

Thriving In Suffering

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[0:00] 1 Peter 3, 13-17. Hear God's word. Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

! But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts, honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. Amen. I think one of the greatest weaknesses of the modern church, at least perhaps maybe the church in the West, the American evangelicalism perhaps, if we want to narrow it down to a particular group, I think one of the greatest weaknesses that we can find is that so many Christians seem to lack a biblical understanding of suffering.

Suffering. And I don't think that it's so much the result of ignorance, but of just really bad theology.

[1:32] And we can see it in lots of ways, right? The most extreme versions of it we would find in what we routinely call the prosperity gospel. And I know many of you have been impacted in that in some way, or maybe you have friends or family who are caught up in the midst of that.

It's kind of taken root in American Christianity. And because of that, it's beginning to spread around the world. And it's a great anti-gospel that teaches us, or at least tries to teach us, that suffering and Christianity don't work together.

Those two things don't fit together. It's just bad theology. But even in places where it isn't so extreme, maybe even in places like our church and in churches like ours, sometimes we can live and think, function, as if God's purpose, frankly, is to make us as happy and as healthy as possible. And think about the way we pray. Our prayer lists are loaded with what? All the things that we would like for God to do for us, or all the ways that are difficult that we would like for God to spare us from. Now, I'm not suggesting that. We shouldn't pray for that. Peter's going to go on to tell us in chapter 5 that you actually very much should pray for that, that you are to cast all your cares on him because he cares for you.

[2:58] So that's not what I'm saying. What I mean to say is that there's some Christians that, if they're going to pray, that's the only reason they're ever going to pray. So that when suffering comes our way, either we're absolutely spiritually devastated because we've been led to believe that our faith in Christ, if it's strong enough and if it's vibrant enough and if we prayed enough, that God would be good to us and we begin to get spiritually just devastated, right?

Because we've prayed all the prayers and we've given all the money and we've attended all the services and we've done all the volunteering and we've done all the things and now we're left to wonder, well, maybe God just isn't good.

Maybe he just isn't good. And then there's the skeptical side of it, right? We see this, but perhaps, in fact, there's no question in my mind that every one of us in this room know people and have people that we love who have abandoned the faith, they've walked away from, or maybe they've resisted it altogether.

And really what it boils down to is the issue of suffering and of evil in the world. It's the old Epicurean trilemma that Epicurus came up with this a few hundred years before Christ even.

Basically says God may be good and God may be all-powerful and God may be all-knowing, but if evil exists and suffering exists, he can't be all three.

[4:34] Either he's good and he's all-powerful, but he's not all-knowing, or he's all-powerful and he's all-knowing, but he's not good, or he's good and he's all-knowing, but he doesn't have the power to do anything about it.

And of course, we would say, well, we would like to introduce as Christians a fourth possibility into that equation, that there is a possibility that God has a good and greater purpose for the evil that he allows to take place in our lives.

And of course, that purpose is ultimately his own glory. And so many people are left wondering, how could God be good and also allow me to suffer? But what if the only way to truly know God, what if the only way to really understand his faithfulness and to display his glory as his people in the world requires that we endure great hardship?

Is it possible that our greatest good necessitates that we do at times suffer?

And of course, the Bible's answer to that is very clear. Yes. The Bible has a lot to say about our suffering. Sometimes suffering that we face is just part and parcel of living in a fallen world ruined by sin.

[5:59] Some of the things we suffer, it's just the consequence of natural law, right? If Andy Allen decided he's gonna take a walk on the roof today, 20 feet or so high, and he gets to the edge and he thinks, you know what?

I think I'm just gonna go one step further, what happens? It falls. And he'll probably suffer as a result. Why? Because there's a natural law that God has created in our environment, in our earth, even though some may question it today, that's called gravity, right?

Now, does gravity mean that God isn't good? Of course not. Does Andy falling off the roof and suffering as a result of it mean that he did something sinful or that there was this great evil that has befallen?

No. Just sometimes we do stupid things and we have to deal with that, right? Sometimes, maybe many times, the suffering that we endure really is just the consequences of sin.

Maybe it's our own personal sin and we face as believers the discipline of the Lord as he allows the natural consequences of sin to take place in our lives.

[7:06] Maybe it's the consequences of someone else's sin that has been perpetrated against us, but so much of the suffering we endure is really, it's the consequences of sin. But the Bible speaks of a particular kind of suffering that Christians should actually expect to face.

suffering on account of their faith in and obedience to Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus' very call to discipleship and to follow him includes the very warning.

If you will come after me, Jesus says, you better be ready to take up a cross not as a symbol, but as a daily dying in identification with Christ.

And as you're doing that, you're gonna have to be prepared to deny yourself in order to follow me. It's right there. Jesus says, it's maybe not what we would hear from most pulpits who just want to get people to come over to the Christian faith, right?

But Jesus does it. He says, look, if you want to be a Christian, if you want to follow me, this is what it's gonna take. You're gonna have to endure some things that are hard on account of that faith. We've reached a point in Peter's letter where suffering for the faith is actually the main idea.

[8:32] Of course, the Christians in Asia Minor at the time, they didn't need to be convinced of the reality of this kind of suffering. They were living it in real time. Peter's just gone through three very specific examples of people in the church who were suffering on account of their faith in particular.

But what they did need was to be reminded of the hope that was theirs in Jesus Christ what they needed was to be encouraged to keep going, to keep persevering in the faith, to keep being obedient in discipleship to the Lord Jesus.

And that's the aim of the text that we just read. It shows us how that we can thrive in times of suffering for righteousness sake.

And I want to present this paragraph to you as four requirements to suffer well for Jesus. Four requirements to suffer well for Jesus.

What will it take if we are to thrive in this world, in this exile, with this kind of suffering? Number one, ponder your blessed future.

[9:50] Ponder your blessed future. Look at verses 13 and 14 once again. Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good?

But even if you should suffer for righteousness sake, we might understand that but even really as more of an indeed. Indeed, when you suffer for righteousness sake, you will be blessed.

Future tense, right? You are suffering. You will be blessed. Now Peter has just finished using Psalm 34 in the previous paragraph to remind us that God has promised eternal blessing, eternal for his people and he has promised victory over all who do evil.

God sees the suffering of his people. God inclines his ear to their cries. He will deal decisively with all their enemies who will not repent and trust in him.

And now he introduces this rhetorical question at the beginning of verse 13. He's confronting suffering Christians in their fear and distress. If you are zealous for good, he says, meaning you are trusting Christ, you are following him in holiness, all of those things giving evidence to the fact that you have truly been born again of God, which we've seen in the earlier chapters.

[11:23] If that's you, you're zealous for good, you're believing Christ, you're following Christ, who is there to bring you harm? Who can harm you? And of course, the immediate answer might be, well, lots of people could harm me.

Isn't that the point? That there are some who will not only threaten harm, but actually have the power to deliver that harm. And of course, we understand as we begin to meditate on this text, Peter isn't referring to harm now.

He's speaking of harm in the ultimate sense. Your enemies, no matter how great they are in this life, have no final power over you.

You belong to God, Peter says. You're safe in him, Peter says. Who is there to harm you when you're God's? The body they may kill, Luther says.

God's truth abideth still. His faithfulness, his goodness, his promise of our eternal inheritance that is undefiled and unfading and kept in heaven for us who are being guarded by God through faith.

[12:39] All of that is true for you today and it will be true for you in eternity. So who can harm you? Who is there to fear? Peter says. It's the same reasoning that Paul used in that amazing section of Romans 8.

Andy read the first four verses of Romans 8 a minute ago. Let me read the last few verses of Romans 8 to you. You know the text. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

Why would you say that, Paul? What do you mean? Where is this security coming from, Paul? He continues. He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all.

How will he not also with him, with Christ, graciously give us all things? What's the all things? That's the future inheritance. The inheritance that is ours in Christ Jesus as joint heirs with Jesus.

That's what Paul's talking about. If God's for you, if he's the one that predestined you and called you and has sanctified you and will glorify you, who can be against you?

[14:02] He did not even spare his own son. Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? Paul goes on to say. It's God who justifies. Who cares what your enemies think? Who is to condemn you?

Jesus Christ is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who's at the right hand of God, who is indeed interceding for us. And then there's that great line of questions, rhetorical questions that Paul presents.

Who shall separate us then from this love of Christ? Shall tribulation do that? Shall distress do that? How about persecution, Paul? What about famine or nakedness or danger or the sword?

And then Paul quotes the Old Testament to describe what our experience could be like in this life. He says, for it's written, for your sake, for the sake of the Lord, for the sake of Jesus Christ, we are being killed all day, all day long.

[15:09] We're regarded as sheep to be slaughtered by this world, the prophet says. What does Paul remind us of? Oh, no, he says.

The no's emphatic. May it never be said, no. In all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loves us.

For I'm sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That, loved ones, is your blessed hope. Who's there to harm you? You belong to him. Who can ultimately bring you ruin? It's Christ that has died for your sin.

Before God, you stand justified as if you never sinned. That is your hope. There's a reason that Peter began the letter with this amazing affirmation of the Christian's future inheritance.

[16:17] There's a reason he continued in chapter 2 to instruct us to set our hope on the grace that is to come to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It's the same reason that he reminds us here of our blessed status before God.

It's because to thrive in exile, which is always going to be characterized by suffering in some measure, that will only happen when we keep our minds focused entirely on the future inheritance that awaits us beyond this life.

even though you may suffer for righteousness' sake, now, Peter says in verse 13, you will be blessed and honored and vindicated in the judgment.

When it's all said and done, you're the one who will receive the blessing. Christ has won your victory. We just sang it, Christus Victor. on that day, who will but tremble when he stands, Christ the victor.

It's amazing. Says Jesus in Matthew 5. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Why, Jesus?

[17:35] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. You suffer now? It's fine. The kingdom belongs to you. Don't be afraid.

It's yours. Christ has won it for you. Blessed are you, Jesus goes on to say, when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Now, let's not get that twisted up. Jesus isn't saying, don't worry when you do stupid things and people call you out on it. That's not what he's saying.

What's he saying? He's saying, when you live faithfully and you preach the truth and you do exactly what I call you to do and people revile you and slander you and persecute you and talk all kinds of evil about you and ridicule you falsely on account of the gospel, he says, instead, rejoice.

Be glad, Jesus says, for your reward is great in heaven for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you so they persecuted our Lord and Savior who paves the path forward for us.

[18:53] How can we thrive in suffering? Well, it starts by preaching the gospel to ourselves every single day, regularly pondering our blessed future, the internal inheritance that God is keeping safe for us in heaven as he guards us through faith here on earth.

Number two, how will we thrive in suffering? we're going to have to persevere in following Jesus.

We're going to have to persevere in following, we're going to have to keep going, keep going.

Look again at verse 14. Have no fear of them nor be troubled but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy.

As is typical, the indicative of verses 13 and 14 is immediately followed by imperatives and as we've come to get used to with Peter's style of writing, he delivers the initial imperative by way of contrast. He does that a lot in the letter, doesn't he? He gives the negative and then it's immediately followed by the positive. Not this but that, right? He's doing it again here and here's essentially what he's saying.

[20:08] Because your enemies cannot ultimately harm you and because you are blessed forever in Christ Jesus, don't be afraid of them. Instead, just keep going.

Keep honoring Jesus as Lord in your heart. How do we suffer well for Jesus? We keep trusting. We keep following him even when you're threatened, even when you're slandered, even when you're persecuted.

Just keep going. For the Dory fans, just keep swimming. Don't stop. Persevere.

What exactly does that look like? Well, let's break it down a little bit more. Looking at this contrast, don't be afraid, don't be troubled, but honor Christ as Lord.

The contrast itself is what helps us understand what Peter has in mind when he uses these two words, fear and trouble. He's not insinuating, let's get this right, he's not insinuating as the Bible never does, that the feelings, that the emotion of fear and anxiety and distress are inherently sinful and problematic.

[21:28] Some of us feel more deeply than others. the feeling itself is not sinful in this case.

It's what we're doing when we're confronted with the feelings of fear and distress and hardship and anxiety. It's what we're doing with that. It's how we're responding to that that really makes the difference here.

And in this case, to fear those who would harm us and be troubled by their reviling would be to shrink back from faith in Jesus Christ.

It is to allow the threat of opposition to accomplish its objective. Isn't that what the opposition is trying to do? They're trying to silence the Christians.

They're trying to make the Christians look foolish so that they might be anti-evangelized and return back to the way of thinking that the world has. That's the objective. To get us to give it up.

[22:29] To stop being so ridiculous and to turn around. Fear and trouble if not handled in light of God's word and God's faithfulness and God's truth will cause us to shrink back allowing our enemies to get exactly what they want.

It's when we begin to turn away from faithfulness and begin to compromise the truth. It's shifting your convictions to align with what's culturally acceptable rather than with God's word.

That's what it means to fear and to be troubled here. It's to continue in the sin that marked your life before coming to Christ hoping that it will appease those in your life who ridicule you for living in such stark difference now.

It's in Jesus' words an attempt to save your life rather than to surrender it to him. That's what it means to fear and trouble in this text.

It doesn't mean that somebody's coming at you ready to take your head off that you can't be afraid of that. I would be afraid of that. That's not what he means to say.

[23:49] No, he's saying what we do with that is really what matters. To thrive in suffering Christians are going to have to persevere in faithful discipleship. We must persevere in following the lordship of Jesus Christ.

That's the positive side of this. Don't be afraid but keep honoring Christ as the Lord. Holy here set apart. Keep setting Jesus apart as the Lord God.

This is the lordship of Jesus Christ showing itself every day in our lives and we are to do that from the heart for as Tom Schreiner wrote the heart is the origin of human behavior and from it flows everything that people do.

So then recognizing our blessed state as God's people we must persist in genuinely following Jesus as Lord refusing to fall away when danger rears its head and it's that heart level faith that is always evidencing verse 13 a zealotness for what is good.

When the heart is settled when we're persevering not on the surface but in genuine faith the result is a zealotness for good and this contrasting imperative it's really just a reiteration of everything Peter's been saying in the last two chapters though we are to respect others our fear is to be reserved for the Lord alone so don't shrink back even when you're threatened persevere!

[25:28] Why? Can't we just get in and then just try to stay out of the way? What Jesus said in Matthew 10 you'll be hated by all for my name's sake but only the one who endures to the end will be saved you said does this perseverance really matter or can I just you know walk the aisle and say the prayer and fill out the card and go to Terry and Kathy's place to get baptized or whatever it is and we just be done isn't that just enough and then I can just kind of go on with business as normal well no that's not biblical Christianity only the one who perseveres to the end will be saved why should you care about this because it's what makes all the difference in your spiritual life keep going third prepare to display and

defend your hope prepare to display and defend your gospel hope look again at verse 15 always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect having a good conscience so that when you are slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame now I want you to notice how Peter's line of thought continues to build this section is not my sister's

English teacher it's not technically grammatically an imperative but she doesn't know Greek in Greek not that you care to know Greek either I don't really care to know it that much in Greek it's functioning as another imperative it looks a bit like a participle it's actually an adjective it's functioning like an imperative here now why is that important for us because Peter's giving us instructions!

And what is it that he says? Well he's addressing a particular circumstance that could arise from your perseverance if you just keep going despite the suffering what might happen?

Right? Just as faithful Christians will attract the attention of unbelievers in the beginning which leads to the potential of threat and slander Peter Peter now indicates that persevering in that suffering by continuing rather than shrinking back that even more attention could be drawn to your faith and whenever it does he says whenever that happens whether the inquiries from unbelievers are sincere as they might be or just mocking as they might be we must be prepared to make a defense for what make a defense for your what's the word hope hope this hope that's buried deep in our hearts what is it it's that blessed future that is secured to us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit on all of those who have been called of God that's the hope this hope is the assurance of our future inheritance and that someone would inquire about it means that we have persevered in such a way that they could actually witness the legitimacy of our hopeful expectation that beyond this life for us is God that beyond this life for us is Jesus that beyond this life for us is heaven and sinlessness and paradise and all that God has promised for his people we have suffered in such a way that they would say you know I think they really believe this I think they really think this is what's going to happen to them after they die in persevering through suffering we let our persecutors see our hope on display and then notice what [30:02] Peter does implicitly by telling us to be prepared to make a defense here he's acknowledging that the Christian's hope in Christ is not superstitious it's grounded in rationality it's grounded in an intellectual reasoning and it can be legitimately defended he doesn't say hey when they ask you about the hope just say well you just gotta have faith no he says make a defense tell them why you have faith tell them why you have hope tell them that the word of God that the Bible is really the word of God and why you believe it is tell them that God really does exist that he really did create the world that we're in and tell them why you believe that give the evidences for it that has persuaded you not only spiritually but intellectually to believe that that's true tell tell them that Jesus Christ is God in the flesh who came and lived a sinless life and died an atoning death on the cross in our place so that all who trust in them will receive his righteousness as he takes on their wickedness and sinfulness in his body on the tree and then he raised from the dead and then say this is why

I believe that's! true make a defense it's rational it's reasonable it really is the slander of the world against Christians will always be shaped like ridicule for what they see as an irrational and foolish faith but we do not have an irrational faith we do not have a foolish faith there are parts of what we believe that are incomprehensible that is we are finite creatures that are trying to comprehend the nature and the work of an infinite God we will never be able to supply every possible answer that anyone might ever ask about God and about the Bible and about all of those things we don't have that capacity no one ever will but we do have a rational faith and it is reasonable and even when they bring their slander and they question they put you in a corner and they think they've got the trump card and you're not exactly sure what to say you can rest assured that in 2,000 years of Christianity they're not going to ask you a question that some other Christian hasn't been asked and hasn't sorted through just because you don't have the answer doesn't mean there isn't an answer

so what do you do you get in your Bible and you start to talk to the other people in the church and say hey I was talking to my friend the day and one another in that we study Peter goes on to say that there is a righteous way to defend our faith and that in our defense we need to be concerned to do it a particular way notice what he says our defense of the gospel must be given with gentleness respect and a good conscience now I the people that we are to be making this defense to have been harsh disrespectful and everything that we would say is how could their conscience even let them do that to another person and

Peter says who cares you make your defense in the way that Jesus would make his defense gentleness humility respect them as human beings made in the image of God do it with a good conscience so that after you're finished making your point you don't have to go and beg for God's mercy on your life because you sinned a dozen ways in the process of it in other words if unbelievers are to be offended let it be for the truth that we proclaim and not the way that we have chosen to proclaim it and in the final judgment Peter says I think that's what he's referencing when he talks about them being put to shame in the final judgment you will receive your vindication because God has saved you and they will receive their judgment if they have not repented and believed so you don't need to take the!

judgment on yourself you don't have to sit in the place of God and give them what they deserve you haven't been called to do that I haven't been called to do that that's God's place he he is the only one that's righteous enough to do that without sinning that's not our job what is our job to display the grace of Jesus Christ in the people in our lives it is to speak the truth of the gospel with all the grace that our enemies do not deserve and that they have not afforded to us why because that's what Jesus modeled for us it's what he did not only in his life on this earth it's what he's done in your life he has been a gracious savior and a gracious teacher merciful we need to show that to others well how are we going to thrive in suffering well we need to start by pondering our blessed future and we need to do that every day we need to make sure we're persevering!

[35:50] on you need to talk to somebody here you come talk to me you come talk to any person sitting in this room you say I just want to be honest with you I'm struggling right now can you just pray for me can you help me keep going don't back up you keep going God's faithful be ready to make a defense and when you do it do it the right way good there is a fruitfulness that comes from this I think it's what he means in verse 17 and we need to pursue that fruit we need to be conscious of it and we need to chase after it so that rather than shrinking back we're pursuing something that we believe God will do in the midst of our suffering look at verse 17 for it is better to suffer for doing good if that should be God's will than for doing evil now

Peter may be saying in verse 17 if I can just offer an alternative view of the verse and what I'm going to present to you he may be saying that it's better to suffer at the hands of men for doing good now than to suffer in the judgment of God for doing evil later!

He means to say in this particular instance he has affirmed that these people have been called of God that God is guarding them through faith that their inheritance is secure there's nothing in Peter's letter that suggests that they would be in a position or even in danger of having to face the judgment of God because Christ's judgment has been insufficient there's nothing there that suggests Peter's line of verse is favorable if we are to suffer at the hands of men let it be for good rather than evil like if you're going to have to suffer make sure it's for righteousness sake and not just because you're a jerk right or just because you've done something that you shouldn't have done or something that is I think that's more the sense that he's giving us here let it be for our faith and not for sinfulness or for aggressive acts of retaliation against them now here's what's most striking to me in the verse it's

Peter's use of the word better it is better it's not that we're better off suffering in one way rather than another I think what he means to say is there is a kind of fruitfulness that comes from suffering for righteousness sake and if we interpret this in light of the very next verse that we'll get to next week in verse 18 I think it clears it up for us look at verse 18 for Christ also suffered once for sin for is the key word there right meaning verse 18 is being built off of what he's just said in verse 13 he's or verse 17 he's grounding verse 17 in verse 18 he's linking them for Christ also suffered once for sin the righteous for the unrighteous and here's the fruitfulness of that so that he might bring us to God

being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit what's verse 18 all about Christ suffered righteously in the will of the father and it brought great fruitfulness it brought salvation and in that way

I think Peter when we suffer for righteousness sake there is something to gain God has a purpose in that notice what he says in verse 17 that this happens according to whose will God's will which means that your suffering has been decreed by God which must mean that God has a particular purpose in you suffering for good suffering for righteousness sake okay well that leaves us with an important question what could that purpose possibly be what good could come from this what is there for us to gain by making ourselves so vulnerable to this kind of situation I want to give you three things to consider the first is

[40:27] I think we gain personal sanctification personal sanctification there is a uniquely sanctifying work that God accomplishes in his people when they suffer for the faith we talked about this in the men's group on Wednesday night it's in hardship that God's faithfulness is most visible this is important to those who actually desire to see that faithfulness he's always faithful whether we acknowledge it or not but it's in our distresses it's in our troubles it's in our hardships that his faithfulness is actually most visible to us and genuine Christians are always thankful for those things that draw us nearer and nearer to Christ and to faithfulness in him and unfortunately suffering is the thing that probably does that most that's why

Spurgeon is reportedly to have said that great statement I'm sure you've heard it he said I've learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the rock of ages what does he mean he means that there was a time in!

his life where trouble and difficulty was something that all he could do was disdain it and he hated it and he worried about it and he was always worried for the next time it was going to come I understand that maybe you do too even even this week and always get worried that whatever it is that I'm preaching that God is going to make me live it out sometime soon and Lord I don't want to suffer what does Spurgeon mean he means well there was a time when all I could think about in relationship to suffering is how much I hate it he said but I actually learned!

through the process that God does something in me in that suffering as he draws me nearer and nearer to Christ and he said I've learned to embrace the very things that I hate if it means that I know Christ better and that I'm more faithful to him and that I'm more satisfied in him and I'm longing for his return even more to suffer well is to pursue!

sanctification that is born of endurance and endurance comes through difficulty second what could we gain from this I would say the second thing is corporate edification so the first one's personal right God's doing a unique work in you a unique sanctifying work the second one is corporate we're thinking of the church now corporate edification that is God does something in my life that spurs along my faith when I see Marty's life going through trouble and distress and hardship and yet he stays the course and it doesn't hinder his song and it doesn't cause him to shrink back from his faith in the Lord Jesus his faithfulness does something in me and who of us has not been strengthened by the faithful endurance of someone else that's why

[43:59] Christian biography particularly missionary biography is so edifying to us God uses our perseverance to spur along the faith of other believers who are bound to suffer as well now here's how that can't happen if you suffer alone listen we get together I like to talk about all kinds of things and I just enjoy being with you baseball season starting to come I want to talk to you about baseball as long as you like the Yankees which is why I don't talk to Shane about it I talked to you about baseball we can talk about how hot it is and I'm not ready for that and we can talk about all kinds of stuff right you know when you're struggling with something in your life I want to see your perseverance not just because I'm nosy but because

God does something for me when you suffer well this week someone texted me this week and said hey there's things going on my life it's been really hard and we had this exchange where I think we were able to encourage one another a little bit in that just to say look the Lord is faithful and they

followed up a little bit later and said hey this thing that the Lord is already working in this situation that did something for me their suffering helped me to see God's faithfulness!
you know private with other Christians not saying that you always have to say everything that you want to say to every person not everybody can be trusted with the deepest things in your life I understand that I'm not advocating for that but you can't do it alone and you shouldn't do it alone and you should pursue the fruit that God may be doing in someone else's life through what you're going through right now so when you go to Bible study tonight ladies and you go through the prayer time if something's going on in your life lean on those ladies tell them how you're dealing with it you don't know what may be going on in their life and God could be using you to be the very thing that will hold them together don't suffer alone here's the third thing and of course the sinner salvation over and over

Peter has said that it is through the faithfulness of God's people that unbelievers are drawn to faith in Christ themselves he said it many times in the letter even in this paragraph the opportunity to win our very enemies to Christ is so evident and again we look at the cross don't we what is it that Jesus does father forgive them they don't even know what they're doing and then the captain who's responsible for killing him says wow surely this is the son of God the Lord may be using your suffering to bring someone else to saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and I think all of us would say as hard as suffering is you know that's probably worth it that's worth it here we go back to that beginning question if I'm going through something hard does that mean that God isn't good of course it doesn't mean what does it mean well it means he's

God and he can do with your life whatever he desires to do with your life and sometimes that means things will get a little hard and we trust that he's always working for his glory and our good our ultimate good and the good of others around us now all of these things why am I bringing up these things there's probably more so that when we do face the hardship and the persecution from others and the slander from others however that may come in this case it's more like people are talking bad about you is really what Peter is getting at in this paragraph when that happens just say you know what God is going to do something in this and I just want him to be fruitful in my life and I to be good and God's plan than for doing evil let's wrap it up to be surprised by suffering might mean it may not be this but it might mean that you're just not reading your

[48:51] Bible well if you go through suffering and that causes you to think less of God or that this isn't supposed to happen you need to read your Bible better because it's there it's all over the place really I suspect that like the Christians in Asia Minor none of you need to be convinced of that I'm sure that you've dealt with it we've had enough conversations that I know that's the case I do imagine however that all of us could use the encouragement and exhortation that Peter gives us in this text we mustn't lose sight of the eternal blessing that awaits us beyond this life of exile we gotta be focused on the gospel every day and when one of us is struggling you know what the other way you say I'm not sure what to say here's what you say if you don't know what else to say you say if everything in your life falls apart everything you think corporately as a church if for some reason we come in tomorrow and the landlord decides you know what I don't actually want you in here you gotta leave and all of this and people get mad and they leave!

If the whole thing falls apart! You know what's true your sins are forgiven your salvation is secured in Christ and that will never change and beyond this life of exile and beyond this life of suffering is nothing but infinite glorious blessing from the God who loved you enough to call you out of darkness into his marvelous light that's the truth and this life is hard and that doesn't mean that your relationships are going to get any better and the pain will hurt less but it does mean that it's coming and if everything else is falling apart you can trust in that don't lose sight of that don't lose sight of it instead keep following Jesus don't be afraid of the people don't be afraid of them don't shrink back you just be faithful you be found faithful in the eyes of the Lord and when they ask about that and then let this text shape your prayer rather than always seeking for

God to remove you from suffering I think it's an okay prayer to ask but rather than always being fixated on when can I just be over with this begin asking him to bear those unique fruits of faithfulness in the midst of your suffering Lord if it's your will that I suffer in this moment let me see

the fruitfulness of it bear your fruit in my life make me more like Jesus let me be an encouragement to other people in my church bring somebody to Christ as a result this is how we'll thrive in suffering