

This Exiled Life – part 3

Rejoicing in Difficult Days

1 Peter 1:6-9

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⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6–9 (ESV)

The 18th Century English Poet, William Blake (1757-1827), aptly captures the tension of living in a broken world:

*Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine,
Under every grief and pine
Runs a joy with silken twine.
It is right it should be so;
Man was made for joy and woe;
And when this we rightly know
Through the world we safely go.¹*

It seems that Blake desires to put into verse a thought that serves to reset the expectations of what life will be like. I don't know if Blake had 1 Peter in mind when he penned the words to that poem; there is some evidence that he was a believer, but his words fit the exile mentality that Peter has in mind in 1 Peter 1.

Life involves joy and woe – does that thought resonate with you? Some of you have been living in that tension for some time. There are things about your life that create wonderful joy and happiness, and yet it isn't long until something challenging or sorrowful happens. Or some of you have learned that joy and woe are not mutually exclusive terms; they can actually, and unfortunately do, co-exist. You can be joyful in some things and sorrowful, at the same time, in other things.

In other words, the older I get the more I realize that the question “How are you doing?” is more and more challenging. Life is full of things that are wonderful, exciting, and hopeful. And yet it is also full of challenges, burdens, and grief. I'm finding that following Jesus is not just about “good” days and “bad” days, but more about days filled with “good and bad.”

¹ As cited in R. Kent Hughes, *1-2 Peter and Jude – Sharing in Christ's Sufferings*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2008), 37-38

Part of Peter's aim in writing 1 Peter is to help his readers get their heads and hearts around what it means to be an exile. He wants to give them hope and to help them know how to live in a world that is increasingly filled with challenges.

Last week Joe Bartemus helped you understand the great mercy of God in your life in light of a spiritual inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. He helped you answer some big questions such as *Who is God? Who am I?* and *What is my future?* He served you really well while I was speaking on the Song of Solomon to about 300 of our people at our church's marriage retreat over the weekend. God did some wonderful things in marriages last weekend, especially after session three. I'd love to have you listen to that series sometime.

Two weeks ago we introduced the book of 1 Peter, and I identified that Peter was writing to believers who were experiencing a significant shift in culture as they became exiles in their own land. Peter wanted to help them think about how to live in this kind of environment, so he connected them to the divine plan for their lives, reassuring them about their position in Christ ("elect exiles") and reminding them that their lives were part of a bigger divine plan ("according to the foreknowledge of God . . .").

Exiles That Rejoice

We are studying 1 Peter because there are many of you who are starting to feel like exiles. Whether it is at work, in your fraternity, in your neighborhood, in your friend group, or maybe in what you see posted on social media, there is just a growing sense that "Oh, I'm actually an exile now."

Our passage today helps us by giving us a way of thinking about difficulty and trials. It seems as though Peter wants to take away the shock and surprise of difficulties by helping us reorient our minds such that we can rejoice in difficulty. That's our aim this morning: helping us know how to rejoice when we suddenly feel the consequences of being an exile.

If you look at the text, you will see that the word "rejoice" appears at the beginning of the text and at the end. It is found in verse 6 ("in this you rejoice") and in verse 8b ("you rejoice with joy that is inexpressible"). Clearly, Peter's aim is to make this word, whatever it means, an important part of the believer's life as he experiences the challenge of being an exile.

Let me define the term "rejoice" so that we are all on the same page in terms of what we mean. So, when you hear Peter say "rejoice," what other words come to mind? How about happy, or excited, or thrilled, or glad? Well, various Greek dictionaries tell us that the word rejoice in the Bible means to be extremely joyful or to be filled with delight or in something.² The word is translated as being glad or exulting in something in other places in the Bible. The target of the word is the emotions or the passion of one's heart. A few examples:

² James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

⁷ *Let us rejoice and **exult** and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; (Revelation 19:7).*

¹¹ *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and **be glad**, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11–12 (ESV)*

¹³ *But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and **be glad** when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13 (ESV)*

This Greek word is different than the one for joy. Often we might think of joy as a deep-seated contentment or God-centered emotion that living for God is better. That’s how we read James 1:2 – “Count it all joy . . . when you meet trials” or 2 Corinthians 6:10 – “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.” And while that is true, the sense in 1 Peter is more than that.

Peter is aiming at more than just godly endurance, calm emotions in a trial, or the ability to find purposeful contentment in hardship. His aim here is to help us fight for happiness, for passion, and for delight, not in the suffering *per se*, but in the bigger picture of what God is doing in difficult days. Peter aims to help us combat the strong emotions of the effects of our exile with the emotions connected to the amazing attractiveness of God’s grace. The goal is to eclipse the understandable and real sorrow of suffering with a gospel-loving affection that makes us a happy, singing, and yet hurting people.

So, is that you today? Are you happy in God’s grace today? If you were to weigh the emotional balance of your soul today, are you in love with what God is doing in your life? I’m not suggesting that the goal is to not be sorrowful. Rather, what I’m suggesting is that God intends for sorrow and happiness to co-exist in the heart of the exile. It is not an either-or equation. Peter wants to help these exiles learn how to rejoice, to be happy, to exult, and to delight in what God is doing while they are in exile.

Hopefully you know me well enough to know that I believe that there is a very important place for lament in the life of the believer and in church life. One third of the Psalms are worship in a minor-key. What I’m saying is that being an exile means that you learn to weep with those who weep and rejoice with those who rejoice. Being an exile means that you acknowledge that what I’m experiencing is really hard and, frankly, not very fun. And yet there is a joy and passion in your heart which is rooted in the gospel and which is apparent to a watching world.

Do you make Jesus attractive to the world? By the way that you navigate the challenges of being an exile, are you wrestling with how to fan the flames of joy and happiness in your soul? Happy, passionate exiles say something powerful to a world that is falling apart and to a culture that is losing its way.

Knowing that life is mingled with joy and woe, how does Peter encourage rejoicing in difficult days?

1. Rejoice by reflecting on life’s trials

The first thing that Peter does in this passage is set the context for the challenges that spiritual exiles are going to face. We know that the rest of the book talks about suffering, but this is the first place that it is

mentioned in 1 Peter. So it is important to note Peter's approach to suffering. How does he set the context of it?

First, he leads into the discussion by pointing back to the beautiful spiritual realities that he had just mentioned. When he says "in this you rejoice," he is referring to the hopeful message of verses 3-5, which include praise to God for the miracle of conversion (v. 3), the power of the resurrection (v. 3), a heavenly inheritance (v. 4), the promise of God's sustaining grace (v. 5), and the hope of a coming victory through Jesus (v. 5).

In short, this is the hope of the gospel – that those who trust in Jesus are rescued from their sins and granted a righteous standing before their God, that nothing on earth can compromise this divine work, and that there is an eternal life waiting for us. This is the starting point for considering any trial, difficulty, or challenge in culture.

When I'm counseling someone who is facing a decision that may result in potential opposition or even persecution, the very first statement I make is something like this: "Listen, the first thing I'm going to say is that you need to know that no matter what you decide or what happens to you after you decide, you're good – meaning your sins are forgiven, your King is on the throne, and your eternal destiny is fixed."

Peter reminds us that it is really important that we rehearse and celebrate the gospel regularly. We need to constantly remind ourselves about who we really are, what our future holds, and what God has promised. This exiled life requires a regular and robust rehearsing of the gospel.

Second, and after highlighting the beauty of the gospel, he shrinks the lens on trials. There are two phrases that communicate this: "though now" and "for a little while." The purpose here is not to say that the trial will be short in this lifetime because that may or may not be true. Rather, having reset the spiritual reality, he now rests the reality as it relates to time and eternity.

For instance, I was telling someone recently that "One hundred million years from now, you'll see the pressure of this moment very differently." He needed what all hurting people need: perspective.

The next phrase "if necessary" connects back to the divine plan of God as we saw in verses 1 and 3. Exiles are exiles because of 1) the foreknowledge of God and 2) God causing them to be born again. Salvation and suffering are both part of God's sovereign plan. The sufferings of exiles are "not the result of fate or impersonal forces of nature. They are the will of God for believers."³ In chapter four, Peter says:

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:19 (ESV)

Fourth, I love the fact that Peter says that they have been "grieved" by these trials. The word can mean to be sorrowful, to be in pain, to be sorry, or to be distressed. Trials and struggles, in and of themselves, are

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 67.

not easy and are inherently filled with joy. Peter is not suggesting some kind of ascetic or unrealistic view of life. Instead, he is acknowledging that grieving and rejoicing can co-exist in the same heart.

I think that this is one of the keys to the exiled life. We have to come to embrace the on-going tension of dealing with hardship that is really hard but rejoicing in the fact that hard is not bad. Someone asked me recently “How are you doing?” And I responded by saying, “I’m really sad and really happy. I’m filled with sorrow about a bunch of stuff and I’m rejoicing in a bunch of other things.” The person really didn’t know what to do with my comment, and yet I think that is what the exiled life is all about.

Finally, Peter uses the phrase “various trials.” This is helpful because it identifies that part of the challenge is not just the reality of difficulties, but also their variety. Suffering comes in clusters. And that can be overwhelming.

But there’s even more than you probably realize here because the word “trial” can include a pretty wide range of meaning. Those of you who grew up with the King James translation may remember that this verse was translated as “manifold temptations.” The reason is because the word for trial can mean trial, or testing, or temptation. In fact, about half the time the ESV translates it, it reads “temptation” (see 1 Cor. 10:13). The word can include things that happen which are simply circumstantially hard, things that are connected to persecution, and things that are related to the brokenness in the world, in us or in others.

Peter, it seems, aims to broaden our horizons on suffering at the front end, shrink it in middle, and then broaden it again. He calls us to take a step back and reflect on our trials. He invites us to be reminded about the joy that we have in the gospel and the limited nature of earthly struggle but also about the broad array of challenges that we face.

So this morning if you feel like the trials of life have you on an emotional roller coaster, you are not alone and are probably right where you need to be. Grief and happiness can actually co-exist. Did you know that? Or did you expect life to be either/or? Additionally, it may be that part of the reason why you feel so spiritually and emotionally unbalanced is because God has used suffering to show you how emotionally dependent you are on the thing that isn’t going well right now.

What’s more, it may be that you are here today and you are not yet a Christian. God may be using circumstances to get your attention and to awaken you to the reality that you cannot do life on your own anymore. You may be seeing the fruit of trying to be your own god. Perhaps God is calling you to turn from your sins, trust in Christ, and follow Him. Trials have a way of making us stop and reflect about bigger needs and issues in our lives. Peter invites us to stop and reflect on the trials.

There’s another spiritual mindset that Peter wants for us to embrace.

2. Rejoice as you see refinement in your life

Having taken a step back and given some perspective on the context of trials, Peter next turns to what happens inside the heart or in the spiritual life of the person who is trying to live as an exile. Peter highlights the spiritual purpose in suffering and helps us to consider the unseen and unbelievable value of what is happening.

Verse seven starts with the words “so that,” which should be a very clear marker that what follows in this passage is the effect of the trials that were previously addressed. As you study your own Bible, don’t miss important phrases and words like these because they serve as way-finders in the text.

These verses tell us that trials result in a faith that is tested, genuine, and valuable. Or you could think of it this way: “Suffering functions as the crucible for faith. They test the genuineness of faith, revealing whether or not faith is authentic.”⁴ Let’s unpack that a bit.

The words “tested genuineness” are really a single word in the original language, which is why the NASB simply says “the proof of your faith.” It is the same word that is used in James 1:3 – “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” The idea is fairly simple and straightforward: anyone can claim to be a follower of Jesus, but that belief is tested and proven in hardship.

That totally makes sense, doesn’t it? It is way too easy to say you believe something, but what you believe actually shows up when it costs you something or when you go public. A relationship with Jesus was meant to be apparent to others. Some of you will remember the children’s song based upon Matthew 5:15 – “This little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine . . . Hide it under a bushel? No! I’m gonna let it shine.” Why is that? Because the gospel, by definition, is something to be proclaimed and heralded. It is good news, and good news was meant to be shared.

This is one of the reasons why baptism is so important. Baptism does not make a person a Christian, but it is the first step when a private faith goes public. And baptism is the first of many, many times when a Christian has to “go public” with his or her faith.

Trials have a way of making our faith, our trust, our belief in the Bible evident and clear. It proves whether what we believe is more than just something we “say” we believe. It shows if we are just believing what everyone else is believing. Your faith is proven when it is costly, hard, inconvenient, painful, or socially unacceptable to say that you believe in Jesus.

What’s more, testing proves your faith not only to others, but also to yourself. Have you ever wondered, “How do I really know that I believe this?” Or “Would I be willing to suffer for the name of Christ?” Trials – no matter what size or scope – have the effect of verifying, even to your own soul, that what you believe is real. Hardship has a way of pummeling the self-sufficiency right out of you so that you have to trust and believe in God. Coming to faith in Christ involves trusting Jesus, but we keep trusting Him throughout our lives. Trials help us to see how that works and highlight that our faith is real. And that is amazingly valuable right now as well as in the future.

The testing of our faith, you see, is not just about the immediate world in which we live. It is also about future judgment. That is what “may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” means. It is the return of Jesus, and the idea here is that the testing right now provides assurance that praise, honor, and glory (heaven) will be yours because your faith is real.

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, 67–68.

Last week I finished reading *The Last Battle*, by C.S. Lewis, to Savannah. There is scene near the end of the book that nearly moved me to tears. After Aslan's surprising return, all the creatures line up and approach Aslan. Each of them looks Aslan in the face, and if they love him they turn to the right, but if they despise him, they turn to the left. The parting of the animals – to a life of misery or a life of joy – was based upon their heart toward Aslan.

Testing proves that your affection for Jesus is real. And that testing, while painful and hard, actually serves to make us glad as our faith is refined. The older I get the more I realize the helpfulness of pain and testing. I learn much more through testing, I grow more through pain, and I sing better when tears are in my eyes. Can you relate? I'm sure you can.

Malcom Muggeridge (1903-1990) captured the essence of this truth when he said:

*I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have ever learned in my seventy-five years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness, whether pursued or attained.*⁵

There is something truly helpful about testing and trials if we can get our eyes off the trial and see the refinement that God is producing within us.

C.S. Lewis said "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."⁶ And 1 Peter calls us to rejoice, to celebrate and be glad in what God is doing even through our pain.

3. Rejoice as you are reassured in your faith

The final reality that we see in this text is the rejoicing that comes as faith is preserved and even reassured through trial. Refinement proves the genuineness of one's faith now and in the future, but there is also a sense here of becoming more confident even now. Brokenness and being stripped of self-sufficiency has a way of creating a strengthened combination of love, belief, and joy.

Peter begins by pointing back in verse 8 and commends his readers that even though they haven't seen Jesus, they love Him. Where did that love come from? How is it even possible that they started loving a savior they have never seen?

What's more, they don't see Him even now, and yet they believe in Him. In their hearts, and in your heart, is belief and love, and that reality is something that confirms, even now, the genuineness of their faith. They believed, and they keep on believing. It is a miracle.

And the effect are moments when they "rejoice with joy that is expressible and filled with glory." They so love Jesus that even trials and difficulties create more love, painful love, tested love, and sovereignly created love in their hearts for Jesus. And this love for Jesus, even in tears, has something connected to it that is other-worldly; it has a taste of glory in it.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *1-2 Peter and Jude – Sharing in Christ's Sufferings*, (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 42.

⁶ <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/2976220-the-problem-of-pain>

If you have suffered or struggled and in your tears poured out your heart to the Lord, you know both the waves of grief and the waves of love. You know the beauty of God's sustaining love and the indescribable taste of "glory" as God becomes your precious portion in life.

And the effect of all of this is that you are obtaining, even now, the salvation of your soul. You are obtaining in your exile the outcome of your faith. In other words, you were saved so that you could be saved right now and so that when you die, you'll be saved for all eternity.

Therefore, being an exile who rejoices means that all this pain and all these challenges actually serve to reassure us that we truly belong to Christ and that God will help us each step of the way. Testing reassures us that God is real, that our faith is genuine, and that God will continue to help us.

Are you "there" this morning? Do you need to see difficulties, various trials, and deep pain through a different lens? Can you thank God again for this trial that you are in? Can you tell Jesus that He is "worth it"? And can you rejoice in the fact that you even have that thought?

If you've walked through hardship, are you able to look back, take the lessons learned, apply them to new areas of your exile and say, "Thank you, Lord"? Can you rejoice in how the Lord has changed you, shaped you, and remade you?

This week I was back in Holland, Michigan where I spoke at a mayor's prayer gathering and visited with some pastors from our former church. Whenever I'm in Holland, I always like to stop by the grave where our daughter is buried. My emotions are never the same. This time, now twelve years later and as I am thinking about 1 Peter 1 and the subject of lament, my heart was filled with sorrow and yet so much gratitude. I went for a walk around the cemetery, and my heart was filled with worship that I could hardly even put into words.

You see, I lost a daughter. She was so close to joining our family, just hours away. And I wish with everything in my heart that she was here. But I'm a different man, husband, father, and pastor today because of that pain. That loss shaped me in ways that I'm still trying to figure out. And while my eyes were filled with tears, my heart was happy. Really happy. Happy-sad. Because with inexpressible joy and a taste of glory, I have indeed tasted and seen the goodness of the Lord. And that has made me very, very happy, even through tears.

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