

## **This Exiled Life – Part 5**

### After You Have Suffered

1 Peter 5:10-11

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*<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:10–11 (ESV)*

What happens every Friday at 11:00 a.m.?

No matter where you live in the state of Indiana, that particular time of the week is the moment when every tornado siren is tested. Once a week the entire state tests the system that is designed to give residents an early warning so that they can be prepared. It is an eerie sound, especially if you've been in a major storm.

That was why the residents of Dallas, Texas were so frightened in April of last year. With clear skies and no dangerous weather in sight, and at 18 minutes before midnight, every one of the 156 tornado sirens began to blare. They continued for an hour and a half. You can imagine what the 1.3 million residents thought. Some worried that they were under attack, others feared that there was a national emergency. Social media lit up with some suggesting that there was a zombie apocalypse or an alien invasion.<sup>1</sup>

When the sirens finally stopped, the city officials determined that someone had hacked the system from the inside. So while some on social media were chuckling, the FCC was not. They began looking for the hacker, and they promised to prosecute.

The issue, as you can imagine, is that people need to be able to trust that it means something when the sirens are activated. The government has worked too hard to help people know what to do when they hear the sirens. The system only works if it is clear and if it is trustworthy. The sirens don't work if people don't understand what they mean.

### **The Siren of 1 Peter**

I think 1 Peter, especially as it relates to suffering, is a lot like a tornado siren when it is working properly. This book has been helpful in identifying the reality of suffering that normally comes to those who are followers of Jesus. In the same way that Spring time portends big thunderstorms and

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2017/04/09/someone-hacked-every-tornado-siren-in-dallas-it-was-loud/?utm\\_term=.12b92f1123b9](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-intersect/wp/2017/04/09/someone-hacked-every-tornado-siren-in-dallas-it-was-loud/?utm_term=.12b92f1123b9)

isolated tornados, so too the church can expect seasons of difficulty and hardship. It is the season that we are in.

But 1 Peter has also helped us to know what to do when the storm hits. This book has helped us know what to think about our identity, our future, and our opponents. Additionally, it has helped us know how to respond to the government, to employers, to unfair treatment, and it even helped wives know how to deal with unbelieving husbands.

Next week we will conclude our study of this wonderful and helpful book. I hope that 1 Peter will be the kind of book to which you will return time and time again. When the dark clouds of our exile begin to loom, 1 Peter is a manual of how we live out the gospel.

1 Peter 5:10-11 is one of the clearest summaries of the entire book. Peter is wrapping up his letter, and this is a beautiful distillation of many themes that we have seen throughout the book. Next week we will review the entire book and all the lessons that we've learned. But this week I want to narrow our focus on how we should think about suffering.

You could think of this book as an "early warning" of what we should do when suffering of any kind comes our way. And here is what this text tells the followers of Jesus about their suffering: It works for them. But that is something that we need to fully understand.

### **Six Truths to Remember About Suffering**

Let's look at some truths that we need to remember about suffering as Peter wraps up this book. If you've been with us during this series, these will not be entirely new, but they are all very important.

#### **1) It's expected**

As we look at this text we need to start at a foundational level, and to realize that Peter assumes that suffering is coming their way. He says "after you have suffered..." He is writing to them with the mindset that suffering is inevitable.

Hopefully you will remember that the recipients of this letter were not experiencing state-sponsored persecution. Rather, the culture around them was shifting and becoming more hostile. Peter's aim in writing this book was to help them know how to live as exiles in that kind of world. And I really hope that this book has helped you to process the challenges you may face.

I think that one of the most helpful truths about suffering is that it is expected. Peter says something similar in 4:12:

*<sup>12</sup> 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. 1 Peter 4:12 (ESV)*

Jesus said the same thing in John 15-16. In one of His most intimate conversations with His disciples He said:

*"If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; 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..." (John 15:19–20, ESV)*

*"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33, ESV)*

Suffering, opposition, feeling like an exile, or this nagging sense that you are weird is part of the normal Christian life. I remember the first time I heard a pastor say, "If you haven't suffered yet, you just haven't lived long enough." That was a very helpful thought because it reset my expectations as to what the Christian life was going to be like.

Sometimes we can develop a mindset that thinks incorrectly about the Christian life and it sets us up for failure. We could think:

- "I came to Jesus because I wanted the abundant life, not a hard life"
- "If I was a better Christian, there would not be opposition or tension in my life"
- "I don't deserve this kind of unfair treatment"
- "This hardship is annoying or a waste of my time"

It is incredibly helpful to reset our fundamental expectations as to what the Christian life is all about. But even more it is important for us to reset our understanding about what the gospel is and what it means. When we rightly understand the gospel (God is holy, I'm not, Jesus save, Christ is my life), then I'm able to see everything through a different lens, including suffering. Hard will still be hard, but we can see that it is not bad. Nor is it surprising. And that is helpful.

## **2) It's limited**

The second truth to remember as we think about suffering is the fact that it is limited – at least for those who are in Christ. I offer this qualifier because this text and this promise is only applicable to those who have put their faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins. Those who are outside of Christ will experience unending suffering in their separation from God.

But for those who are in Christ, there is a consistent promise in the scriptures regarding the temporary nature of suffering and even death itself. That is why Peter says "a little while." He is attempting to remind his readers that our experience of hardship and suffering is not unending, not ultimate, and not unlimited.

Whatever our suffering or hardship is, the Bible promises that it will not last. In other words, there is something more to come. The arc of God's redemptive plan is creation-fall-redemption AND restoration. We are waiting for that coming restoration.

We are waiting for the day when God wipes away every tear from our eyes, when death shall be no more, when there will be no more mourning, crying, or pain anymore (Rev. 21:4). We are waiting for

the day when God will put all things, including death, under the feet of Jesus (1 Cor 15:20-28). The Bible tell us about that day in order to give us hope in this lifetime.

This is why the Bible often talks about the restoration as “rest” (Heb. 4:11). The resurrection of Jesus signaled that sin and death had been conquered, and that what happened to Jesus will happen to all who know him as Lord as Savior.

So if you are here today and tired because of the brokenness of the world or its effects, I want to remind you that what happened to Jesus is going to happen to you one day. The same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 1:4) is the same Spirit that is going to raise you up on the last day. And the reason why we are told about the empty tomb and why Peter says that suffering is limited is to help us think correctly about suffering.

For those who are in Christ, suffering is not our future because Jesus conquered sin and death.

### **3) Grace is available**

The third truth that we need to keep in mind is connected to the phrase “the God of all grace...” It is interesting and instructive that Peter quickly turns from the reality of suffering to the reality of who God is. He moves from what is coming to who God is.

I think that this is one of the fundamental truths to keep in mind when we are facing opposition or suffering. You see, there are any number of questions that you can ask in your attempt to make it through hardship. You could ask: What is going on? Why is this happening? How am I going to make it? Those are not bad questions to ask unless you neglect to ask this question first: Who is in control?

As I’ve studied the life of Job, it is very clear that God pointed Job back to the character of God as his ultimate hope. God never answered the *why* question, but He did answer the *who* question. God kept pointing Job back to God because there is more hope in *who?* than *why?* So Peter points hurting people to God.

He doesn’t just point them back to God in general, but he says, “the God of all grace.” Peter is highlighting something very important about the character of God – He is a God who helps people. How does He help us? Grace is what God gives to people when God forgives them through Jesus – “for by grace you have been saved through faith...it is a gift of God” (Eph. 2:8-9). In 1 Peter 5:5 we were told that He gives grace to humble. In 1:13 there is grace that we are going to receive when Jesus returns. As the apostle Paul struggled with his thorn in the flesh, he heard from Jesus “my grace is sufficient for you...” (2 Cor. 12:9). Grace is what God promises to provide when we are generous, to help us with the loss of what could have helped us (2 Cor. 9:8).

Grace is the help that comes from God. It is the way that God helps us with our sin. It is how He helps us with the risk of being humble. It is what He provides to help us endure. It is what He promises in the future. And it is what fills in the gaps when we create our own suffering by giving things away. God can help us.

This is why suffering of any kind is traumatic and so helpful at the same time. It reminds us that we are not in control of our own lives and that we need God's grace. Suffering reawakens us to the reality that we are not "the God of all grace." Suffering shows us how limited we really are.

So if you are not yet a believer in Jesus, this truth is really the sum total of what the entire Bible is about: we need God's help. We're sinners. God is holy. And we need His mercy.

If you are a hurting believer under the weight of suffering, can I remind you that the God of all grace is ready to help you today? Although your life may be hard and disappointing, God is ready and able to pour out grace into your life – again and again and again. Why not turn to Him again today and ask for the grace that you need? He's the God of all grace!

And if you are not yet suffering, I want to encourage you to 1) understand this principle and 2) practice living on it through generosity. Giving practices trusting in God's grace. It is choosing to suffer loss because you believe that God's grace is better and more secure than what money brings you.

When we suffer, we need to keep coming back to the God of all grace.

#### **4) There's a plan**

The fourth truth related to suffering is something that we've seen before but we need to keep reminding ourselves about. The next phrase in our passage is "who called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus..." This statement is loaded with meaning, and it is connected to God's plan for each of our lives.

It is loaded with words that capture the depth and richness of God's redemptive plan. Three phrases are noteworthy:

**"called you"** – This is an important word and concept in 1 Peter. It means that God has sovereignly placed a purpose over your life for His redemptive plan. When someone is "called" in the Bible, it means more than just an invitation; it means you have been chosen and commissioned. You didn't just receive a call; you received a calling. Peter uses this word four other places in 1 Peter: 1) 1:15 – for description of God ("he who called you"), 2) 2:9 – as a description of the transformation from darkness to light ("who called you out of darkness"), 3) 2:21 – for an explanation of the role of suffering ("for to this you have been called"), and 4) 3:9 – the responsibility to not repay evil for evil ("do not repay evil for evil...to this you were called").

**"to his eternal glory"** – the calling is to a future hope and a future glorification. God's plan for all of His children, as it was for Jesus, involves a place of exaltation in the future. Suffering now leads to the crown in the future. Take note that the plan is not for that exaltation to happen now. The very nature of a Christian's calling is connected to the hope of future glory, and the hope in suffering is directly connected to the promise of future glory. The entire Christian life is based upon a belief that there is a day coming where God is going to make everything right. God's plan is working toward that completion.

**“in Christ Jesus”** – This is, of course, the means by which the calling happened. Without the work of Jesus on our behalf, there would be no plan. Everything about the plan of God is only possible because it is in Christ Jesus. But there’s more. Jesus not only inaugurated the plan of God, the glory of Jesus in the life of His followers is the plan. In other words, the glory of the restoration means that we look like Jesus! Therefore, we can know that God’s plan for us is to make us into the image and likeness of His Son. And the Bible tells us that everything in life works to accomplish that goal and objective (Rom 8:28).

That becomes a very important and liberating thought when you are going through suffering. It is life-giving when you come to fully understand it. This can make you joyful in the midst of loss, terminal cancer, unfair treatment, and persecution. God is working out His plan for your life, and there is nothing that hinders His process of making you more like Jesus. The question is whether or not we want this formation of Jesus in us.

One of the key truths to remember in suffering is this basic concept that God has a plan to make me more like Jesus, and it is absolutely worth it!

## **5) Live on promise**

The fifth truth that we need to know about suffering is that God promises to help us endure all the way to the end. This is similar to what we heard before about “the God of all grace.” However, there is a specific promise here. Namely, that God is going to help them endure to the end.

It is not just that God possesses all grace, but also that believers can live on the promise that God Himself is going to help them both now and in the future. The promise that is given here is ultimately fulfilled in the future, but we receive help even now.

There are four words connected to God’s promised help: restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish. They are all unique words, but they all communicate the same message. What is the promise? That God is going to complete what He’s started in you. We’ve already sung a song that captures the essence of this important doctrine:

*When I fear my faith will fail,  
Christ will hold me fast;  
When the tempter would prevail,  
He will hold me fast.  
I could never keep my hold  
Through life’s fearful path;  
For my love is often cold;  
He must hold me fast.*

One of the frightening things about grief or suffering is the fearful thought of whether or not your faith will hold. And yet the Bible promises that God will help you. This text is one of those anchor texts, helping us to know that God will help us be faithful to the end.

What does God promise to do?

- To restore – to mend what is broken and make you complete
- To confirm – to make you stronger and more able to endure
- To strengthen – to increase your resolve and determination
- To establish – to make you grow deeper in what you believe

Through suffering God supplies the grace mercy and the help that we need in our hour of testing. And through the struggle God is at work to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish His children. I can tell you from my own experience that sometimes we know that is happening. We can see the ways that God is helping us. We can feel the difference. And at other times, it may take longer seasons before we actually see the work of God's grace in our lives.

The key is to learn to live on God's promise to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish us. We must believe that God is at work – molding us, shaping us, and helping us. And we must believe that when the trajectory of our life is complete and when God has finished His work in and through us, we will be completely restored, confirmed, strengthened, and established.

To suffer well, we must live on that promise.

## **6) Ends in worship**

The final truth to remember in suffering is its connection to worship. Verse 11 is a beautiful doxology that exults in the sovereign dominion of God and His eternal rule. It is a fitting way to end because this is, as Jonathan Edwards said, the end for which God created the world.

The aim of redemption, the aim of creation-fall-redemption-restoration, and the aim of our suffering is to magnify the worth, the glory, and the dominion of God. Suffering can become a platform for worship. Suffering *will* become a platform for worship. The arc of redemption lands in the exaltation of God's purposes and the fulfillment of His plan.

The beauty of God's plan is that every tear, every pain, every trial, and even death itself are swallowed up in His victory. The cross looked as though it was a defeat for God's purposes, and it became the means by which salvation was offered. That is how God works! Nothing can stop the divine plan for God to be exalted.

And here is what's unbelievable: those who have been rescued by Jesus love this plan! They know that the entire purpose of salvation has been to show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us (Eph. 1:7). But the fact that you know this and love this is a miracle. Before Jesus, you were set on your own dominion and your own glory.

But the gospel has created new longings, new desires, and new affections in you. Because of God's grace, you love the glory of God and the hope of His future reign. And suffering only creates that longing even more. In our pain and in our struggle, our love and hope for God's dominion can grow deeper.

This is what makes suffering ironically glorious. It strips away the veneer of our lives and reminds us what is truly valuable, lovely, and worthy. Suffering reminds us that everything in life ends in worship.

I don't know where you are this morning on your journey. You may be suffering deeply. You may be in a season of relative peace. Or you may have this sense that God is preparing you for something in the near future. Regardless, these six truths are important to remember because like thunderstorms in Indiana, suffering is just on the horizon.

But that doesn't mean we should despair. We should use these truths from 1 Peter as a reminder that God uses suffering for our good and His glory.

How do we think about suffering? This text reminds us that:

- 1) It's expected
- 2) It's limited
- 3) Grace is available
- 4) There's a plan
- 5) Live on promise
- 6) Ends in worship

To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

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