

Peter and His Epistles

Lesson #11: Suffering

I. Introduction: Peter's comments on suffering (1 Peter 4:1-5:11)

- A. Notice that Christ suffered as our example (4:1, 4:13) See also Heb. 2:18
- B. Don't be surprised when you suffer (4:1, 4:12-19)
- C. Make sure and minister to those who suffer (5:1-9)
- D. Remember, suffering has a purpose (5:10-11)

"...Pain is a bruising of a blessing, but it is a blessing nevertheless. It's a strange, dark companion but a companion – if only because it has passed through God's respecting hand. It's an unwelcome guest, but still a guest. I know that it drives me to a nearer, more intimate place of fellowship with Jesus and so I take pain as though I were taking the left hand of God. (Better the left hand than no hand at all).

Perhaps the simple realization of something so redemptive is healing enough."
(A Place of Healing, by Joni Erickson Tada)

Definition of suffering: "to be affected by something from without, to be acted upon, to undergo an experience, to be subjected to evil." (Word Dictionary, p. 1129)

Suffering is anything that hurts or irritates.

II. Nature of suffering as noted in 1 Peter:

- A. Distressed (1:6-7), slandered (2:12), insulted (3:9), harmed (3:13), reviled (4:14), suffered as Christian (4:16), suffered as part of God's will (4:19) and suffered temporarily (5:10).
- B. In general it is: painful, perplexing (causes us to ask why), a process (Rom. 5:3-4), a purifier (Phil. 3:12-14), pre-determined (1 Pet. 1:6, 4:12) and inevitable (1 Thes. 3:3)

III. Causes of suffering:

- A. It's the natural repercussion of living in a fallen world (See Gen. 3:15-19)
- B. It's the reaping of our sowing (See Gal. 6:7-9)
- C. It's a form of God's discipline for his "kids" (See Heb. 12:6)
- D. It may be persecution because of our faith (See 2 Tim. 3:12)
- E. We may never know the cause

Isa. 55:8-9 *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

IV. The reasons for our suffering (See www.bible.org)

- A. We suffer to develop our capacity and sympathy in comforting others. "There are wounded people that we need to identify with."

2 Cor. 1:3-5 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows."

- B. We suffer to keep down our pride

2 Cor. 12:7 "To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me."

- C. We suffer as training tool. We have lessons to learn.

Heb. 12:5 "And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you,"

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 work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

D. We suffer as a witness to others

2 Tim. 2:8-10 *"Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."*

2 Cor. 4:12-13 *"So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,"*

E. We suffer to bring about continued dependence on the grace and power of God.

Eph. 6:10 *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power."*

F. We suffer to manifest the life and character of Christ. "We have a suffering Savior with whom we can enjoy greater intimacy."

Phil. 1:19 *"Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance."*

G. We suffer to broaden our ministries

Phil. 1:12-14 *"Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly."*

V. "Things to keep in mind when suffering becomes a part of our life experience" (Neil Chadwick's notes)

A. Remember, it is temporary

Ps. 30:5 *"For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."*

B. Remember to pray

"I pray for the strength to bear it, the grace to benefit from it and the devotion to offer it up to God as a sacrifice of praise." (Joni Erickson Tada)

1 Peter 4:7 *"The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear minded and self-controlled so that you can pray."*

- C. Remember to keep loving others (deeply!)

1 Peter 4:8 *"Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."*

- D. Remember to rejoice and keep on praising the Lord

See Acts 16:25 and notice what Paul and Silas were doing

- E. Remember to keep "doing good"

1 Peter 4:19 *"So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good."*

VI. So what?

- A. Remember: Sometimes He chooses not to heal us, but to hold us. "The more intense the pain, the closer the embrace."

Discussion Questions?

1. Peter has much to say about suffering. What events in his own life gave him perspective on this topic?
2. Think of someone you personally know that is suffering right now? Can you see any possible positive outcomes from that pain?
3. Who could you be praying for this week?