

# Why Do Christians Suffer?

*Our Identity in Christ*

By Ty Blackburn

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** 1 Peter 4:12-19  
**Preached on:** Sunday, May 12, 2024

**Providence Church**  
2146 Buford Hwy  
Buford Hwy, Duluth, GA 30097

**Website:** [www.providenceduluth.org](http://www.providenceduluth.org)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch](http://www.sermonaudio.com/providencechurch)

This text we're looking at this morning, again, that we began looking at last Sunday, 1 Peter 4:12 to 19, I want to this morning address this text with a question. A question and the question is this: why do Christians suffer? Why do people whom God loves so much as he loves believers, as we just read about, can he forget us? He's inscribed us on his palms. Isn't that amazing? 700 years before Christ, that's what God said, "I've inscribed you on My palms." The wounds of Christ. He loves us with an everlasting love. He loves us with a perfect love, and yet he allows his precious children to suffer and there are many Christians, professing Christians, who stumble at this, and genuine Christians can stumble as well.

Why is it that God allows suffering? Why do Christians suffer? One of the things we see is that life is hard in a fallen world. Life's just hard. I mean, the good days are wonderful, but in general, hard days are coming. If you're in a good day, hard times are coming. If you're in hard times right now, pray for grace and for better times, but hard times are going to come after this. And within the church, life is hard. In fact, it's interesting as we read this passage, he's going to mention that judgment begins at the household of God, that is when God is going to deal with all the problems in the world. And boy, there are lots of problems in the world, aren't there? When God's going to deal with all the problems in the world, he starts at home. He starts in his house. That's the language of this verse we're going to read in a moment and when he says that, he's echoing what he said, he used that same word, house, in 1 Peter 2:5, he's building a spiritual house, that is a spiritual temple. He's not talking about this building, he's talking about the spiritual building of the body of Christ, the believers. But God begins judgment with us and so, he brings affliction to us to test us and to prove us and to help us grow. We're going to see that.

So why do Christians suffer? 1 Peter 4 verse 12.

12 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. 14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ,

you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; 16 but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. 17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? 18 AND IF IT IS WITH DIFFICULTY THAT THE RIGHTEOUS IS SAVED, WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE GODLESS MAN AND THE SINNER? 19 Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we come in need of grace, mindful that, Lord, apart from Your work in our hearts, we know nothing. We're not able to know anything of eternal value, even Your word, without Your Spirit ministering it to us, Lord because of the hardness of our hearts will not produce what You want it to, but with Your Spirit, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, You can accomplish all things, and Your word will not return to you void. So bless us, Lord. Help us. Teach us. Offer the glory of Your Son. We pray in His name. Amen.*

So why do Christians suffer? I want to suggest to you from the text this morning, three reasons that are here in this passage, three reasons, and why does God allow us to go through what he allows us to go through. The first reason is suffering is fundamentally necessary. Suffering is fundamentally necessary. We talked about this some last time, but I want to dig in a little more on this this morning. Suffering is fundamentally necessary. He says, "Don't think it's strange. Don't be surprised." We noted that the verb "do not be surprised" last Sunday is actually a verb form of the word for stranger. "Don't think it's strange" could be another way to translate this, and then he uses the word strange also as an adjective when he says "those strange things were happening to you," at the end of the verse. So it's emphatically saying, "This is not strange. It's not foreign. It shouldn't be that way. You shouldn't see it that way because that's the last thing it is, is something odd for Christians to suffer. But instead, understand that it comes upon you for your testing." That's the language of the New American Standard, "which comes upon you for your testing." There's purpose. We talked about this last time. It's purposeful. It prepares you. It works in you. Suffering does something that is fundamentally necessary. It's essential for our well-being.

I love the song that we sang earlier, John Newton's song, to the tune that we sang it to. I like new songs with a familiar tune are a good way to do that so you can really focus in on the words. "I ask the Lord that I may grow." Don't you want to grow? How about you ask the Lord, "Lord, I want to be free from sin"? You pray earnestly for that, and what does he do? According to that song, he lets you see how ugly your sin is. He lets you experience the onslaught of the enemy. He lets you experience trials, because those are the things through which he will answer your prayer. Not the way we ask for it, though. We would like it just to be instant, right? "Lord, instantly deliver me from the sin."

Occasionally you hear somebody give a testament where they were instantly delivered from a sin. Now, I think they're going to have to learn to walk in it at some point in the future. Sometimes God gives an extraordinary grace when somebody gets saved, and maybe an alcoholic doesn't drink again, or someone who's bound in another type of sin has tremendous victory. But that's not the norm. The normal way is that he gives some relief and then you have to learn to battle because there's something about the battle that makes you dependent upon God and see that he really is everything that we need.

So, suffering is necessary, in this letter, it was necessary for Jesus. In fact, the word suffering is a key word in the book of 1 Peter. It occurs 14 times in the book, three times in the passage we read, though you heard it four times because they supply one word to make it make sense in italics in verse 16, "but if anyone suffers as a Christian." It's not technically there, but the idea is from what he said before, "see that none of you suffer as an evildoer, but if anyone as a Christian." But three times in the passage, the word suffering and "sufferings of Christ" are a key phrase that we saw in verse 13, "but to the degree that you share in the sufferings of Christ." Now think about this for a moment. Why did Christ have to suffer? Was his suffering necessary? Of course. Without the sufferings of Christ, we are still in our sins. And Peter uses that phrase a number of times when he talks about a lot of our suffering, but he also talks a lot about the sufferings of Christ. As we just read, 4"13, "to the degree you share the sufferings of Christ"; chapter 5, verse 1, we're going to read, "Therefore I exhort the elders among you as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ"; chapter 2 verse 21, "you have been called for this purpose since Christ also suffered for you." Christ suffered for you. He expands on that in verses 23 to 25, "while being reviled, He did not revile in return. While suffering," that is Jesus, "while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously. And He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness, for by His wounds you are healed." His suffering brings our healing. His suffering was necessary. Chapter 3 verse 17, "For it is better if God should will it so that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong, for Christ also died for sins." The idea is here his suffering was death that he might bring us to God. His suffering was purposeful. His suffering was necessary. And the reality is that the New Testament makes clear that our suffering is purposeful and fundamentally necessary in the same way his was.

Now, not to bring about salvation. We can add nothing to the merit of Christ. His suffering and his suffering alone are sufficient to pay for the sins of everyone who will ever believe, but the Lord has ordained that we follow in his footsteps, in his path, and the path is a path of suffering. In fact, that's the whole point of what he says in chapter 2 verse 21, "since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." We looked at that a few months back and we saw that that is the most emphatic way of saying, Peter is saying, "You have to follow Jesus exactly and walk exactly as He did." The word example means to have a pattern that you follow after, that you try to, and we talked about it, it's like they would use this word for example, in education, educating children to write. They would write the letters across the top of the page as an example for them to write. Remember, you probably learned that. I don't know if kids still today even learn how to write. They don't need to, I guess, now with the

computers and all that. But in the day, we all know what it was like. You had to learn to write, make your letters, right? And you had to look at an example, and you had to then follow it. That's the word. Jesus' suffering is an example. His life is an example. Look at his life and follow that. Do it exactly the same.

An example for you to follow. It's not just an example, that's enough, but he says, "No, you follow that example," and then he adds the phrase, "in His steps," which we talked about at the time means literally stepping in his footprints. The most emphatic way he can say, "Listen, Jesus left you an example to follow. You're going to have to suffer. Suffer as He suffered." That's what he's telling us and he doesn't do this whimsically. In the same way the sufferings of Christ were necessary for our salvation, somehow the sufferings that we share now are necessary for our sanctification to make us holy in our experience. He makes us holy in our standing. What Jesus has done finishes forever your need to be made holy before God in your standing, your position. You believe on Christ, you are declared righteous forever, sanctified, in some sense, set apart unto God forever. But there's a sense in which sanctification has not only that sense of eternal separation from what you were before, it has a practical ongoing experiential element where you become more and more set apart in your life, set apart from sin unto God. And suffering is absolutely necessary to that element. There's no other way around it.

It's a picture of how awful sin is. It's a picture of how awful the world is. How great is our enemy, the devil, that the only way that we can learn holiness really is through the path of suffering. It is necessary, but it's interesting to even ponder. I want you to think about this. When Jesus says, what's his invitation that he issues to the disciples and to us? He says, "Come follow Me. Come follow Me." It's not just "accept Me." That's, of course, that's what it means. It means "believe on Me, receive Me, but receiving Me means following Me," and what does following him look like? Luke 9:23. What does it mean to follow Jesus? He says, Luke 9:23, "If anyone comes after Me, wants to come after Me, If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me." This is what the Christian life looks like, Jesus says, self-denial and daily crucifixion. Take up his own cross spiritually, as it were, not literally, of course, spiritually saying that the Christian life is a life of suffering but it's suffering that is continually actually resulting in greater joy, greater love, greater hope, greater victory. But it is the path.

I want you to look with me, turn forward in your Bible, past James to Hebrews. We read earlier from Hebrews 2, chapter 5. The necessity of suffering, suffering is fundamentally necessary for the Christian life. It's necessary in ways we don't understand for Jesus. When we think about his suffering, we think about the cross, which ultimately, that's the ultimate experience of suffering. He bore our sins in his body on the cross. He was a propitiation for our sins. That's the climax. But what the author of Hebrews is saying is that it was necessary for him to suffer all along the way. That's why he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.

Look at Hebrews 5.7. "In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He

was heard because of His piety." Now he seems to be saying, in one sense, that his life was a continual offering up of prayers and supplications, but he focuses in, zooms in on Gethsemane, that his loud crying and tears that Jesus poured out, asking the Father if there'd be any way to save him from that hour, the hour of becoming the sin-bearer, experiencing the wrath of the Father. And this experience, it was real. It was agonizing. We read in Luke's account that he sweat drops of blood, that his anxiety at the cross, not the physical as much as the spiritual, the reality that he would be under the Father's displeasure and wrath was so burdensome, so overwhelming that he began to have blood come out of his sweat pores, something that happens when the capillaries, you're under such anxiety that the capillaries near the skin burst and blood literally comes out. It's something that physicians see on the rarest of rare occasions. Jesus experienced that in Gethsemane. And imagine what the awesome spiritual weight was. The agony of that.

So he says, think about that. Now we understand that part of the suffering, but look at what he says as we continue reading. "Although He was a Son," verse 8, "He learned obedience from the things which He suffered." Now wrap your mind around that. He's the perfect sinless Son of God but here the Scripture says he learned obedience. He never failed to obey. I mean, imagine that. The gospel is this, the gospel is the glorious exchange that happens on the cross, is God takes the sins of everyone who would ever believe, and he credits them to Christ, that is, my sin, your sin is put on Jesus. "He who knew no sin became sin for us," 2 Corinthians 5:21. He puts our sin on Christ, and he punishes Jesus with the punishment that you and I deserve, and then, in exchange, he gives you his perfect righteousness. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." That is, we receive his righteousness, that is, for more than 30 years, probably 33 years, Jesus was tempted in every way, yet without sin. He was a perfect, sinless infant. And you can tell an infant is a sinner. I mean, think about the way they cry sometimes. It's like, man, "If I could grab your neck right now, mom, I would just squeeze it, because you are not doing what I want you to do right now. I've had to wait longer than I should have." Maybe I'm going a little too far, but you know that's in there and you definitely see it when they're about two. The defiance that you can see in a little child. I mean, that's not all the time, but you just see it. Man, that is something, that is the evil that's in my heart is right there in that child. But God is a God of grace. There's so much beauty, too. But Jesus wasn't like that.

I can't imagine what that was like. Mary, man, having a baby like Jesus and then a little boy like Jesus who always did what he was told, never told a fib, always perfect righteousness, perfect, perfect, perfect, every day and yet, this text says that his obedience grew, that he learned obedience, and he learned obedience from the things which he suffered. What does that mean? It means that as he went through the agony, agonizing things in his life, the agonies of life in a fallen world, and then the agony of having to experience the reproach of people, the misunderstanding of people, the despising of him because men hate light and he was light. As John says, "He came to His own and His own did not receive Him," because they didn't want the light, and his life was light, and so he knew rejection and rejection. He's a man of sorrows acquainted with grief. And I love this, though. He is a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, but you also read Scriptures that says the other side of it. He was anointed with the oil of gladness above all

of his companions. Jesus' life was like Paul said, as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Filled with sorrow, yet filled with joy, because his joy is in God.

But he's experiencing these things and as he goes through trials, he's learning obedience. Never failing to obey, but learning. And think about this. I mean, think about how we talked about last week, Abraham. Abraham loved God before he offered up Isaac. But man, when he went through the testing of offering up Isaac, he loved God to a new level, didn't he? That's the path that Jesus walked, too. He walked the human path of deepening obedience throughout his life. He learned obedience and how did he do it? Through the things which he suffered. If suffering was necessary for Christ to learn obedience, how can it be anything less than that for us? He says he was made perfect, having been made perfect, that is, reaching the complete measure of the fullness of obedience, God giving him more and more opportunities, like he moves from smaller to bigger to bigger to finally the climax of the cross, which he says, "Father, if this cup could pass from Me, nevertheless, not My will, but Thy will be done." And in that final surrender, the perfection of obedience, and now, as he says, having been made perfect, he became to all those who obey him the source of eternal salvation. He had to live that life. God couldn't just send down a 33-year-old man and have him die. That would be a spotless lamb, but it would be a lamb without a record of righteousness. He sent down a baby in the womb and he went through all of the agony of the physical life that we do, all of the things and trials that we have, he had; he was tempted in every way, but he never once failed the test and each test brought him more and more human perfection of righteousness.

So if Jesus needed that to perfect him, you and I get saved, if you know the Lord Jesus Christ, truly, if you've repented and placed your faith in the Lord, you've been born again, you have a new life, but your new life is supposed to grow, right? You don't just get saved to stay as a baby and go to heaven. You're to grow and to mature and to look more and more like Christ. The whole point is for you to look like Jesus and me to look like Jesus and how are we going to do that without the path of suffering?

Back to 1 Peter, he's told us this over and over again. I like what he says in chapter 4, verse 1, "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Suffering helps kill sin, particularly the suffering of suffering for righteousness' sake, but suffering helps kill sin if you keep your eyes on Christ. Now, it can make you more bitter if you don't, but the believer's path is to embrace it. "Yes, Lord. Take this cup from me, but nevertheless not my will, but Your will be done." That's how we're supposed to walk through the things God brings in our life, to put our feet in his footsteps and to walk as he walked. And the beauty of it is we don't have to do it in our own strength. We continually ask him, "Lord, help me. Give me grace. I don't want to walk through this, but You walked through everything. Give me Your grace. Give me a heart to embrace this. Help me, Lord." And we walk through it by his power, his Spirit. He empowers us. He calls you to something, and faithful is he who called you, he also will do it. He will give you the power.

So suffering is fundamentally necessary. Why do Christians suffer? Secondly, suffering is eternally productive. It's eternally productive. Verse 13, "to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." Imperative there, keep on rejoicing. Stop being overwhelmed by the strangeness, the perceived strangeness of this, and see it's not strange at all, so stop thinking like that, he says, and instead of being perplexed and kind of dumbfounded by what's happening to you, start rejoicing and keep on rejoicing as you suffer. That's certainly counter-intuitive. But he says "keep on rejoicing so that you may rejoice with exultation at the revelation of His glory." Keep on rejoicing now so that you will be able to rejoice even more with exultation when Jesus is revealed, that is, at the return of Christ. He's basically saying if we learn to suffer well, and what's suffering well look like? In this verse, what he's emphasizing, there's other things the Bible says about it, but in this verse, what it's saying, do you want to suffer well, this verse says, keep on rejoicing. This says, obey the command to rejoice in the Lord always.

How do you do that? Well, he starts to help you with that in what he even says in verse 13, "keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation." He's saying suffer well by rejoicing in God in the moment and knowing that the suffering was going to produce great joy later. Like this phrase, "to rejoice with exultation," it's like to rejoice with great rejoicing. He's piling up words here. He uses this phrase, this translated exultation in 1:6 and 1:8, greatly rejoice, in this you greatly rejoice. So it's like he used the word rejoice and greatly rejoice, two different words, but they both mean that. He's saying to rejoice with great delight. You will rejoice now in the moment, even though it's hard, rejoice, and how do you rejoice now? Rejoice in the hope of what is coming. If we suffer well, this is going to result in a great, glorious reward when Christ comes, and in great glory to him when he comes and he's saying, think on that.

The value of this suffering will be clear. This suffering, what he's saying is, the suffering you're going through is of great eternal value. It is producing something of great value. Doesn't feel like it but know that it is and it will be clear when Jesus returns. Suddenly all the things that we can't see, we will see and one of the things that we're going to see is the value in what God did in the suffering. There are times where, listen, we go through life and we suffer in ways and we don't, we should not pretend to know exactly what God is doing in any circumstance. I mean, sometimes you can kind of see and maybe trace his hand, but generally we just don't know. What is God doing? And we need to be humble and just acknowledge that. "I don't know what the Lord's up to, but I know He's up to complete good and blessing and magnifying His Son, and He only does the very best thing for His children. I may not know this, but I know that." And that's enough. But he's saying, even though you don't know what's happening here, don't just rejoice in God's goodness, rejoice knowing that God has brought this, and it is producing something incredible, and set your heart on that, and that's what even fills you with joy in the moment.

That's essentially what he says in Matthew 5, this is particularly talking about suffering for righteousness' sake, this passage is, when you suffer as a Christian, when people

abuse you because you love Jesus. But it also applies to suffering in general. But in Matthew 5:11, at the end of the Beatitudes, Jesus says in verse 10, actually, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And then he adds some more "blessed's" on the end. This is the only beatitude that got a lot of extra stuff, two more verses. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me," Matthew 5:11. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Rejoice in the moment as you're suffering because your reward is great. Look to the reward. Don't be preoccupied with the pain of the moment. Look to the reward. This is how the great men of faith did it. This is essentially, you read through the Hall of Faith, Hebrews chapter 11, you read again and again how they were looking not at the present circumstance, but at the eternal blessing that was coming. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were looking ahead. Moses, it said, did not enjoy, chose not to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, but he identified with the people of God and suffered with them because why? He was looking to the reward. Set your eye on the reward. Get an eternal perspective.

That's what he's saying here. Suffering is eternally productive. It's producing something of great value. But it's not just suffering in persecution. A really encouraging verse is found in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 17. Paul talks about all kinds of suffering in this passage. In fact, I want to say a word about the video on Wednesday night because there's a verse here that relates to this. I was there to hear Dr. Lyle, Patty and I were. Outstanding presentation. Best I've heard anybody talking about abortion and why it's such an evil thing, but also the beauty of how God has designed things. He talks about the moment of conception. Scientists have now observed the moment of conception. When the union of the sperm and the egg happens, the moment that life is born, there is a flash of light in the mother's womb. A flash of light. Where's that come from? 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." When God made the world, he said, "Let there be light," and there was light. When God makes a new believer, he gives a person new life, what he said here, that is, he says into our dark heart, "Let there be light," and there is light, and a picture of that's even in the conception of the human baby. Life and light. God sends forth his word and his light, and there goes life.

Well, he goes on after he says this to say, we have this treasure, this treasure of the light, of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. We know God now. We have an eternal relationship with him, but we have this treasure in earthen vessels. We have this treasure in clay pots. That makes sense. You don't put treasure in a clay pot. Not in that day. You put treasure in an iron thing or a gold pot or something that clearly tells people it's not trash. The clay pots are what they put the garbage in before they carry it out. They didn't have the trash bags that you can pull together and all that. So they put them in clay pots and they take that out and you dump that out. You don't care about the clay pots, but he says God has put the treasure of a living relationship with Christ, he puts it in clay pots, that is, physical bodies like you and me. And the clay pots get chipped and broken, and God does this to show the glory of what's inside, because the clay pot, the



difference between a clay pot and one of these nice metal pots is you can chip the clay pot and you can break parts of it and here it still is, but you can see inside the treasure shining out. That's what he's getting at. It's going to happen in these verses. Verse 8, "we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body."

Now skipping on down to verse 16, Paul says our life is a life of suffering. He says, verse 16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day." That's the beauty of the Christian life. As you get older, your hair turns gray, I've learned. In fact, I met somebody just yesterday who had not seen me in a long time and he commented on my hair. Thank you very much. Didn't recognize you, that kind of thing. Like, appreciate the encouragement. But the reality is we are wasting away. Our bodies are decaying. The outer man is decaying. But the glory of it is, if you know Christ, the inner man is getting better and better and heading toward perfection. The inner man's being renewed.

Look what he says in verse 17, "For momentary, light affliction." I love that. Look what he just talked about, persecuted, forsaken, struck down, afflicted, crushed, all these things happening to Paul and he says, "momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." If you were to draw up a balance sheet, he actually does this in this text, the words he uses are intentional contrast. Momentary, light, affliction. Momentary, light, affliction. Eternal, weight, glory. See that? He's describing the same realities with these two separate word groups. What you and I experience of overwhelming agony, like Paul experienced, he experienced more than I dare say any of us have experienced. He said, "When I count it and I look at it against eternity, it's momentary. It's light. Yea, it's affliction, but it's momentary and light."

Momentary, it's just a moment. It's just an instant. It's over, like that. Now, there are things that we have in this life that last years, but he's saying against eternity, it's nothing. It's like if you're a math person, you know whatever number you put over infinity, if you put some number, a great number, and you put a line and you put infinity below it, what happens to that number? It goes to zero. No matter how long, it's momentary compared to eternity.

Light. This is like light as a feather. It's so trifling. It's just easy to carry. Almost don't even know I'm carrying it compared to weight and the word for weight of glory, the word weight is a burden, something that's overwhelming. He says, what we have now is momentary and light, but what we're going to have then is going to be eternal and a weight, and it's not a weight that weighs you down, it's a weight that delights and thrills your soul. It's overwhelming, overwhelming joy, overwhelming reward. That's what he's saying.

That's the reality when we have our mind set on eternity and we see suffering is eternally productive, and he's saying that suffering produces this, that the momentary light affliction is producing. When you suffer well, it's producing. It's a word that's emphatic

about working it out. The momentary light affliction is working out for you an eternal weight of glory and I love this, "far beyond all comparison," in the Greek, hyperbole, eis hyperbole. Hyperbole, we transliterate that word into English with hyperbole. He uses the word hyperbole twice. Hyperbole unto hyperbole. Hyperbole means to, it comes from a word which means to throw over and above and beyond. And you think of the word hyperbole, I'm using hyperbole means exaggerating, you're saying way over the top. He says that the eternal, it wasn't enough to say momentary light affliction produces eternal weight of glory, he adds hyperbole unto hyperbole. It's over, above, and beyond, over, above, and beyond, over, above, and beyond, anything you can imagine.

That's the reality and he says, if you rejoice now in the affliction, back to what Peter says, you rejoice in your suffering, you keep on rejoicing, you keep on rejoicing in God, in his good purpose, and in his promises, no promise of the Lord will fail and he's saying to you, "If you are faithful in these little things, I'm going to bless you more than you can imagine." It's going to be far beyond anything we can imagine and so the heavier it seems to us, and you know, a lot of times we struggle most with looking at our brothers and sisters who are suffering and we think, "Lord, why are You letting them go through that?" And we should have compassion, we should have broken hearts, but we should not be questioning God's goodness and if we understand that if the Lord's called my brother to walk through this path, I wish he didn't have to, but I know God knows better than I know and I know God knows that this affliction, though it seems beyond what I can imagine, I don't think, "Lord, it seems it's more than he can bear." Well, part of the reason we're supposed to help bear those burdens and get in there with them and suffer with them and help them along the way. But even though it seems like more than that, I need, even in thinking about my brother or sister who are suffering, to apply these promises in my own heart so that I don't despise the ways of God and act the fool and question God, and then make myself of no benefit to them because I'm embittered about their circumstances. But if I embrace God's goodness... Now, it doesn't mean you go in immediately and say, "Hey, the Lord's got a plan," and all of that. No, sometimes you sit there and you weep with them for a week and you don't say anything. But if you know in your heart, and you're telling yourself the truth in your heart, and you're believing it in your heart, whenever you do open your mouth, it's going to be giving life and blessing. And even when you're not opening your mouth, if you're believing the right things, even a gesture, a pat on the back, taking their hand, praying with them, it's going to be life-changing. We have to discipline ourselves to think like this for ourselves and for one another because it really is true, suffering is eternally productive. If we believe it, let's act like it.

And finally, suffering is uniquely attractive to God. It is uniquely attractive to God. Back to 1 Peter 4 verse 14, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." Now he's talking again specifically about suffering for Christ but there are other verses that would say this also applies, even some of what you see in other, what we've already talked about in other passages that we could look at. But when someone suffers for Jesus, man, it draws Jesus to them. And I think what he's saying too is that there's something about suffering in general, the believer suffering and suffering rightly, that is trusting God, that draws God to want to dwell with

you in an extraordinary way. This, this is what makes suffering so precious. But he's saying, you're being reviled, you think you're being cursed. Somebody's reviling you, they're insulting you, they're tearing you down. You're being torn down for Christ, you are blessed. God is blessing you. God is pouring out his grace upon you even in that moment. No, you may not feel it, but you are being blessed. And in fact, you are becoming the kind of person that God is going to want to come down and make his glory known in right now.

And the imagery of this picture, the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. There's so much there. I think the imagery picks up from Exodus chapter 40, the building of the tabernacle, the tabernacle, the tent of meeting. When God took the people out of Egypt and he took them to Canaan, one of the first things he did was at Sinai, he had them build the tabernacle. It was a portable temple. It was a tent. And the Holy of Holies, the holy place, where inside the tent, the priest went inside the tent to minister to the Lord. And what happened when Moses did all of the work, when he finished all of the work exactly as God had told him, Exodus chapter 40, the end of the book there, he says, the Spirit of God, the glory cloud, descended upon the tabernacle and rested on it. The cloud picturing the glory of God, rested on the temple. In the same way, Peter's saying the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. Same thing happened when Solomon built the temple. Now the tabernacle becomes permanent. The place of meeting is now a physical building, the temple. And when the work is all finished, and everything is done, and I tell you, you read Exodus 39 and 40, you read 1 Kings chapter 7 and 8, you see all that went into it, and you find things like this repeated "As the Lord commanded him. They did exactly as the Lord commanded him, exactly as the Lord commanded him, exactly as the Lord commanded him." They're obeying, they're doing what God said, and when everything is set, then his glory descends and it says in 1 Kings 8 that the priest could not go in because the glory cloud filled it and the glory was shining out from it. And it's evident, "Look at God. God is with us."

He's saying when you and I suffer well, there's something about the suffering itself that makes God want to come and manifest his glory with you and share his glory in that moment. He sees that as attractive. Isaiah 57 verse 15, "For thus says the high and exalted One," listen to this now. Who is God? For Isaiah, he's the holy one, the exalted one. This is what the Lord says through Isaiah, "For thus says the high and lofty One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, 'I dwell on a high and holy place.'" We would expect that, wouldn't we? He's the high and lofty one. He's the holy one. Where would he dwell? On the high and lofty place. Look what he says next. "'I dwell on a high and holy place, And also with the contrite and lowly of spirit.'" The high and lofty one comes down to dwell with the contrite and lowly of spirit. Why do I dwell with the contrite and lowly of spirit? "I come in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite." God finds brokenness to be the most attractive quality in the life of his people.

When you are broken, God loves to come down and dwell with you and show you his glory and show others, so often it's showing others his glory through you. You may not even see that the cloud has descended. You still feel like you're just hanging on, but others are seeing the glory. Others are looking at your face and seeing the shining out of

Christ as you're bearing up in the moment. They're seeing his glory. This is the way God works. So suffering is not something to be despised, not for the Christian. I mean, yeah, we're not to invite it. We're not to look for it. But when God brings it, we should have a heart that once we see it's there and you can't... I mean, you know, if you can naturally escape it, you don't just go ahead and not have a surgery or not do what you need to do. You do the things that you can. But when you can't escape it and you know God has brought it, now embrace it. "Yes, Lord." You still can pray. I mean, if there be any other way, let this cup pass from me, but when you know God has said you prayed like that, and he said, I'm going to leave it with you, you need to be like the Apostle Paul, when he prayed three times the Lord would take that thorn in the flesh from him and Jesus said, "I'm not going to receive it. I'm not going to remove it." Why? "For My grace is sufficient for you. For My strength is made perfect in weakness."

So embrace it. and get ready to just see the Lord. Love him more, serve him more joyfully, and allow him to get more and more glory and others will see the glory. As we learn to suffer like this, we learn to suffer like this and help each other suffer like this, which is what our calling is until we go home, though the outer man is decaying, the inner man is being renewed, and there's a sense in which we're moving as he says earlier in that chapter, actually in chapter 3, we're being transformed into his image from glory to glory. That's God's plan. It's not the way we would have drawn it up. It never is how we would draw it up, but it's so, so much better.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Our Father, how grateful we are for the wonder of who You are, the beauty of Your ways, the perfection of Your will. Lord, teach us to want Your will, always above everything else, to truly be able to pray as Jesus taught us to pray that Your kingdom would come, that Your will would be done in our lives. Help us to long for what You want above what we want. Help us to despise our own opinion even, Lord, because we just don't know. And help us to treasure our Savior who has not only done everything necessary to make us right with You and has given us perfect righteousness, but He has laid out the path and He will walk with us through the path, because He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. I will never, no, never leave or forsake you." Lord Jesus, be our all in all. For those that don't know You, bring them to Yourself. Even now, help them cry out to You to repent and believe on You today. And make Your people, Lord, look more and more like You. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen.*