

Three elderly ladies were discussing the struggles of getting older.

One said, "Sometimes I catch myself with a jar of mayonnaise in my hand, standing in front of the refrigerator, and I can't remember if I need to put it away or start making a sandwich."

The second lady chimed in, "Yes, sometimes I find myself on the landing of the stairs and can't remember whether I was going up or down."

"Well," the third one said, "I'm glad I don't have that problem – knock on wood."

And as she tapped her knuckles on the table she responded, "That must be the door. I'll get it!"

As a former chaplain in the nursing home ministry and as your pastor, I know that there are many who struggle and suffer in this life. Whether it is a memory loss like the three ladies, our health, our finances, our marriages or other relationships, our school or work situation – whatever the case may be – to some degree, we all suffer through various struggles and trials in this life, and inevitably, the question always comes up – that question that never seems to go away – **Why?** If God is in control – and He is, if God is for us and not against us, then **why does He allow these things to happen to us? Why do we struggle? Why do we suffer?**

Depending on your situation, there could be several answers for this question of “*why*” when it comes to suffering – and I don’t pretend to have all the answers, but I know that one possible reason for our suffering is that we live in a fallen world, and as believers in this world, we tend to experience what the rest of mankind tends to experience. Accidents happen. As we grow older, joints seem to hurt more, and most recently, natural disasters occur that impact the lives of millions. Paul tells us in **Romans 8:22**, that all of creation suffers, so in that respect, we will all face suffering in this life. It’s just part of living in a fallen world.

Another possible reason for our suffering, and we don’t like to admit it – is our own sin. We tend to be our own worst enemies. I’m Public Enemy #1 in my own life. We make bad choices, we say stupid things, we engage in sinful and risky behavior, and surprise-surprise, we experience our own self-inflicted suffering. Go figure!

This morning in **1 Peter**, we are going to look at another reason for our suffering – a reason that will hopefully provide you a new perspective on suffering and maybe even give you some encouragement as you face your own difficulties and hardships in this life.

Now before we begin this morning, let me get you caught up a bit. Peter wrote a letter to believers in the churches situated in northern Asia Minor who were suffering. If you recall, Christians were being severely persecuted by the Roman Empire, after being falsely accused by Nero of setting fire to the city of Rome. And because of this intense persecution, Peter sends this letter to encourage the believers to remain hopeful and to live godly lives even in the midst of their difficult circumstances.

In his letter thus far, Peter has been encouraging these scattered believers to look forward, explaining that in light of their current suffering, they were chosen according to the eternal foreknowledge of God – God had a purpose all along, and in spite of their suffering in this life, there was another life waiting them. They had been born again to a living hope because they had a living Savior. And this living hope in Christ included an inheritance that was reserved for them in heaven, their true home, and as heirs of this heavenly inheritance – they were protected by the power of God – their salvation was safe and secure, so Peter encouraged them look forward in their suffering.

That brings us to **1 Peter 1:6-9**, where Peter says,

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Peter gives his readers a lot to chew on here, and I am going to do my best to break this down into some manageable bite size pieces. So, let's begin with **verse 6** where Peter says,

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

In light of the intense persecution and the suffering these believers were experiencing, Peter tells them that because of their living hope, being born again, having a heavenly inheritance, and a protected salvation (these things he mentioned in the previous verses), they can still **“greatly rejoice”** – they can still experience the joy of their salvation – even in their suffering. They can have joy when the circumstances in life suggest otherwise.

Now Peter is not denying their distress, and he's not glossing over their grief and their pain by suggesting they should wear big fake joyful smiles on their faces and go about their business as if nothing is happening. Church people are so good at that, but that's not what Peter is saying here.

Rather, he is saying is that in their suffering, there is another perspective to consider – there are other things that need to be taken into account – the first being that their suffering is only **for a little while**. Again, Peter is not minimizing the suffering, life can be hard and Peter knows this, but he is making a comparison for the sake of perspective. In comparison to eternity – which is forever, suffering is only for a short season – it's only **for a little while**. Now I understand that may not be comforting and encouraging for those who just want the grief and the heartache and the pain to stop right now – I get it, I wish my wife did not suffer with chronic pain, but it doesn't change the fact that everything in this life is very brief and temporary when compared to eternity that lasts forever and ever and ever.

Then Peter continues and says to his readers that they may have to suffer for a little while, **if necessary**. **If necessary**, speaks to design and intent, and yes, God may determine that it is necessary, for the sake of our spiritual growth, that we suffer through trials. God knows what is best for us, and He will permit us to go through **various**, literally meaning “*multi-colored*” **trials**. Trials are varied like colors, and as believers, we are not shielded from them.

Contrary to a lot popular preaching out there today, the Bible is clear that believers will face trials. Believers will experience trouble and tough times. Believers will walk through dark valleys. And if you question that, just spend some time looking at the life of Peter, or Paul, or John – all men of faith, all devoted to the Lord, and all suffered greatly in their lives. Believers will suffer, it's a normal part of the Christian experience, in fact, James tells us this very same thing in **James 1:2**, where he says,

“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials.”

Notice that James didn't say *if* you encounter trials, but **when** you encounter them. It's been said that people have either just gone through a trial, they are in the midst of a trial, or they're getting ready to face one. Believers should not be surprised when they suffer in this life – trials are expected – **but why? Why do we have to suffer? Why do we have to go through these trials?**

Well, I hope the next verse will give you an answer, at least something to consider. Look at **verse 7**.

⁷ so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

I want you to take special notice of the first two words in this verse – “**so that.**” Whenever you see these words “**so that**” in a passage, it means there is a purpose being stated. “**So that**” are words that begin a purpose statement. In other words, it is the beginning of an answer to a “*why*” question. **Why the trials?**

Peter tells us in **verse 7**, that as believers, there is a purpose for our trials, there is a legitimate reason for our suffering, there is *an* answer, not necessarily *the* answer, but *an* answer to our question of “*why*” – that being, we suffer through fiery trials **so that** our faith can be proved or tested. These trials are actually tests – tests that prove if our faith in the Lord is genuine or not.

If you noticed, Peter mentions **gold** being tested in the fire as a point of reference.

Did you know that it takes four tons of gold ore to produce one ounce of pure gold? During the refining process, the gold ore is heated in a giant furnace to 1900 degrees Fahrenheit until it liquefies; and once it liquefies, the impurities or the waste material floats to the surface, where it is skimmed off by a goldsmith, leaving only the pure gold at the bottom.

In ancient times, goldsmiths could prove they had pure gold when they could look at the gold and see their reflection. Pure liquefied gold under intense heat became mirror-like in appearance.

And just as the goldsmith tests the gold to see if it is pure, so the trials of life test our faith to prove its genuineness. God puts our faith to the test by allowing hard times and suffering to come – not to defeat us, not to destroy us, not because He is angry with us, but to spiritually develop us and determine if our faith in Him is real. Too many “professing” Christians have a false faith, or they put faith in faith, or they really have no faith at all, and this is revealed in their response to the trials and the suffering. How one responds is very revealing.

But here’s a question. **Doesn’t God already know if our faith is genuine or not?** I mean He is God, and He knows everything. **And if God already knows everything, then why does He need to test our faith?** Obviously, He already knows if I’m going to pass or fail the test, even before the test is given, so then **who is the test for?**

The test is not so God will know, it’s for us to know. Our faith is tested by God because we are often clueless of how much or what kind of faith we really have.

We need to know if our faith is real or we are just playing games and going through the religious motions.

How we respond to trials and to suffering tells us what we truly believe about God. Do we really trust Him in a particular area of our life? Do we honestly believe that our trials and our suffering are in the hands of God, and that He is working on our behalf? This test is given to prove to you and to me where we stand – do we have genuine faith in God. Do we really trust Him? We need to know this for ourselves.

But not only are trials given to us to reveal our faith, but this test also reveals our faith to our loved ones and to anyone else who may be watching to see if our faith is real. People do take notice to how we respond in the face of trials and suffering. Do they see Jesus reflected in our lives when circumstances are hard? Do we run to God to become better or do we run from Him in anger and bitterness? Do we place our weight on God, trusting He will hold us up under the heavy burden, or do we lean elsewhere?

God proves our faith to us, and to our loved ones, and to those who are watching us, and when we respond to God in faith in the face of our fiery trials and in our suffering, it brings honor and glory to God because we are in essence saying to Him – “*Lord, I trust You with my life, no matter what,*” with the future hope that one day we will hear from Him, “*Well done, good and faithful servant.*”

Then Peter reveals how we can face the trials and suffering. Look at **verses 8-9**.

⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

How could these believers face their trials and suffering with faith?

Only because their faith was grounded and rooted in Jesus Christ. Jesus was the object of their faith. In essence, our question of “*why*” becomes secondary – it takes a back seat to the more important question of “*Who?*” Who is my Lord? Who do I belong to? Who is always with me? Who is in control even in the chaos? Who knows the number of hairs on my head? Who has engraved my name in the palm of His hand? Who loves me more than I could ever know? It’s Jesus.

And even though these believers had not seen Jesus in the flesh, they accepted the testimony of those who knew Jesus like Peter, and they made a deliberate choice to

love and trust the Lord – entering into a personal relationship with Him by faith. Even though they did not see Jesus, talk to Him, touch Him, eat with Him, and walk with Him like Peter and so many others had – they loved Jesus and believed in Him.

Just like the recipients of this letter, our love and trust in Jesus is not based on physical sight either – it's found in a personal relationship with the Lord as well. God knows us, and He desires that we know Him too – that we live by faith in Him and not by sight, even in the midst of our fiery trials and suffering.

And consider this for a moment: If you believe that Jesus came to seek and save the lost, meaning you because He loved you, if you are convinced that Jesus took all of your sins upon Himself on the cross to pay your sin debt in full, if you accept that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day to usher in new life for you, if you are assured that an inheritance is kept for you in heaven, if you have no doubt that your salvation by faith is safe and secure by the power of God, then surely, **can't you trust the Lord in your trials and in your suffering? Can't you? That's the test isn't it?**

Peter tells us that in spite of the trials and the suffering in this life, knowing *Who* we now know, we can still **greatly rejoice**. Now, I don't believe Peter is saying that we should rejoice because of our trials and suffering – but that we can still rejoice in the midst of our trials and suffering by grounding and rooting our faith in Jesus. We can still be joyful and experience a deep-down sense that all is truly well with the Lord, even in our trials and suffering.

Even though we do not see Jesus now, we love Him and trust Him. We have a living hope in a living Savior, we have an inheritance kept for us in heaven, and we are protected by God. In Christ, our salvation is safe and secure, or as Peter is telling us, even now we are **obtaining as the outcome of our faith, our salvation**. In other words, we are saved, we are being saved, and we will be completely saved as the final outcome – past, present, and future. This is the outcome of our tested faith – our salvation.

And there will come a day when faith comes to an end, when faith is no longer necessary. Faith will not be needed in heaven as that which we have hoped for will be fully revealed and realized. Our salvation will be completed, and our inheritance will be fully experienced in heaven. We do not see Jesus now, but one day, as a blessing of salvation, we will finally see Him face to face and come to the conclusion that the trials and the suffering in this life were more than worth it.

There is a story about a man named William Montagu Dyke. This man was blinded at the age of ten through an accident. Despite his disability, William graduated from a university in England with high honors. While he was in college, he fell in love with one of England's most beautiful girls – though, of course, he'd never seen her with his eyes. He loved her, having not seen her. And they were to get married.

Just prior to the wedding, William had eye surgery in the hope that the operation would restore his sight. If it failed, he would remain blind for the rest of his life. William insisted on keeping the bandages on his face until his wedding day. If the surgery was successful, he wanted the first person he saw to be his new bride.

The wedding day arrived. The many guests – including royalty, cabinet members, and distinguished men and women of society – assembled together to witness the exchange of vows. William's father, Sir William Hart Dyke, and the doctor who performed the surgery stood next to the groom, whose eyes were still covered with bandages. The organ played the wedding march, and the bride slowly walked down the aisle to the front of the church with her father Admiral Cave.

As soon as she arrived at the altar, the surgeon took a pair of scissors out of his pocket and cut the bandages from William's eyes. Tension filled the room. The congregation of witnesses held their breath as they waited to find out if William could see the woman standing before him. He had seen nothing since the age of ten. As he stood face-to-face with his bride-to-be, William's words echoed throughout the cathedral, "You are more beautiful than I ever imagined!"

One day, we will experience the full reality of our completed salvation and our heavenly inheritance. One day, we will come face to face with Jesus, the One we have never seen and yet the One we have loved and trusted. And when we do, it will be so more beautiful and awesome than we could have possibly ever imagined, and our trials and our suffering in this life, in the here and now, will seem light and momentary in comparison. So, look forward and look up.

Source Material:

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