

1 Peter 4:12-19 “Responding to Suffering”

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

I want to add Happy Mother's Day to what Kelly said so well. I have the privilege this morning of having not only my wife and my mother-in-law, who are usually here, but my mother as well. I'm so thankful for them. Yeah, you can clap. I mean, I would clap for them, but I wasn't saying it to make you clap for them.

So, in light of all that, let's talk today about suffering. That wasn't the right segue? That seemed like the right thing to say there.

This passage that we're looking at this morning is the next passage in 1 Peter. It's actually at the end of a long section of 1 Peter where he's been focusing on suffering.

[1 : 06] Writing to God's people about how are you to handle suffering, and what does it look like to respond in the midst of that? He's told us already that suffering gives opportunities to share our hope with others.

Right? That because Jesus has endured our sufferings, we can be assured we will enjoy his victory. That the threat of suffering presents us with a life-shaping choice between our sin and our Savior. That loving one another well is essential for surviving suffering. As God's people, we need one another. All these principles about suffering.

But before we see one more today, I wanted to just say something about principles about suffering.

As I was thinking about this and writing, what's our key principle about suffering for today?

I just felt the need to say, as much as I've tried to distill a key principle from each passage, these are not meant to be cold and calculated to remove all pain from your life.

[2 : 09] If you just learn a couple of key principles about suffering, that's really not how it works. Sometimes what is needed in the face of suffering is silence.

God's word shows us and tells us that as well.

Remember, God's goal is not actually to remove all pain from our lives. Rather, it's to help us stand firm with him like our Ukrainian violinist in the bomb shelter while life is chaotic all around us, while suffering continues, that we would remember who and whose we are.

Especially then, so that we can stand firm. For that, we need patient people as well as practical principles about suffering that we know that we can count on.

We need relationship. As we'll see this morning in this last section, it begins at 1 Peter 4 at verse 12. I want us to read God's word together this morning.

[3 : 34] And notice as we do, Peter's sensitivity to this relationship, that it starts with beloved. Remember who you are, dearly beloved, so that you have a living hope that will never die.

That you're part of a people who can have courage because their God cares for them. Dearly 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.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or an evildoer, or as a meddler. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

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? And if the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?

[5 : 00] Therefore, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful creator while doing good. Thus far, God's holy word, let's ask for his help.

God, we do need your help this morning. Not merely that we might understand your words, although we ask for that, but that we might know you.

The one who is with us, the one who is our faithful creator to whom we can trust ourselves. Would you teach us that this morning? Would you meet us in our grief and pain and suffering?

And would you, by your spirit, speak to us the truth that our hearts most need? And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. One of my favorite things about this passage, passage where God is preparing us for suffering that we're already experiencing or perhaps about to walk into in days ahead, is that this passage makes it clear that suffering well is not natural.

That's not natural for us. I'm really thankful for that as a guy who doesn't handle pain well. Even when I stub my toe or pull my hamstring, ask my family, I'm a wimp, okay?

[6 : 32] Much less when people are upset with me, disappointed in me. I hate that, right? Suffering is not pleasant.

We don't have to pretend that it is. But there is hope in the midst of that suffering. It's hope that is not that we'll never suffer again.

No, that is the false gospel, if you will, of health and wealth and prosperity. That's nowhere in God's word. No, the hope as we suffer is a relationship with God.

A relationship with God that transforms how we can respond to our suffering. It's not natural or easy to suffer well.

It runs against our instincts, doesn't it? But there is a God who, if we really access his power, his presence with us, his promises, can make all the difference in how we view and then respond to our truly difficult suffering.

[7 : 45] What difference can active relationship with God make? How does God enable us to respond to suffering?

That's what this passage is going to show us. First thing, it shows us we can rejoice in suffering with the Son rather than avoiding it.

That's our natural bent, right? Our natural bent to avoid suffering. But perhaps we spend so much time in a very resourceful society, thinking that we can largely avoid suffering, that we are actually surprised when really difficult trials come into our lives.

Peter says, don't let that happen. Don't be surprised at the fiery trial, at the painful test of your faith. What I mean is that natural responses include things like, hey, I mean, I'm a pretty good person. I don't deserve suffering like this. I shouldn't have to deal with this in my life. I'm good enough. Or for some of us, hey, I'm a Christian.

[9 : 02] So God's going to keep me comfy. I mean, that's in here. Which verse is that? God promises that... Peter's reminding us that's not in here.

That is not the case. When you take church membership vows, when you publicly align yourself with Jesus, you are signing up for suffering.

Michael, that's a reason to back out, right? Not your story. That's what he's trying to be honest with us about. This is not unusual, he says.

It's the experience of Jesus himself, right? It's the pattern of all through church history. A couple weeks ago, we talked about one martyr after another, all through different places, different times. It's the promise of Jesus even to us, right? John chapter 15. 15. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

[10 : 00] If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. If this was your home, then you could expect a warm welcome. But it's not.

But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you. A servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. Jesus promises we will be persecuted. We will suffer. Remember Peter told us at the start of this letter, one aspect of why that is.

Many of you have taken tests recently, right?

To see if what you say you've learned all year, you actually know. Yes, they're not a lot of fun sometimes. Sometimes they're called exams, which just means it's even worse, right?

[11 : 04] And many of you have gone through those. But when you take a class, you expect that test to come, right? Peter says, listen, this is even more important than that stuff you've learned.

Your faith is more precious than gold, he's told us, right? So even more so, it's to be expected that your faith in God will be tested.

That God will take you through painful suffering to burn away your trust in other things and so strengthen your trust in him. So don't get taken off guard, right?

If you get taken off guard, you might fly into a rage. You might throw a pity party for yourself. You might despair of all hope. But I never thought this was going to happen.

I give up. Instead, Peter says, no, name the pain, honestly. Cry? Yes, certainly.

[12:08] Point out injustice. Surely do that. But rejoice! Don't give up on me here. Some of you who are really thoughtful are thinking, that sounds crazy.

This is some psychological mumbo-jumbo reverse psychology sort of thing he's got. And he's saying, be really sad and be really happy at the same time. Yeah, that'll work.

Turn that frown upside down for Jesus. No. That's not what he's saying. Rejoice not in the suffering itself.

It is bad. It is unjust. It is painful. Rejoice not in the suffering itself. Rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings.

Listen, this is the difference that relationship with God can make. Right? This is what transforms how we respond. How do you rejoice in the sufferings?

[13:13] How do you count it all joy when you face trials of many kinds, as James says? You rejoice in your relationship with Jesus. You rejoice that you know him more.

That happens, doesn't it, when you share a common experience with someone? You know someone more. You understand them better, especially when it's a significant experience.

When we miscarried our first child, I understood so much better in a new way the hurt and the grief that many of our friends had known was a big part of their story and it drew us closer to them.

When you suffer unjustly, you understand in a new way what Jesus endured. A big part of his story. It draws you closer to him because you're sharing in his sufferings. Mocked. Insulted. Falsely accused.

[14:24] That's what Jesus endured. And then let me connect the last dot. Not only do you know him more, but knowing Jesus more intimately is the greatest possible thing that could happen.

That's why you rejoice. It's greater than anything else. It's worth any cost. To know him like that. Paul writes about this in Philippians chapter 3.

He calls it the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. That nothing else compares to it. He longs to know Jesus more.

And as he does that, he says this in verse 10. He's longing that I may know him and the power of his resurrection. And may share his sufferings. Becoming like him even in his death.

That he so longs to know Jesus. Listen, Christian. You are already united to Christ. That's not up for debate.

[15:25] The most glorious hope ever is yours. You in Christ. Christ in you. The hope of glory. Sharing in his sufferings helps you experience that reality.

That thing that's already true. It helps you taste it. Even when it hurts. So that you can rejoice in the glory that you'll also share with him as well.

Suffering keeps us from going through this life thinking that this world is home. And the treasures I get here are the greatest things ever. Be honest.

You've thought that before. This world has felt a lot like home. And the things you've been able to accumulate. And the recognition and the experiences. They seem like the greatest things that could possibly happen.

And suffering reminds you those are both lies. This is not home. And these are not the greatest things that you could possibly experience. Suffering pushes us back to Jesus.

[16:24] And the ultimate treasure of our relationship with him. That we at times neglect. That we at times undervalue.

That we at times forget. Johnny Erickson Tada has known suffering and Jesus.

She became paralyzed from the shoulders down for the rest of her life. During a diving accident as a teenager. On top of that she began to deal with chronic pain.

And battling cancer throughout her entire adult life. When she was in a season of intense struggle with some of this pain and suffering. She went back to investigate what she believed about suffering.

And she wrote this. Rather than try to frantically escape the pain. I relearned the timeless lesson of allowing my suffering.

[17 : 26] To push me deeper into the arms of Jesus. I like to think of my pain as a sheep dog. That keeps snapping at my heels.

To drive me down the road to Calvary. Where otherwise I would not be naturally inclined to go. I love that picture.

A sheep dog driving me to Jesus. And because knowing him is the greatest treasure. But I sometimes forget that and run after other things.

I need somebody to drive me back. And then I can rejoice in the sheep dog. Even of suffering. Rather than frantically trying to escape pain.

Right? Don't waste your suffering. By turning inward. And going it alone. And I'm just going to make it through. No.

[18 : 21] Rather rejoice. That Jesus is with you. And you with him. That's the first thing. Relationship with Jesus enables us to rejoice.

And secondly. To receive the blessing of the Spirit. Rather than living ashamed. Verse 14.

Peter says. If you are insulted for the name of Christ. Verse 16. If anyone suffers as a Christian. You're insulted.

You're suffering as a Christian. What's the natural response? Of course. If you're insulted. It's to be humiliated. By those insults. To be embarrassed. To want to go away.

Disappear. From that context. That's what an insult is. Right? Something that shames you. In fact.

[19 : 23] The name Christian. In Peter's audience. For them. It was a mocking term. It was a name given by those who wanted to shame. The followers of a crucified teacher.

A seemingly failed Messiah. You Christians. But Peter says. Because of your relationship with God. You need not be ashamed. In fact. When you're insulted. Blessed. That's literally how it reads. As soon as you get insulted. Blessed. Blessed. He's echoing the words of Jesus in Matthew chapter 5. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. Theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 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. What? People are saying all kinds of evil about you. Most of it is not even true. How can that be?

[20 : 31] People are calling you a bigot. People are calling you stupid. People are calling you worthless. Blessed?

Blessed? Blessed. Blessed. Because. The spirit of glory. And of God.

Rests. Upon you. Not because those things are good things. Not because you like the insults. Because the spirit of glory and of God. Rests. Upon you. Here's what Peter's saying. It's really beautiful. The Holy Spirit dwells in you as a child of God.

Right? That's his promise. And in the midst of a trial. As you are sharing mystically in the very sufferings of Christ.

[21 : 27] Connected even more closely to him. There is a special strengthening of his spirit that you are given. Yes, he dwells in you by his spirit.

But it's as though he's saying. Especially when you can't imagine holding up any longer. And you may be right that you actually can't on your own. Jesus promises to send his spirit to rest on you. Maybe you've thought about suffering like that before. Suffering you know you couldn't endure. Losing a child maybe.

Being tortured until you deny Jesus. Something that you've watched another Christian. Maybe a friend here going through. Maybe you've seen it or read about it around the world somewhere.

And you think, I couldn't do what they do. I couldn't endure in that circumstance. Probably you're right on that day. You haven't been called to it.

[22 : 30] But God gives grace to meet the need we face. He sends his spirit to rest upon us in the suffering that he has called us to.

So that we know him more. So that we trust him more deeply. So that when we're on our own and we're failing and we couldn't stand. When we would surely fall, we can actually stand in his spirit. Isn't that beautiful that he knows our needs? What glorious grace that he would send his spirit to rest on you then. It's why Samuel Rutherford hundreds of years ago said, God's choicest wines are kept in the cellars of suffering.

It's why Corrie ten Boom said, after enduring the horrors of a concentration camp, that she then knew for sure there was no pit so deep that he wasn't deeper still.

It's why the often depressed preacher Charles Spurgeon said, those who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls. We suffer more deeply and find there's more grace than we knew.

[23 : 46] There's more comfort in God's hope than we believed. There's more power of God's spirit available to us than we had imagined. And then we learn it and we experience it.

Now you don't get that experience of the spirit by breaking the law, killing or stealing or doing other evil things, right? That's not how it works, he says. You don't get the spirit by being a busybody and annoying people so that they say insults about you.

That's not, no, no, no, none of that. Some of you are good at that. That's not how it works. Let it be that suffering comes to you as a Christian.

And then you so deeply taste God's spirit that you don't repay evil for evil. That you don't even run away in shame, but you glorify God.

Yes, indeed, I'm a Christian. Even if that means something derogatory to you, it means to me that I have an eternal hope because of the suffering Savior that you're mocking.

[24 : 52] You see how you draw on the reality of your relationship with God. You receive the spirit as a blessing rather than staying alone in your shame.

Finally, a relationship with God allows you to respond to suffering by running toward the Father rather than away from Him. Again, this is counterintuitive to us.

Naturally, we run away from pain, right? We all clear on this? In fact, you've probably had someone say to you when you've been suffering, if this is what happens to children of your God, to people who believe in Him, you need to find a new God.

Some God you serve who let this happen. You've heard that before? On top of that, this passage ends by talking about God coming in judgment and starting with us.

Time for the test. Painful discipline. Maybe we'd best run away from God for a while. The background of these verses, an Old Testament prophet read Malachi 3 sometime.

[26 : 14] He says God will come and He will start in the temple purifying His priests. His own people are going to experience the refiner's fire so that they will worship Him as they ought.

It will be painful to get there. And Peter goes on to say, if the righteous, if God's people is scarcely saved, not at all saying that the outcome of salvation is uncertain for God's people, but rather highlighting that the road there will be difficult, will be paved with suffering.

If we as God's people go through all this fiery suffering to purify our hearts, to melt away our idols, how much more intense will the heat be to those who do not trust God at all, but wholly worship idols?

So, Peter concludes, let those who suffer according to God's will, again reassuring us that nothing comes to us that He doesn't control or use for our good, let them entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

The idea of entrusting in Peter's day, they didn't have banks, but it was finding somebody you could, if you went on a trip, leave your money with and you could count on them protecting it so that it was there when you got back, right?

[27 : 45] And this is a decision for all of us this morning. To whom will you entrust your soul? We all suffer in this life.

We have to decide, where are we going to find refuge when we do? Where will we run for help? Where will we look for hope? If you do not follow Jesus, if you are not one who believes in the God of the Bible, the warning in this passage is soberingly clear.

Please don't miss it. The refining fire is coming and what will become of you? Please don't just think you'll skate by with no problem that this God is not holy, holy, holy.

There is a storm coming and we all need a refuge, a place that we can deposit our souls where they will be safely guarded. All of us need that.

Thankfully, the offer is just as clear as the warning. Entrust your souls to a faithful creator. Who could you entrust your kids to while you go on a trip?

[29 : 02] What would their qualifications need to be? Someone who is strong enough and trustworthy enough to keep them safe for you.

Listen to what Peter says here. God is strong enough. He is the faithful creator. He is the one who said, let there be and there was light and animals and plants and water and stars and everything in

the universe, including you.

He speaks and it is. There is no one stronger to run to. But that's not enough, is it? For something as precious as your soul, you need to know if he's trustworthy.

He is. How do you know? How do you know you can trust him? He has suffered too. This God has not remained distant from you.

We're reminded of that again in this passage, the same way Peter began the letter, that it is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the triune God in full force with you in your suffering.

[30 : 22] He's not far off. That's a friend you can count on. He moves towards you to offer to you the relationship that can transform your eternity and transform how you respond to suffering right now because you're no longer on your own.

It's not all about you. It's not all up to you. The only God safe to trust in your suffering is one who has been there, who has felt the pain, who has endured the loss.

He won't stay far away from you. He has come near to you and offers you this mourning relationship. Wherever you are, whether you've ever done this before, he offers you to run and jump into his loving and forgiving and protecting arms and know peace forever.

To deposit your very soul with him and be assured that no matter what happens, no matter what suffering comes into your life, even if your body were to be burned away by it, that you'll be reunited with that soul you've entrusted to him forever.

He offers you to come and experience that in relationship with him today. The God who can be trusted is the God of the cross.

[31 : 42] He suffered not merely as an example to us, but as a savior for us. He suffered so that we are never alone in our sufferings, so that we have an eternal hope.

all your sins forgiven by his death in your place, all your shame wiped away by his delight in you, even at your worst, all your sufferings now made purposeful because they bring you closer to him, an eternal weight of glory that they bring for you.

That's why we stand and profess our faith in him. That's why we sing even through tears. That is why we come and eat with him again now.

This God at this table invites you to run to him today. To entrust yourself to him no matter what is going on in your life to find peace in his arms.

If you don't trust Jesus like that, if you don't see at this table his body and blood as your great joy and as your only hope, then don't come to this table and take the bread and the juice this morning.

[33 : 07] I'd invite you instead, instead of doing something outwardly that's not connected to faith in your heart, would you come and observe?

You can still come. We'd love to pray with you or if you prefer, you can stay right where you are but the most important thing I'd urge is that you would consider the offer of Jesus.

That he offers you relationship with him. Free forgiveness. Eternal hope in him. Would you consider that even as we celebrate his death for us this morning?

But if you're one of those here who has entrusted your soul to Jesus, if you've publicly demonstrated and declared that by joining one imperfect manifestation of his body, the church, then don't let anything keep you from coming to him.

No experience of suffering, no doubt of his goodness, no uncertainty about whether he loves you, he loves you, he gave himself for you.

[34 : 14] Come and celebrate that. Jesus on the night he was betrayed said this to his disciples preparing them for the suffering they were about to walk into.

He took bread and broke it and he gave it to them. As I'm ministering in his name give this bread to you. He said, take and eat. This is my body that is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. And then in the same way he took the cup and he said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood which is shed.

It's going to be poured out. There's going to be painful suffering but the result is going to be the forgiveness of sins. Drink from it all of you.

Let me pray and then we'll celebrate together. Father, we thank you for your provision of this meal and for your presence with us in it.

[35 : 16] Where we hurt, where we struggle, where we suffer, would we know that you love us, that you hold us, and that you'll never let us go.

Would this meal be not just common elements? Would you use them to strengthen our faith that is more precious than gold because it unites us to Jesus? Do that even now, we ask by your Spirit. Amen. For more information, visit us online at southwood.org.