

Growing Strong Through Trials

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[0 : 00] Well, I really desire to turn our attention to God's Word today because I do think God has a word for us. It's probably not a word that's going to cause you to get all excited. The sound man's already warned me, don't get in front of the speakers and holler.

So I probably won't be hollering a lot, just the kind of message it is. But I think you'll know that the minute you see the topic, the minute you see the title. It's Growing Strong Through Suffering. But let me just tell you that as a pastor myself, I really do believe this is an area that we owe it to our churches to prepare them in this area.

Maybe it's 30 plus years of pastoring that has just caused me to realize what the Bible already tells us. And that is, there is going to be suffering and we want to be equipped and prepared to handle that.

And so I'd like you to turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 5. 1 Peter 5. And we're going to look at verses 6 through 14.

[1 : 05] But let me just read before I pray 1 Peter 5 and verse 10. So if you have your Bible verse 10, I'd love for you to follow along. I'll read just verse 10, but you keep your place there and we'll follow from there.

Verse 10. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

Let's pray together. Father, thank you for the time we can share together today. Just looking into your word, being fed by your word today.

And so I pray in these next few moments that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you would illuminate the scripture to our understanding. Lord, give us insight.

Lord, give us ears to hear. And I pray, Lord, these things would affect our hearts today. For those that may be suffering even in our midst today, that it would encourage and strengthen their hearts.

[2 : 17] But that, Lord, it would prepare all of us for any time of suffering we may have to endure. And so we ask today that your word would have its intended effect upon our hearts.

And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Well, it is, I think, one of the most crucial lessons we have to learn as Christians. And that is, how do we handle suffering?

In this fallen world, suffering is a certainty. And I want to say up front, I know there may be some of you today, I hope many of you, that have not experienced a great deal of suffering.

And yet, I want you to recognize that God's word wants us prepared for how to handle suffering.

And this really is the best time for you to learn how to handle suffering when everything is going according to your plan, the way you'd like it to go.

You're not in the midst of some suffering at this current moment. And so it's a good time to prepare yourself. I don't want you to just think, well, I really haven't had much suffering, so this doesn't really apply that much.

[3 : 25] I'll turn to it when I am in suffering. I hope as we progress today, you're going to see how dangerous a time this can be when you're in the middle of suffering, how vulnerable we can be to the enemy's attacks.

And if we do, we'll realize we need to be prepared in advance for when that time would come. Now, I don't want you to interpret what I'm saying today as somehow this is doom and gloom, and all the Christian life is suffering.

Thank God we know that's not the reality of Scripture. But it does make us aware, Scripture does help us to see that because we live in a fallen world, we're going to encounter times of suffering.

It could be physical sickness and illness that is just the result of living in the frail bodies that do get sick and die. And there are those that suffer for lengthy periods of time in the area of their physical bodies and with disease and so forth.

It may be the grief of watching someone you love suffer. I've discovered as a father it can be more difficult to watch one of your children suffer than for you to suffer yourself.

[4 : 31] And yet it brings a particular kind of suffering to watch those you love suffer. It could be problems that stem from our own sin or from the sins of others against us that provoke in us suffering, trials, problems that come from...

Sometimes it's just, you know, there's a scale of suffering. And sometimes we don't think about just the everyday common pressures of living life. Can we make a living? Can we meet the bills? Can we have enough money to do the things we have to do? And just wondering how can we bear up under those pressures? And even dealing with times of financial pressure can be a form of suffering and difficulty that we can encounter in our lives.

And so the point this morning is this. We're going to find times of suffering. And as Christians we need to be prepared for how can we walk through those times in a way that glorifies God and God uses that to accomplish His purpose in our lives.

So suffering is inevitable. How can we be prepared to best walk through that? Because it's going to affect our hearts. I can't tell you how often I've seen individuals walk through suffering that end up bitter.

[5 : 51] And it affects the rest of their walk with the Lord because they've grown bitter. And yet there are others that can walk through suffering prepared for it, I hope, can walk through it in such a way that they actually become better.

And we're going to see what this verse has to say to us about that. If you don't learn how to handle affliction, worries, and other kinds of suffering, you're not going to persevere as a Christian.

On the other hand, if you do learn how to handle those things, if you know you've got some tools and you have the right understanding about suffering, the Bible here promises that you can grow strong through that suffering.

That's the basic gist of that verse that we read. If you handle suffering properly, you not only survive the suffering, you come out stronger.

And we're going to see that as we move through this morning. I think Peter here gives us four strategies for how that can happen. How to be prepared for suffering. How to come through suffering stronger.

[7 : 00] He gives us four ways to do that. And they're all connected in the context of this verse, but we often think of these individually. I hope today looking at it together will help us really understand this passage of Scripture a little bit better.

He's going to tell us to grow solid or strong through suffering. We've got to humble ourselves before God. We've got to resist the devil. We've got to stand firm in the grace of God.

And we've got to trust the Lord. Did I get those out of order? I think I did. But he tells us if we'll do those things, and that's the simple outline that we're going to use today to look at this verse, if we can do these things, we can end up coming through suffering in a way that glorifies God, but also strengthens our life, produces something in us that God is after.

Now listen, if you're here today and you're already in the throes of suffering, as I said earlier, the best time to hear this message is before suffering comes. But if you're here today and you are suffering, I'm confident in God's Word that His Word even today can encourage your heart, can strengthen you, can give you the hope and the confidence that you need in the face of that suffering.

And so really, regardless of where you find yourself today, I hope you'll find this applicable to where you are. Alright? So number one, to grow strong through suffering, humble yourself before God.

[8 : 33] Look at verse 6 and 7. Verse 6 and 7. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, so that at the proper time He may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on Him because He cares for you.

If you want to grow strong through suffering, you're going to have to humble yourself before God. In verse 6, it says, humble yourself therefore.

That therefore connects verse 6 and 7 to verse 5. Do you see if you look real quick back at verse 5, how He ends verse 5? God opposes the proud.

We don't want to be opposed by God. That's a given. And so He says, since God opposes the proud, therefore, humble yourself before God. You want to be humble before God, and you want to take all your anxieties and cast them on the Lord.

That word anxieties comes from a word that means distracted or divided. So that when you have these kinds of cares, you're in the middle of suffering, trials, difficulty, the pressure's on, and my thoughts are scattered.

[9 : 47] It's hard to get thoughts together. There's this anxiety, this division of my thoughts. And He's saying here, you take those and you cast those on the Lord.

Can I just encourage you with one thing? We sometimes think of anxiety or worry as a bad habit or just something we'd rather we didn't have. But if we can really see it for what the Scripture says about it.

See, the thing about worry is this. Not just that it makes us feel bad. We don't like to feel worry or anxiety. But it keeps us from thinking about the right things.

When we're worrying, we're thinking about the wrong things. So our minds are divided. Instead of being wholeheartedly thinking about God and the things of God and what He calls me to do, my thoughts are scattered.

And so it distracts me from the productive things God wants me to be thinking about and doing. I'm focusing my thoughts on me rather than on the things God would be calling me to do.

[10 : 50] And so He says here, humble yourself. And there's something about humility that will help you to get rid of those anxious thoughts.

And here's how it connects. I hope this can help us. At the heart of anxiety is a proud notion that I can handle this by myself. Now if you struggle with worry, don't get mad at me this morning.

I'm trying to tell you the truth. And that is when we worry, at the heart of anxiety is a proud heart that says, I can handle this. And yet everything around me is saying, you can't handle this.

That's why the confusion. That's why the bad feelings. I'm anxious because I feel like I should be handling this, but I can't handle it. And the source of that is pride.

And so He's saying here, humble yourself before God and you're not going to struggle with those anxieties. You cast those on the Lord and realize you can't handle it yourself.

[11 : 53] God's message is clear in His Word. He is serious about ruling our hearts and lives. He doesn't want us ruling our own lives. It isn't about, can I control everything that's going on in my life?

It is about, will I let God control everything that's a part of my life? That's what He's telling us here. Humble yourself before God. Now listen, if you're here today, I don't know you well, and so if you're here today and you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, the basic issue for you this morning is just this. Will God control your life or are you going to continue to try to control your own life? It's that same struggle that He lays out here. And the plea of Scripture is submit yourself to God.

The plea of this verse is humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. That's His call to you if you're not a believer today. If you are a Christian, even those of us that have trusted in Jesus Christ who talk about trusting Him in everything, when it comes right down to it, we're very tempted to trust ourselves, our own abilities, to work our way through life's difficulties, aren't we?

I know it. Self-sufficiency is one that I fight against. And so my first instinct when something goes wrong is, how can I fix it? I understand that.

[13 : 10] And it takes suffering, takes trials at times to get me to the point where I realize I really can't control the world. I really have to trust God.

He's saying to us here that we're to totally cast ourselves upon the Lord. And one of the problems is it's hard for us to do until God yanks the rug out from under our feet sometimes.

It's a sad truth, but it is true. And do you realize that's what suffering can be at times? It can be God calling to our attention, no, you've been under this illusion that you can control your life.

Here's evidence that you must trust in me. He's serious, church, about us trusting in him, submitting to him. And so Peter starts here, humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

You see, at the very root of self-reliance is pride. It's pride. Now, suppose we're on one of the cruise ships that dock over here.

[14 : 12] You don't know anything about handling a ship that size in rough waters. You don't know how to drive this thing. But you have a captain who is a seasoned veteran. He's brought the ship through many of those kinds of storms in the past.

Wouldn't it be the height of arrogance for you to go up to the bridge and to tell this captain how to run the ship or even worse, to take the helm away from him and act like you were going to, you know, pilot that ship?

If you were anxious in a storm, you were afraid because the boat was tossing around a bit. If you talked to the captain, he would most likely allay your fears because he could explain to you what was happening and what he was going to do about it because he has experience.

He's done this before and he's gotten through other storms like this. He's going to get you through this one. So you might still have a rough ride, but you can go through it without the anxiety because you know you've humbled yourself to that captain.

You've let somebody who knows what they're doing. And that's really what God is calling us to do here. He's saying, I'm in control. I am the sovereign Lord. He's going to reinforce that in just a few verses.

[15 : 26] And he's saying, he is worthy of our trust and you really can trust him in every situation. And there's two things we tend to doubt when we go through suffering.

We tend to doubt God's sovereign control. This somehow escaped God's control. This snuck by God. This somehow snuck in on him and snuck in on me.

Maybe God isn't sovereign and powerful enough to fix this or to prevent this. And so we're tempted to doubt his sovereignty.

We're tempted, if not, to doubt his concern or his love for us. And that's been from the beginning. Is God big enough and does God love me enough? And when we're in the throes of suffering, we're going to be tempted to question both of those.

Church, listen to me. Faith is not getting all the outcomes that you want. Faith is believing God is sovereign and God is loving in spite of the fact that I don't understand what he's doing in my life right now.

[16 : 31] And every trial, every suffering that you experience is going to be a test to are you going to believe that. And let me just give you a little advance on the conclusion.

Alright? And when we get there, we're going to realize that it's this faith that God is going to, it's how he's going to make us strong. He promises here, if we'll come through suffering like this, God himself will establish us.

One of the ways he's going to establish you is by being firm in your heart. You're questioning less and less, is God powerful and does God love me? Because I'm standing on faith.

I'm not going based on what I see or what I think or feel. I'm going based on God's word. I'm holding to that. I'm believing that. I'm trusting in God. That's what he calls us to do.

To humble ourselves under God. Alright? So when you're in suffering, I know that that's not a, I want to put my arm around somebody, I want to pray for them, I want to help them.

[17 : 31] I don't necessarily want to say to them, you need to humble yourself. But right now, because I don't know your situation, I'm sharing with you God's word and you can take it to your heart and you can apply that to your heart and at least examine, are there areas, Lord, where part of my struggle, part of the test of this is simply to get me to trust in you.

We want to walk through this in a way that we become strong. He says, to do that, you've got to humble yourself. Secondly, if you're going to grow strong through suffering, you've got to resist the devil.

And don't be afraid. Cedric knows me, so, a lot of times, you just mention the word that there's a struggle with Satan or with the devil and we all get a little bit tense.

How far are we going to take this? And, we're going to take it as far as the Bible takes it. And that's probably a little further than you may want to take it, but I want God's word to help us see what it says.

Verse 8 and 9. Be sober minded, be watchful, your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

[18 : 54] Now, watch what he does in the context of this. No sooner has Peter kind of said, relax, humble yourself, cast your anxieties on him, just relax.

No longer, I mean, no sooner has he got us relaxed than he screams out, wake up! Be alert! So, cast your cares on the Lord, but right on the heels of that he comes along with be careful, church, when you're in suffering, be careful.

Now, we're applying it to suffering. This verse is broader than that, but you'll see in the context, he's clearly going to be addressing the issue of suffering, but it's broader than that. I understand, Satan is out to devour us, not only when we're suffering, but I want you today to apply it particularly to

when you're suffering, to realize we can be very vulnerable in times of suffering to the enemy. You're to be, according to Peter, sober and alert so that you can resist his attacks. When it comes to dealing with the devil, I know Christians typically go to one of two extremes. They either see a devil behind every bush or they completely ignore him. That may be where you're coming from today. A lot of times, I'd rather just ignore him, pretend he doesn't exist. [20 : 13] But here what we see in the scripture is a real warning in God's word that as Christians, we need to be alert, be sober-minded, be alert, pay attention.

There is someone out there that is desiring to take you out. Now, we're clear, and let me just make clear that Satan is defeated, he's not omnipotent, he's not omnipresent, he's a defeated foe, the cross of Jesus Christ has spelled his doom and the resurrection sealed it.

So, it's clear that we can resist the devil, or as James says, resist him, firm in our faith, and know that he will flee from us.

So, that's very true. And what Peter is telling us here is also true, and that is be alert, be aware, be on guard. He calls the devil, he calls him your adversary, the devil.

Church, listen, do you realize you have an adversary? Do you realize, even in times of suffering, that you have an adversary that in the middle of that suffering desires to take you out, to take your faith, and wipe it out, if possible?

[21 : 37] He is after you to devour you. That's the way Peter phrases it here. He says, he uses his name, the devil, which is slanderer, one who accuses.

He's called the accuser of the brethren. And so, he's going to throw things at you, and how much more, in times of suffering, we are vulnerable to those attacks, if we're not alert, and sober, and on guard, and ready.

And his strategy is to hit when we're under some intense trial, suggesting, you know what, God must not love you very much to let this happen to you. Or, God must not be very powerful.

Maybe some of these things are outside of God's control, or he tempts us with those thoughts, and really what we don't realize is we are in a fight for faith at that point. We're fighting the fight of faith to believe against what I don't understand and what I don't see necessarily to believe that what God's word says is true.

So you're in a fight. And Peter here wants us to be aware of that. He wants us to be on guard to that. And he suggests us, in fact, in chapter 5, verse 9, the end of verse 9, he suggests that the devil will sometimes cause you to think you're the only one in the world going through this.

[22 : 59] Because in 5, 9, he says, no, listen, don't think you're the only one. All of your brothers are going through this persecution, this suffering, this trial. His point is, not that everybody experiences the same suffering, the same difficulty, but you're not alone.

And the enemy, one of his chief tools is you're all alone. Nobody understands. Nobody else gets treated like this. And he's saying here, no, you need to be alert to that.

You need to be aware of that. You're in a fight for your faith even in the midst of suffering. Now, so we can resist the enemy.

We can fight those temptations and those thoughts. But remember, verse 6 comes before verse 9. Right? Verse 6 says, you must humbly bow before God.

Humble yourself before God. Verse 9, then you can stand against the devil. So, it's intended to work that way. Alright? But he says, in the midst of suffering, if you want to stand strong, he says, the enemy is like a roaring lion and you need to be careful lest you're in the middle of battle and your thoughts and your faith you become a castaway just as the enemy is seeking to devour your soul.

[24 : 17] And so, it's especially true when we're in the middle of trials. So, be careful. That's the weight that Peter puts on this. Be sober. Be alert. Be careful.

It doesn't have to happen. If you'll be awake, if you'll be alert, if you're aware of what's going on in suffering, you can come out strong, but only if you stand against the enemy this way.

So, if you're going to grow solid through suffering, you need to humble yourself before God. Be alert so that you can resist the devil. Number three, to grow strong through suffering, you must trust the sovereign Lord.

Look at verse 10 and 11. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be dominion forever and ever. Trust. Now, trust throughout this entire passage, I see trust.

[25 : 28] It's not always explicit. In verse 6 and 7, it's kind of implicit. It's there. If you've got to believe these things, you've got to trust God in verse 6 through 7. Verse 9, it's more explicit.

Be firm in your faith, he says. So, he's talking about be able to trust God, what his word says. And then I think 10 and 11 is also, it's more implicit.

But it's like, he doesn't come right out and say, church, you've got to trust God. But if you read those verses, you get the feeling he's saying you've got to believe this in the middle of suffering.

And so, the trust is implicit there. He's saying in verse 10 and 11, God hasn't forgotten you in your trial. Some of you just need to hear that this morning in the middle of your suffering.

God has not forgotten you. Your adversary is throwing that accusation at you. But God hasn't forgotten you. How do I know that? Because verse 10 and 11 tell me that.

[26 : 29] It makes clear that God has not forgotten me. He is the God of all grace. And he's called you to his eternal glory in Christ.

So you can trust him to use every trial, every bit of suffering according to his purpose in your life.

Why? Because he's the sovereign Lord who has dominion forever and ever.

That's a paraphrase of verse 10 and 11. That's the way he finishes it. It's just like keep in mind he's the sovereign one. He has dominion forever and ever.

He's in control. He's the sovereign God. He has not forgotten about you. He's the God of all grace.

Now listen, I know trusting God has kind of fallen in hard places among Christians of late.

If someone comes into my office and is expressing to me an issue and the temptation of my heart, if I'm going to give them biblical counsel, often times it really revolves around you really need to trust God.

[27 : 34] That doesn't mean don't do anything, just wait it out. It means do you trust God? And yet, if I told you that, you're liable to go away from that session saying that was worthless, just cliches.

Trust God. That's kind of the way we think that's not the way Peter's looking at it here. He's saying when you're in the midst of suffering, if you want to be strong, if you want to come through that in a way that you've glorified God, you're going to have to trust in God.

Trust in who He is. Who He is and how He's revealed to us in the Scripture. Let me tell you what I think trust involves.

I think trust involves, first of all, four things, putting your trial in perspective, verse 9 and 10. Do you notice how He starts that?

And if you're in suffering this morning, just be very patient right now because when you read those words, it's only going to last for a little while. And you've been suffering maybe for years or years and it's been ongoing and it's a lengthy thing.

[28 : 43] But here's what Peter's calling us to. If you're going to survive in this suffering, if you're going to come through it strong, you've got to put that suffering in perspective.

Here's the perspective. Eternity. If you miss eternity, this verse makes no sense that suffering is only going to last a little while because it can last a long while.

And God doesn't give us a deadline on that. He doesn't tell us whenever we're finished with things, He's going to be finished with them. But He does say this, in light of eternity, even a whole lifetime in light of eternity is going to be a little while.

Now listen church, to get that you've got to have an eternal perspective. You've got to really believe there's something beyond this life that I'm living for or you're not going to be able to view your suffering as though it's only going to last for a little while.

In terms of eternity, that's the perspective. So you've got to put your suffering in that perspective.

And I understand the challenge that can be when you're in the midst of that suffering.

[29 : 55] But He says if we'll do that, in fact, Paul tells us something very similar later in 2 Corinthians, he says, for momentary and light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

person. See, that's an eternal perspective that says, alright, this is painful, I don't wish this on anybody, but what I'm experiencing right now is producing something for eternity, an eternal glory that is the weight of glory and the heaviness of it, it just goes beyond anything we could experience in this life.

So put your trial, put your suffering in the right perspective. perspective. Secondly, put God in perspective. Now, I don't like the wording of that as well, but you don't put God in perspective, you kind of see him.

I want you to have this perspective about God. Notice what he says in those verses, who is God? He's the God of all grace, not the God of a little bit of grace, right?

What Clarence tell us during worship about Chicken Unlimited, I got feeling bad, I missed out on that, it sounded like my kind of place, Chicken Unlimited. See, God says here, he's not like that, he's not going to run out of chicken, he's not going to close the doors, he is the God of all grace, and right after he shared that with us, we sang grace unmeasured, it can't be measured.

[31 : 24] Well, the God we're talking about today is that God, he is the God of all grace, not some grace, not a little, not a certain measure, he's the God of all grace, and he's saying it's like an ocean, it's like a limitless supply that just keeps breaking upon our lives, and so in the middle of suffering, keep that in mind, who God is, get that perspective, that it never runs out, and not only is he a God of all strength, but verse 11 says, he's the God of dominion, he's ruling this thing, he's the king of everything, he's in control, he goes on to say in verse 11, it's a form of praise, but he's acknowledging truth about God, this is God, his dominion is forever and ever, he hasn't somehow lost control, this is who God is, so keep our eyes focused upon God, and who he is, who his word tells us he is, and so then even when we don't fully understand what

God is doing, why things are working out the way they're working out, we can hold on to what we know is true, here it is, he's the God of all grace, and he's the God whose dominion lasts forever and forever, so you want to keep your trial in perspective, suffering, keep God, make sure you have God's perspective of who he really is, but also put your calling and God's purpose in your calling in perspective, did you notice he says here, he called you to his eternal glory in Christ, so in the middle of suffering, Peter is saying remember that, make sure you keep that in perspective, God has called you to himself, he has an eternal purpose in it, he didn't call you in order to condemn you, he called you to bring you to his eternal glory, so that's what God is at work doing in us, church, even in the midst of suffering, sometimes most powerfully in times of suffering, he's working his eternal purpose in our lives and in the lives of others, he's using that suffering for that purpose, so he says remember he's called you and he hasn't called you for some terrible reason or purpose, he's called you to his eternal purpose and glory in

Christ, and so in your trial, you look ahead to what God has promised for those that he has called, and you can trust God, so we're back to the eternal perspective, I've got to realize no, this isn't all God's writing about my life, there's going to be an eternity to come, and he alludes to it here by talking about the eternal glory, that's what God has called you to, and so after your suffering, after this time of difficulty, not only strength does he promise here as we'll see, but he promises us that we're going to enjoy that eternal glory, glory, along with him, so put your calling, I should say it this way, put God's calling, and his purpose for you in perspective, I'm using the word perspective on purpose, because it's the way we're seeing and thinking about our suffering, and so we want to put it in perspective, we've got God, we're seeing who he is, we're trying to put our suffering in the right perspective, his calling, what God's after, and finally, put God's purpose for trials in perspective, I don't know about you, but I grew up, one of my dad's favorite phrases, one of those things you just kind of pick up from your family and his life was, you can endure just about anything if you know the purpose in it, you know there's a reason, there's something about suffering that doesn't have a purpose that can drain the hope out of your life, and so I think this morning God wants you to have an understanding, not about his full purpose, he doesn't ever promise he's going to make all of that clear to us, but here's at least a partial purpose, what God does in suffering, and I want you to listen to it, and to me, I'm overwhelmed as I read this verse, and I read this part of it, he himself, he says, God, has another few phrases, and he says, he himself is going to do this in your life, if you walk through suffering, if you come through it, and stand fast, you've fought against the enemy, you've humbled yourself before

God, here's the promise, here's the purpose, that God has in mind in the midst of suffering, again, not full purpose, not everything God's intending to do, we only see a small part, but here's a biblical part, of what he's going to do, he himself will restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you, we all know it, don't we, trials are intended to burn away the dross, remember I said a fight for faith, that helps me, because at times in suffering, I get self-focus, and self-pity is a temptation to me, but when I realize, no, I'm in a battle, I'm not a victim of something here, I'm in a fight for my faith, am I going to let the enemy strip my faith in God, cause me to question the goodness of God, there's something that tends to rare up inside of me, that's kind of what he's calling us to here, realize God has a purpose, and his goal is, he wants to make you strong, he wants to mend you, he wants to

burn out the dross, and leave your faith pure, as the writer of scripture says, like pure gold, he uses the word here, intentionally, these different words, he uses the word restore, here's what [37 : 29] God's going to do, if you'll walk through suffering, in the way we're talking about, God himself will restore you, that word means to equip, or to repair, to render complete, it's the idea when Peter is mending his fishing nets, it's that word for mending, he's got a hole in the nets, he's fixing that up, he's tightening that, making it useful again, God says, in suffering, that's one of the things he's doing in your life, he himself is going to restore you, he's going to mend your life, he's going to mend your net, making it useful, equipped for service, that's kind of a part of it, God will put you back together after the trial, so that you can be useful to him, he will confirm you, that means to fix, or to set fast, or to strengthen, it's the very same word Jesus uses to Peter, after Peter has denied him, remember in the Lord's restoring Peter, and he says,

Peter, you will strengthen your brothers, very same word, confirm, you're going to strengthen them, so that's what the Lord promises, right now, I've been in those times, and you feel pretty weak, you wonder, am I ever going to be strong again, God's promise is, he will confirm you, he will strengthen you, in that way, he goes on to say, he will establish you, that's the word that means lay a foundation, this is what God is doing in suffering, it's not random, meaningless, though we can't fully comprehend it, he is establishing you, this is the word by the way Jesus uses when he's telling the story about building your house upon the sand, one is built upon the sand, and it washes away in the storm, the other is built upon a rock, and that's the idea, it's established upon that rock, it's a firm foundation that is built, and God's promising that through suffering, it's a painful process at times, it lasts sometimes way longer than we want it to last, but God's using it, and he says he will establish us, give us that foundation, that strength and stability to our lives that he desires for us, so that we might more effectively serve him, and so he'll establish us in our faith, and equip us to serve others, so the goal, the thought is, the idea is that you can trust

God in the process, when you face difficulty of any sort, you can trust him, because when you've passed the test, you're going to trust him even more, you're going to have greater faith in him, your faith has been tested, and so you face relationship challenges, you face those things that affect your heart, and kind of unsettle you, and if you remain faithful, and you walk through those things, your faith will come out stronger, that's the promise, God himself will establish us, will strengthen us, will confirm us in that, so if we're going to grow solid through our suffering, we've got to humble ourselves before God, resist the devil, trust the sovereign Lord, and just one more, and number four is to grow strong through suffering, stand firm with other saints,

I want you to see this in the context, it's not Peter's main point, you can tell the way he writes it, but my concern is that we get to verse 12, and we say, oh yeah, here's his sincerely Wayne part of the letter, you know, just that closing, greetings, you know, you start the letter with, you close with a sincerely, or your brother in Christ, or whatever, your friend, this is more than just closing, and I want you to see that, I want you to see verse 12 through 14, he begins to list some names, but again, this entire letter, by the way, is written to individuals that are suffering, they're facing persecution, they're in the middle of difficulty, there's hardship, and so, even the closing of this letter, you see something that I think will help us in the midst of suffering, verse 12, by Silvanus, a faithful brother, as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God, stand firm in it, she who is at

Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son, greet one another with the kiss of love, peace to you all who are in Christ, so again, this is what you would call the concluding part of this letter, but I want to make sure we don't just view it as kind of throwaway verses, these are important, they are a part of God's holy and inspired word, recorded for us for a reason, not just a goodbye, this contains for us something about the relationship that Peter has with folks and is desiring for us, and that can be helpful to us in the midst of suffering, note that we go through suffering with other believers, Peter has experienced it, the church he is writing to experiences it, and he's writing to them together about their life together, so he's giving some warm, closing thoughts, but in doing so, he's telling us about an assumption that he has about us, that when we walk through suffering, we have each other, and these final verses just kind of brim over with these warm relationships,

[43 : 29] Peter commends Silvanus, or Silas, who's probably his secretary, probably delivered this letter to the church, he's a faithful brother, you remember he joined Paul on his second missionary journey, he was the one who sang hymns with Paul, Paul and Silas in prison at midnight, and this is

the Silas, he's no stranger to persecution, remember why he was in prison, he'd been beaten, put in prison, and they're singing hymns at night, same Silas, so in your suffering, understand, Peter's saying we're not alone, Silas is bringing this letter to the church, he's probably penned it, as Peter wrote, what an encouragement, when you go through suffering, when you go through trials, to know you have faithful brothers like Silas, who have been through persecution, who have stood firm, who have learned in the midst of it, and are able to help us as we walk through that as well, he sends his greeting to those who are at Babylon, chosen together with you, most likely he's referring to the church at Rome, kind of uses this symbolically of Babylon, the place of exile, and probably

Christians at Rome, and they're under the persecution of Nero at that time, and so he writes it that way, but he's saying basically these other Christians are also, you know, chosen together with you, there in Rome, I mean the city, really the center of evil, and much of the persecution that the church was encountering, God had planted his church, and he'd linked it with the churches in Asia, and Paul now is saying in the cause of the gospel, your fellow believers in Rome are also standing with you, or he's saying your fellow believers in Winter Garden are standing with you, it was that kind of warm relationship where there was a connection to each other, and so it's these warm relationships that he's reminding us of, he refers to Mark, who he calls his son, this is the same Mark remember that has deserted Paul and

Barnabas, because of persecution, now he's grown into what appears to be a faithful man, he's ready to endure hardship for the cause of the gospel, and so again you just see these are not strangers to persecution, and it's like Peter is reminding them as you walk through this, as difficult as it is, remember the way to stand firm, the way to come out of suffering strong is not to isolate yourself, not to exclude yourself from fellowship with others, but to gather others around you that can serve and help you, and again, because it's such a dangerous time, and so through these relationships, we should go through suffering together, supporting each other in the family of God, so let me say this, if you're in suffering, don't run from the body of Christ, don't withdraw yourself from others, even if you don't think they're going to understand, or they may not always give you the most helpful comments, or you know, we just, we cannot exclude ourselves from others when we're suffering, it's just too dangerous of a time for us, and if you're not suffering, can I just encourage you as a church that I think this passage on the relationships that were had among the church that's being persecuted and suffering,

I think it calls us to move toward those who are suffering, and that can be an uncomfortable thing, I mean, you don't know what to say sometimes, you don't know, is it going to make any difference, or there's something about being with others, it's not always about what we say, is it?

There's just something about our presence being with people, yes, if opportunity arises to have a word of encouragement, or a scripture to bless and encourage, but we're moving toward those who suffer, rather than away from because it's uncomfortable, or we don't know what to say, we can't fix it, it's not about fixing, it's about walking through suffering together, I think Peter closes out this letter, and again, had we walked through it, we walked through this entire series at Grace Church, and you'll see that the entire book is really a treatise on how to handle suffering because this was a church where people were suffering, they were being persecuted, their lives were being upended, and all that Peter is writing is within that context, and so I think even his closing here, the reminder of those warm relationships that we enjoy, it can be a reminder to us as Christians to not run from those in the midst of suffering, not to exclude ourselves and further isolate ourselves, that is the enemy's tool, that's one of his tricks, is to isolate us, to make us feel nobody else understands, [48 : 42] I'm the only one going through this, Peter addresses that doesn't he, says no, all of your brothers are experiencing things like this, not the same, not the same intensity, maybe not as severe, but they're experiencing times of suffering as well, so don't run from them, but enjoy those relationships together, why?

Because we want to walk through these things in a way that glorifies God, yes, but that we come out strengthened rather than our faith being shaken, church, listen, suffering is never easy, I understand that, I've lived long enough to experience a measure of suffering, and I know it's never easy, but if we'll humble ourselves before God, if we will cast our anxieties and concerns upon him, stand against the devil, resist him, trust in God, the God of all grace, and stand firm, and if we'll do that together with fellow believers, we really can grow solid, we can grow firm and established in our Christian walk, and church, listen, I told you at the beginning, I'm not a doom and gloomer, but I do know we live in a culture that appears to be more and more dark, and getting darker by the day, and

there may be forms of suffering we can't even identify, most of our suffering has been personal, and things we're encountering, physical sickness, finances, issues of that nature, but there may well be a time that we have the kind of suffering that the

Christians Peter's writing to, that came in the form of genuine persecution, where they were bodily and physically having to suffer because of the cause of Christ, and what I would desire for you, for all Christians, is that we be prepared for whatever may come, that we would have an understanding of how to suffer, and how to do it in a way that we, rather than throw away our faith, we grow stronger in that faith.

Would you join me as I pray together this morning? Let's ask the Lord to help us in those moments, and this morning especially to help those who may be in the very throes of suffering of some form or another today.

Let's pray.