasingly walk in the opposite direction from the world around us.

Consider the numerous policies our Canadian government has introduced or continued to promote over the last decade. I mean, these are not just policies that are “a little off” from what we believe as Christians. These are policies that show contempt and outright hatred toward true Christians. And these are not conspiracies or suspicions or insinuations; these are the publicly promoted policies of our government:

- A. **MAiD (Medical Assistance in Dying)** - Our government has made ending your own life with their help a growth industry, and thousands of people are ending their lives by their own choice. Further, they propose that this should be expanded to include those with mental illness, and, at times, it has been offered as a solution for poverty or disability rather than providing care and support.
- B. **Abortion** - Our nation is about as pro-abortion as a nation can be. We have no laws on the books at all. In 2018, the federal government denied grants to organizations that did not sign an attestation supporting abortion rights, directly

discriminating against Christian organizations that uphold pro-life values.

- C. **Bill C-4 (the so-called “Conversion Therapy Ban”)** – This law goes far beyond banning coercive practices; it criminalizes even voluntary conversations where someone seeks help aligning their sexuality with their faith. It also vaguely defines “conversion therapy,” which creates real problems for those who provide biblical counselling and pastoral care.

These are not merely neutral government policies but manifestations of hatred toward God and his people. We shouldn’t be surprised at this; we should expect it.

In decades past, society's expectations were much more aligned with the basic precepts of Christianity, but that's no longer the case. There is now increasing friction, and we should prepare to feel this friction more often, assuming that the trajectory that is currently set is one that will be followed for many years.

If that turns out to be the case, there is greater difficulty ahead for you if you are a Christian, not less. There is more friction, not less. More testing, more hostility, more rejection, and therefore, as paradoxical as it may seem, more rejoicing and more blessing.

Suffering is the unsought and unwanted physical or emotional pain we experience during our lives. There is no human being who ever lived who did not experience suffering of one type or another, and that includes Jesus during his time on earth. Suffering is unpleasant, but it is not to be unexpected, not if you are a follower of Jesus.

It should not be unexpected, but often it is, isn’t it? We are often surprised. We are surprised, but God is not. In fact, it is often planned and allowed by him for his glory and our good. And could it also be true that he has a purpose for this suffering and these trials?

Could it be true that if we apply faith to our endurance of them, there are blessings in store for us that we can't yet imagine?

Yes, these are truths, and that is what Peter is getting at in today's passage of Scripture. He offers us four commands as we face fiery trials.

1. Do Not Be Surprised at Fiery Trials (v12)

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Peter addresses them as beloved, as dear friends. And that is what they are. In the same way, I say to you this morning: "Dear friends, heed these words of Scripture!"

Have you ever made a commitment to "get in shape"? Maybe some January, you said, "This is it. I'm finally going to fit into those 10 shirts that no longer fit! I'm really going to get fit this year - this is the year I do it!" And you set out for a few weeks in the new year with determination and discipline and sufficient effort, and it goes well. And then you begin to take a cheat day here and there, and then there are more cheat days than no-cheat days, and then eventually there are only-cheat days and zero no-cheat days. You're no longer filled with zeal to really get fit. You're no longer working hard to strengthen your core.

Has this happened to anyone?

But what if, whenever you get to the point where you plateau, or even at other times, a personal trainer would get an alert and show up at your door? "I've noticed you're starting to slack off. Would you like some help? Some coaching? Some motivation?" I think most of us would like that, wouldn't we?

What if the same thing existed for the benefit of our spiritual fitness? I have good news for you. Paul says in 1 Tim. 4:8 that “**while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.**”

God sends trials into our lives as opportunities to improve our spiritual fitness. Trials are our spiritual fitness trainer. You know those annoying people who stay fit without exercising? Good news - those people don't exist in the spiritual realm!

So our trials, friends, are sent with a purpose. We should remember this, and we should not think it strange when we meet them along the path of life. Everyone experiences them. No adult human has ever gone through life without these trials. Based on the history of humanity and indeed on our own personal experience, we should not be surprised when we meet again with some variety of adversity.

Trials have come, they are here, and they will come again; do not be surprised. These trials come to test us, and testing trials are to be expected.

We are tested as trees are tested by the wind. When we experience very high winds, these winds test every structure in their path. Buildings are tested, and trees are tested. On one of my drives to Port Stanley, where the trial by wind created magnificent ice sculptures on the pier, I also saw a giant old tree in pieces on the ground. From the outside, this tree looked sturdy and durable, but the wind came to test the tree, and this test revealed that the tree was rotten and weak on the inside. There was no strength in its core, and when the test came, this internal weakness was revealed.

We are tested in much the same way. The winds of trials and afflictions blow into our lives and threaten to reveal our internal weaknesses. Haven't you experienced this to be true? In someone's life, maybe your own, where everything seems to be in place, but a

time of adversity comes and pressure reveals that not everything on the inside is as it appears to be on the outside.

And we might see this as a bad thing, but it is not necessarily so. These trials come as gracious gifts that can reveal weaknesses in our character that have formed around our frequent lack of faith. Notice that I said these trials CAN reveal weakness, and they always DO reveal weakness, but whether or not we take note and take action is another matter. Trials always grab our attention, but we may pay attention to the right things, or we may not.

We know, of course (although often more in theory than in practice), that there is no better life than one that is full of faith in God. Jesus never lacked faith in God, and because of this, he was completely obedient to him. The goal of our lives is to bring glory to God by continually becoming more like his son, Jesus. We call that process “sanctification.” By way of our trials, God shows us where we lack faith. Wherever we lack faith, we will struggle with obedience to what God has set before us as the good and perfect path.

But you might find, as I often do, that you are too busy being distressed and agitated at this latest turn of events to notice what these events are revealing about your character. When a trial threatens to be financially costly and we begin to worry, God is revealing that we have more faith in our money than we have in his ability to provide. So he calls us to trust him and to rest in his providence. When difficult circumstances arise in our families and we struggle to cope, God is revealing that we have put too much faith in our own efforts and not enough in his ability to save and redeem. Again, he calls us to trust him and to rest in his sovereignty, not our efforts.

But you might find that you are so preoccupied with questioning God about why he has allowed this to happen that you forget that he has already told you: These trials come as gracious gifts to reveal

weaknesses of character that form around our frequent lack of faith. (Amen? Thank you, Jesus?)

We know that God is not put off by our perplexity and that he sympathizes with our weaknesses. He knows what it's like to live as we do on this earth, with all our frequent troubles and turmoil. And so a faithful response in our trials might well include a degree of puzzlement and bewilderment, but if all we do is dissolve into distress and agitation and questioning God about his ways and his timing, we are only continuing in our faithless responses. To do so is to set the priority of our own comfort and glory above his glory and wisdom.

Peter's first instruction is to not be surprised by fiery trials. His second instruction is even more challenging:

2. Rejoice in Fiery Trials (13-15)

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

This word "rejoice" is a command; it is a command to do something that will not come naturally to us when we are suffering. When we are suffering, our first response is not usually rejoicing, but we should train ourselves to make that our default response. This is possible, you know, but only by way of faith. Faith in God's sovereignty over our circumstances and his guaranteed provision whenever we face need.

And this word "rejoice"—we need to know that in Greek, this is not a single-use concept. We are commanded to rejoice not as a one-time isolated response, but as an ongoing and continuous attitude, a determined approach to life.

As we share in Christ's sufferings, we are to continually rejoice, to set our minds on the benefits and not the costs. Benefits? What benefits? Peter tells us that as we walk the hard road that Jesus

walked, we are walking toward the same glorification he experienced at his resurrection. And it is in *that* fact that we are to rejoice. We rejoice in our sufferings *not* because we see them as good in themselves but because by way of them, we move farther up the road to glorification with Christ.

Alan M. Stibbs comments that “When Christ's destined glory is openly manifest, when the whole universe sees and acknowledges Him as Lord, there will be a much greater outburst of joyful exultation. So to suffer with rejoicing now is the way to prepare to rejoice with exultation then.”¹

Our rejoicing while suffering now can be seen as a preparatory exercise for rejoicing in glory later. Think of it, if you've ever been to a concert... In the weeks leading up to the concert, we listen to the music of the band or artist we are going to see in preparation for seeing them in person. We listen to what is inferior (recording) to prepare to fully experience and engage in what is superior (the live performance).

When it comes to suffering in this life, we rejoice not in the suffering itself but in the superior enjoyment that God will bring about by way of our suffering. With this perspective, we can genuinely rejoice when we face trials of various kinds if we keep our eyes and minds set on the good that God will bring and not the present affliction that we are enduring.

We can decide today to obey this command so that we are better prepared for the next time the houseguest of affliction knocks at our door. It will not be automatic; I don't know if it ever will be, and so we must apply effort by faith that God is trying to do something good for us in all our trials when we suffer for his name.

¹ - Alan M. Stibbs p159

On this side of his return - prior to his return - be glad when life leads you down the same paths he walked (betrayal, hardships, physical afflictions). If you do this, then when he returns in all his glory, you will be many more times glad than you ever were sorrowful. When you suffer as he suffered, you join in his blessing - already now. You have fellowship with him - already now. You are walking the same path together - already now.

And consider this: those who attempt to avoid suffering in all its forms will never have fellowship with Jesus. A life that has as its main goal the avoidance of all suffering will find in eternity that there is nothing but suffering to be endured. But those who willingly find fellowship with Jesus in their sufferings by welcoming these sufferings as sent guests will enter their eternal rest from all suffering on the same day. Suffering willingly and joyfully for the sake of Christ in this life is a down payment for inexpressible joy when he returns in all power and glory.

Peter continues:

¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

Peter here is echoing the words of Jesus in Matt. 5:11-12: **"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."**

There is something about suffering for the sake of Christ that calls down God's blessing and favour. This suffering might be incidental or it might be intentional, it may happen without your invitation, or you might put yourself in harm's way for the sake of Christ. This should never be leveraged as a scheme to manipulate God to bless you. You cannot inflict suffering upon yourself as if it is a quarter you put into God's vending machine, and his blessings drop out of a slot.

So we must tread carefully here. When we suffer for the name of Christ, we are blessed, so we must not avoid suffering, but neither should we seek it out for its own sake, as if it were a simple transaction that will bring us good favour. Suffering is not a lucky rabbit's foot that is thought to bring good luck. God is not paying us for our suffering with blessings in the bank. We are not finding all the suffering that we can, as if it were scrap metal that we collect and take to the salvage yard, that we can exchange for cash. That's not how it works.

We are not to seek suffering for its own sake; we are to seek the Kingdom of God, and as we do, we will inevitably face suffering that we are then to joyfully endure. I hope you see the difference. We are not to think that suffering is required and therefore to be sought, but rather that suffering is inevitable and cannot be avoided.

Peter then adds a caveat. There is a limitation to this. It is not ALL suffering in which we are to rejoice. Peter guards against the unscrupulous use of this theology of suffering when he says:

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.²

Genuine Christian suffering is suffering that is undeserved, and there is no inherent benefit in the other kind of suffering. Undeserved

² On being a meddler...

"To look upon that which belongs to another might well mean to be too interested in other people's affairs and to be a meddling busybody. That is by far the most probable meaning. There are Christians who do an infinite amount of harm with misguided interference and criticism. This would mean that the Christian must never be an interfering busybody."

"It is Peter's instruction that if Christians have to suffer for Christ, they must do so in such a way that their suffering brings glory to God and to the name they bear. Their lives and conduct must be the best argument that they do not deserve the suffering which has come upon them, and their attitude to it must commend the name they bear."

suffering puts us instantly on the road with Christ in his suffering and results in unexpected rewards, but the suffering that comes because we deserve it is merely the payment we should expect for acting in sinful, foolish, or criminal ways.

We can bring suffering on ourselves by way of our sins, and this suffering does not immediately put us on the road with Christ to share in his suffering. It is only once we address our sin with concrete repentance that we can again resume walking in close fellowship with Christ on the road to glorification. Let's be clear here: we do not lose our salvation when we sin - our salvation is secure. But our nearness to Christ, the intimacy of our relationship with him, depends on our willingness to see and admit and confess our sins and to apply real repentance - a turning again and again from our sin to walk again with him.

But remember this as well - it is not that the suffering we experience because of sin can't be redeemed and used by God for his glory, but that it is a detour and a time-waste to sin in the first place and then to undergo suffering as a result of robbing us of still more time.

If we go about our lives peaceably as Christians and then suffer hardship because we are Christians, we are serving and glorifying God the whole time. But if we engage in sins of crime or other foolishness, we are not serving God at the time and our lives, and therefore our ability to glorify God, are made more difficult when we experience the consequences of our sin.

Now, to be sure, God can still redeem the life of a **repentant** sinner (be they criminal or not) and work in that sinner's life for his glory. But we must also recognize that if we have acted in those ways, we have not made the best use of the time given to us and have wasted a precious resource given to us by God. And yet even for this, there is grace and mercy and redemption.

Peter's first instruction is to not be surprised by fiery trials. His second instruction is to rejoice in fiery trials. Here is his third instruction:

3. Do Not Be Ashamed of Fiery Trials (v16-18)

¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Stibbs says that “To have to suffer reproach for Christ's sake is not a misfortune to be resented in self-pity but a privilege for which to thank God and to congratulate oneself.”³ “To congratulate oneself...” Isn't that what the apostles did? We see in Acts 5:41, after being beaten for speaking in the name of Jesus, that **“they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer...”** And in Acts 14 we see them encouraging other believers by saying that **“through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”**

“Congratulations! You've been chosen as worthy to suffer! Here's your prize: suffering!”

What this is teaching us is that not only should we *not* try to avoid suffering at all costs, but we should embrace it as a blessing! Can you believe that?! Suffering and joy - both were always present in the lives of God's servants in scripture; so why would we expect anything different today?

¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And

**“If the righteous is scarcely saved,
what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?”**

³ Stibbs p160

We should know that all evil will be judged and is presently judged. The evil in your heart and the evil that you do, brother or sister in Christ, is judged by God - he calls it what it is: it is evil. And as he reveals this to us and as we repent of it, he deals with us with mercy and kindness and discipline (Hebrews 12 shows us the value of this), and he does all of this for the purpose of our sanctification and redemption.

And as we journey through life, erring, yes, but cooperating with the Spirit in this redemptive discipline, then what Paul writes in Romans 2:6-8 will be said of us. He says first that God will “render to each one according to his works,” and then about those who walk in submission and cooperation with his Spirit: “to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.” And then he turns, just as Peter does in our passage, to the fate of those who persist in their refusal to walk in obedience and submission to God: “but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.”

In response to this, Stibbs asks: “If the justified sinner who is seeking to do God’s will is saved only with difficulty, because through judgment, and with inevitable pain and loss, what will be the end of the ungodly and sinful, who is doubly wrong, both in his heart attitude to God and in the evil practices of his life?”⁴

God is already bringing judgment onto the world. This implementation of present judgment is laid out for us in Romans 1. It is not yet the final decisive judgment, but judgments are at this moment being rendered on sinful people and nations that turn away from God. Seeing as we are part of such a nation, we should not expect a complete exemption from the consequences of these judgments, even if we are not guilty of the specific sins that bring these judgments onto our nation.

⁴ (Stibbs p163)

I mentioned earlier some sinful laws and practices in Canada. These are all offences for which our nation is being judged, and even we as Christians will feel the sting of a measure of that judgment, not personally, if we have not participated, but generally, as our nation faces a moral decline. These judgments and sinful humanity's rebellious responses to them are sure to lead to further suffering that will include God's people.

So here is Peter's final instruction:

4. Trust God and Do Good During Fiery Trials (v19)

¹⁹Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

How might we suffer according to God's will? We might be under intentional and loving discipline as his sons and daughters. We might be included in a wider judgment and suffering for the evil of our nation. We might face direct persecution. And many other ways we might suffer according to God's will.

Therefore, he says - because all of the preceding is true - here is what you are to do when you suffer according to God's will. When this is the case, here is Peter's good instruction:

1. Commit your soul to God's care
2. Continue to do good

In both of these responses, we are to learn from Christ's example. He suffered mockery, betrayal, beatings, and death by crucifixion, all according to God's will. Acts 4:27-28 tells us this: **"for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."**

Jesus suffered according to God's will, yet never wavered in his obedience. He committed his soul to God's care and kept doing good, obedient to God's will at all times. Empowered by his Spirit, we can do the same.

Continuing to do good is how we entrust ourselves to the faithful creator. By doing good instead of seeking revenge, we show that we trust God to attend to what is a just response to our persecution, so that we don't have to.

Back to the Top

Those of you who have been in scripture-mapping Bible studies with me will recognize the following as the culmination of a study process. Map out the passage, look up the Greek words, do a bit more study, then write out an amplified version of the passage. Here is the amplified version of this passage.

12 My dear friends, do not think it strange or be surprised when intense trials come to test your character, as if this is an unexpected turn of events. These trials will knock at your door and expect hospitality, so be ready for these houseguests at all times.

13 And be glad because the arrival of these houseguests means that you will have closer fellowship with Jesus in his sufferings. And as you participate at present in his afflictions by undergoing afflictions of your own, you will also be exceedingly glad when he returns and his glory is fully revealed to everyone!

14 If you are abused with angry words or defamed and your earthly reputation spoiled because you call yourself a Christian, you are fortunate, you are well-off because the power and agency of God's kingly majesty rest upon you.

15 But just to be clear, not all suffering is an inherent blessing. If you suffer because you murdered someone, or because you stole something, or because you acted in some other criminal way, there's

no inherent benefit or blessing in that. Likewise, if you are a busybody in other people's affairs and keep driving in someone else's lane, trying to impose your standards on them, there's no blessing in that either.

16 Yet if you experience ill treatment because you are a follower of Jesus, don't consider this a dishonour, but praise God all the more. Take pride in being counted as worthy to suffer in the name.

17-18 For it is time that God begins to judge, and he will start with His own family, the Christian church. And if it begins with us, what will it be like for those who persistently disobey God in thought and deed?

19 In light of all these things, let those who suffer ill-treatment according to what God wishes or has determined to be done trust the deposit of their souls to him while they carry on with the good works that he has prepared for them to do.

CONCLUSION

We learn here that when we suffer as Christians *because* we are Christians, we suffer according to God's will, according to his plan. Now, we could spend quite a bit of time exploring all the theological implications of this fact, but let's just take the most apparent meaning: It is possible for us to suffer according to God's will.

So then, this leads me to ask *myself* if I am suffering well in the trials that God has assigned to *me*. In Acts 5:19, the angel of the Lord breaks the Apostles out of prison, but it is not to deliver them from the hands of their enemies. No - it's to put them right back into the hands of their enemies. And so we see that God can deliver us FROM trial or INTO trial. The determining factor is which one will bring more glory to him. It's his glory that matters supremely, not our comfort. His glory, not ours.

Applying this personally, it means that in the trials I endure (if they are by God's design and not just a result of some sin of my own), I am bringing more glory to God in my endurance of those trials than I would if I were to be immediately rescued from them.

And here is something else that I am realizing, which is of the same pattern we see in the lives of God's servants in scripture. God may release me from whatever trial I am enduring at any point, but I'm quite sure he will fairly quickly deliver me into some other trial where his glory can be maximized and my sanctification can be moved along. This pattern repeats itself in my life.

But I must be honest with you here, these are not truths that I have always successfully taken hold of or consistently practiced in my life. Do you feel the same? Every new instance of suffering still seems like a surprise to me. It is a shattering of the recurring delusion that hard times will come again no more. It is a repudiation of the plan *I have for my life* - that I will get things figured out and then everything will hum along nicely from then on. And because this is my experience, because I repeatedly convince myself that this latest suffering is the last of my suffering, I never prepare for the suffering that is already on its way as I sit in my denial of its existence.

And when it shows up at the door, I groan! I wonder what it's doing here. I make a surprised, disgusted face that betrays my lack of preparedness and my lack of faith.

But daily, I strive to have more of the mind of Christ every day. I labour to conform my thinking to that of the faithful saints who were the writers of Holy Scripture. They consistently said things like: If we suffer with him, we will be glorified with him (Romans 8:17). It is my desire to enter into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ (Philippians 3:10). If we suffer with him, we will reign with him (2 Timothy 2:12). And dozens more of such statements.

If we remind ourselves of this thinking, of this spiritual truth, of this approach to faithful living, then we will see this life of frequent affliction as a privilege and not a punishment or a burdensome existence.

Let's pray.

The content of this booklet was written by Michael Krahn, a pastor of Community Bible Church in Ilderton, Ontario. We are a gospel-centered church devoted to the faithful teaching of Scripture, the building up of believers, and bearing witness to Christ in our community and beyond. To learn more, join us for a Sunday service, or connect with us directly, scan the QR code or visit:
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