

The Suffering Church

1 Peter
Pastor Jeremy Cagle, May 21, 2017

Good morning. If you are joining us for the first time today, we want to say a special welcome to you. We are so glad you're here. We also want to let you know our church is starting a new membership process, and if you would like to join, please stick around afterwards. We're gonna do a Q&A for that. I was going to call it "Pester the Pastor," but I didn't know if that...It didn't sound too sanctified. So, just have that in the back in your minds. But you're welcome to ask anything about the membership covenant. We can help you think through that, if you would like to join our church. We would be so glad, if you would consider doing that. You can go downstairs, and grab your kids, and then come back up, and we'll start that time after the service. But we believe in the church here at Grace Fellowship, Amen? And we believe it's important, we believe it's necessary. It's important to God; it's important to us as well.

And in fact, we just finished a series called "Foundations of the Church," where we've looked at some foundational or fundamental issues for the church. We started that back in January and ended it last week. And in this series, we talked about what the church is, and what the church does, and we talked about how the church is different from the world, and how it's different from the parachurch. We talked about the importance of the church, and the leadership of the church, and the membership of the church, but the church is a big deal to God. It's no small thing to come into the house of the living God. Martin Luther said, "Anyone who wants to find Christ must find His church." He said, "How could you know where Christ is, unless you know where His people are?" And we think the same way as well.

And today, I want to build on this with a new series called "The Suffering Church." We have a foundation now; we've put that in the ground. We've poured in the concrete; we've let it settle and harden up a little bit. What do we do next? Where do we go from here? Well, I think if you would ask a contractor, he would say, "You put in a retaining wall," is that right? Is that the next thing you do? You put some support beams in to keep the house from falling in a storm. I don't have to tell you that life is not always sunshine. It's a beautiful day today but give it a couple days here in British Columbia, and it will rain. Right? Sometimes the winds blow through life. Sometimes a storm comes crashing in, and when it does, the house needs to stand. And that's what we're gonna talk about next: how does our church stand through the storms of life?

And if you would, turn with me in your Bibles to the book of 1 Peter. And as you're doing that, when you think of the saddest books of all time, you probably don't think of the book of 1 Peter, you think of the book of Job. If you pronounce it another way, it'll pronounce the word "job". That may be why it's so sad. That's a bad joke, sorry. I don't know if you've ever read Job before, but it's one of the longest books in the Bible and one of the saddest, because it's all about suffering. It's all about one man's pain. We're gonna talk about 1 Peter, but just to preface Peter's book, in the book of Job, Job loses his family, his home, his job, and his health, all in the first three chapters. You have 39 more to go after that. And after that, things don't get any better. In fact, after that, his wife tells him to curse God and die. Everyone dies in his family, but his wife, his helpmate, and that's her help and her counsel to him, "You just need to curse God and die."

It's that bad. And then his friends come along, and they tell Job that, "It's all your fault," that was their help. They said, "I'll tell you why this happened, Job. You sinned, you messed up, you blew it, and now you're in this mess." In the book of Job, it's just one heartache after another.

In fact, you can add to this, that we don't know how long the heartache lasted. The timeline in the book of Job is obscure. It could've lasted for years. It could've lasted for decades for all we know. And you can add to this, that satanic forces were involved. The book of Job tells us that Satan was out to get him. Listen, you might have had some trials, but I doubt that the devil was out to get you, not like this. He probably never went into the throne room of God and said, "Go after that man. I want to kill that man." But here's the good news in the book of Job: God cares about this man. That's why the book's in the Bible, to remind us that God cares about those who suffer. You might not have thought about this, but Job is one of the longest books in the Bible and it contains the longest recorded speech from God in the Bible. Chapters, I think, 38 through about 40, are all God speaking out loud to Job, because God cares about our problems. He cares about our misery. He doesn't just write the book of Job and end it by saying, "Eh, it's too bad." God cares.

We live in a hurting world, don't we? Do I have to tell you that? We live in a world where people suffer. The book of Romans says this world is groaning and we're all groaning with it. Just turn on the news and that's what you'll see, crying, after crying, after crying. You guys who watch the news every day at 5:00, I don't want to end my day that way. I don't know how you do it. You're stronger than me. It makes me so sad watching the news. Just talk to people on the street, you'll hear the same thing. I was talking with someone the other day, who said that they're sick, their spouse is sick, and they just got laid off from work. That's sad. I was talking with another friend, a friend from years ago, who told me his child was sick. They had juvenile arthritis, and his little daughter couldn't run or play with the other kids, 'cause her joints would swell up. That's awful. And we live in a world where this goes on, but the good news is that God groans along with us. The good news is that He goes through the heartache and the misery with us. He carries His people through the storm.

Some people think that once you get saved, the storm is over. After you come to Christ, it's just smooth sailing and easy winds, but that's not true. The storm just starts when you become a Christian. C. S. Lewis was once asked, "Do the righteous suffer?" And he said, "Why not? They're the only ones who can handle it." We're the only ones who can get through the storm, because God carries us through it. Oswald Chambers said, "Suffering is the heritage of the bad, the repentant, and the Son of God." He said, "The bad thief on the cross was crucified, the repentant thief on the cross was crucified, and the Son of God on the cross was crucified to remind us that trials come to us all." But the good news is that if you trust in Jesus, He will get you through the storm. We have a foundation here this morning, amen? I heard one man say that, "The bottom can be very low, but if you're with Jesus, the bottom is rock solid. He won't let you go farther than you can handle."

And this all brings us to the book of 1 Peter. 1 Peter is the Job of the New Testament. It's not as long or poetic, but it talks about the same thing, it talks about suffering. Other than the book of James, which comes right before it, but as far as I know, it's the only New Testament book devoted entirely to the topic of suffering. From cover to cover, it just talks about trial after trial.

It starts off in verse one, "To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia ..." and it ends in chapter five verse eight, "Be of sober spirit ..." or that's toward the end of the book, chapter five verse eight, "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." It starts off with aliens and it ends with lions. That sounds like a suffering kind of book.

And in the midst of this, Peter says, there's hope. In the midst of the lions and the aliens, there is something to hold onto in the storm. Just a couple of places where Peter talks about this, I'm gonna give you an outline, or at least, some discussion points of the book. But some places where he talks about this, chapter 1 verse 3, he says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope." You get that expression "living hope?" Peter says, "When you become a Christian, you have a hope that is alive; it's not dead." I don't know about you, but when I suffer, it feels like someone died, doesn't it? It feels like the life just got sucked right out from me. Peter says, "You don't have to feel that way. You have a living hope. You have a powerful hope. You have an energetic hope. You have a strong hope."

Chapter 1 verse 23, you see this word "living" again. It says, "For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." Peter says, "You have a living Word as well." God is always speaking to you, that's what this means, even in your storms, even in your trials. I'm sure you can attest to this as well, but when you suffer, it feels like there's a wall up there in heaven, doesn't it? You want to pray to God, you want to ask Him for it to stop, and you feel like you're praying to a concrete wall above you. Peter says, "That's not true either. You have a living and enduring Word from God. When you suffer, you can open up the Bible and see what He says to you."

Let me show you one more time where this word "living" is seen. It's in chapter 2 verse 4. It says, "You come to Him, as to a living stone, which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious to God." You have a living stone to stand on. You don't have a dead foundation, amen? You don't have a rock that's gonna mould, or decay, or rot with the passing of time. I've been told by the builders here in Chilliwack that if you put the foundation in wrong, the whole house can crumble. As a matter of fact, if you don't put it in at the right time ... You guys can correct me on this. I'm talking to the builders in the room ... the foundation can, well, it can move, right, with water in it and all kinds of stuff like that. Peter says, "You don't have that problem in Christ." He says, "This foundation won't move, because it's alive." In 10, or 20, or 30 years, it'll be just as strong as it is today. In 100, or 200, or 3,000 years, it'll still be standing, and you will still be standing if you stand on it. That's the point of 1 Peter: you can stand in the midst of a storm. You can make it in the midst of a trial.

It's been said that those who know their way to God can find it in the dark. And that's the point of 1 Peter: it's here to help you find God in the dark, when the lights go out, when you can't see through the tears. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning, and for the next couple of months, actually. I'm sure some of you are in a dark place this morning. Some of you are in the middle of a storm. And if you're not, you probably will be soon. I think it's been said you're either coming out of a trial, going into a trial, or in a trial. Some of you are groaning along with the rest of creation. This book is for you. You can add to this, that 1 Peter 1:1 says that these

people that he was writing to were aliens. I'll explain that a little bit in a minute, but they were in a storm, emotionally and culturally. They were in a storm, spiritually and geographically. Some of you can relate to that. You're not from Canada. Like me, you're an alien. You don't know what a toque is. You look forward to meeting one someday, but you don't know what one is. You don't know what a "washroom" is. You ask, "Can I go to the restroom?" And they start talking about a "washroom." I don't know what ... You don't know why colour is spelled with a "U" in it. You've never seen the letter "zed." I could go on, but you're an alien. You're a foreigner in a strange land, which can bring a different type of suffering. Maybe suffering is the wrong word. A different type of awkwardness, maybe, if that's the right word. How are you supposed to handle that kind of stuff? Well, 1 Peter is for you as well. This book was written to aliens, and we're all aliens, and I'll talk about that here in a minute. But it tells you how to handle emotional darkness, it tells you how to handle cultural darkness. It tells you how to find God in a storm, it tells you how to find God in another country. This whole book gives you something to stand on, and gives you light in the darkness, and that's what we're gonna talk about. Does that sound like an interesting book to you? Any of you relate to some of this?

Well, let's dive into it. We're just gonna give an introduction to the book of 1 Peter this morning. We're just gonna wet the whistle, so to speak. If you're taking notes this morning, I want to introduce the book by giving you several ways to get through your suffering. Since that's the theme of 1 Peter, let's just talk about some ways to get through your suffering in the book. We'll use that to look at a big overview, and then, in the weeks to come, we'll get into the details of this. The first way to get through your suffering is this: you get through your suffering when you understand who you are in Christ. You get through your suffering when you understand who you are in Christ. A good friend of mine, his dad's a pastor in West Tennessee where I grew up, and he told me his dad has gotten really sick and is kind of falling apart because he can't do the ministry anymore. And he's encouraged his dad by reminding him of who he is in Christ. You're not defined by your job. You're not defined by where you're from. You're not defined by your beautiful kids. You're not defined by your 2.5 cars. You get through suffering when you understand who you are in Christ. This is how Peter starts off the letter. He says that his readers are aliens, and then he goes right into saying who they are in Christ. If you look in chapter 1 verse 1, it says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen."

If you had a map of the Roman world in the first century, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia would all fall into the territory of Asia Minor. It's the same place the seven churches of Revelation are from. The Romans broke up their empire into territories, huge chunks of land, and one of them was an area located between the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea, known as Asia Minor. Today, it's the country of Turkey. We would call it the Balkan Peninsula. It's a huge chunk of land, about 300,000 square miles, and this is where these people were from. Peter actually says, "They were scattered there," in verse one, "To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout these places." The word in Greek is *diaspora* and we'll get into that next time.

But if you notice, Peter doesn't dwell on that. He mentions it, and then he moves on to say, "Who are chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father". Peter says, "Yes, you are aliens in a foreign land. Yes, you're scattered, thrown out of your homes, but remember that you were

chosen." Peter says, "Remember, you're aliens in a foreign land, but you're from another place," he says.

The word "chosen" means just what it says it means. It means, "God chose you, not because of something He saw in you, but because of His great mercy," verse three says. "Because of His foreknowledge," in verse two. As one author says, "Sinners are not loved because they're attractive; they're attractive, because they are loved." Think about that for a minute. That's the idea here. You're not chosen, because you are attractive, you're attractive because you are chosen. Salvation is all of God, amen? Salvation has nothing to do with works. It has nothing to do with your standing in the community, which had to have been encouraging to a group of aliens.

Aliens have no standing in the community. Right? Aliens don't fit in anywhere. That's the point. They're from another planet. They have nothing. They have no money, they have no credit, they don't have any history in the region, they don't even have a clue. Well, I got an example of that. I remember one of the first times I talked with someone from Canada. I was calling about a passport question to the Border Services, and a man picked up the phone, and I couldn't understand what he was saying. I know you guys, some people speak French in Canada, so I said, "Well, maybe he's speaking French." So I said, "Could I talk to someone who's speaking English?" And he said, "Sir, I am speaking English." I thought, "God, you're gonna have to do a miracle," because this is how my ministry started. I didn't have a clue. Peter says, "That's okay, because you're chosen." See, that's okay, because God loves you and that's all that matters.

He says in chapter 2 verse 9, that, "You're a chosen race." There, you see the word "chosen" again. That's also who you are in Christ. A race is a group of people brought together by blood, brought together by birth, that describes you. Peter says, "You have been brought together by the blood of Christ, by the new birth of the Holy Spirit." He said, "You guys lost your previous race when you were dispersed, but you got a new one. You lost your previous birth rights." When the Babylonians and Persians ... what they would do is when they took over an empire, they would take all the people groups and just mix 'em all around, so that there would be nobody to make a coup to take over the empire. Those of you who've moved to Canada, you did that by choice. See, these people didn't have that choice. They were literally picked up and transplanted, they lost their race. Peter says, "You have a new one now. You have new birth rights, a new standing in the community, in Christ."

In chapter 2 verse 10, he calls them, "A royal priesthood." They come to God like priests do. Priests have direct access to God, that's the idea here.

In chapter 2 verse 10, he calls them, "A holy nation." They're a new nation now. They lost their original nationality. Now, they have a better one: a nation of God, a Kingdom of God. But the idea is that you can get through suffering, because you have all of this in Christ. You can get through the pain, and the misery, and the confusion of being an alien, because you have something better in Him. In other words, "You are not aliens to God." That's what Peter says. This Jew of Jews, who grew up thinking the only people of God were the Jews, now says, "You guys are aliens no more." People may look at you funny, and talk to you funny, and make fun of

you, but God doesn't do that. Peter says, "God doesn't make fun of you. You're not an alien to Him and that's all that matters. He chose you."

You can look at this way: A little girl was once asked if she was afraid of walking through a cemetery at night, and she said, "No, I'm not, because my home is on the other side." You see, friends, your home is on the other side. It's not here. Even if you're from Chilliwack, your home, your eternal home is not Chilliwack, it's in heaven. When you die, your soul will not stay in Chilliwack. If you're in Christ, it will go to heaven, which means that you're an alien too. We're all aliens. Whether you grew up here or not, you're just passing through. This world is not your home, so don't get too comfortable here, that's the idea.

I don't know whether you guys have heard the expression, "You never see a U-Haul following a hearse." You can't take it with you, so don't get too comfortable, and don't be surprised when it rains on you, and the lights go out.

Let me say this another way: Are you afraid of walking through cancer? No, you're not, because your home is on the other side. What can cancer do to you? Kill you? Okay, you're in heaven - upgrade, right? Are you afraid of walking through a bad job? No, you're not, because your home is on the other side. What can a bad job do to you? Sanctify you? Okay, you're sanctified. Refine you? Okay, you're refined. Are you afraid of walking through a bad marriage? No, you're not, because your home is on the other side. That's what Peter is saying here, "You have something greater to hold onto, something greater to live for." Jesus died for your sins, so what do you have to worry about? Why should you be afraid of cancer? Why should you be afraid of anything?

I don't know about you, but I can handle anything, if I know it's going to end. Amen? A bad supper, if it's going to end, I'm not afraid of it. If I have to eat it forever, maybe not. But a bad book, bad movie, bad conversation, as long as it's going to end, it's okay. My friends, this is all going to end one day, so you can get through it. We're far too worldly in our thinking. One man said, "We're like a bunch of children making mud pies, when our Father is offering us a holiday at sea." We would rather focus on the mud and the dust of this life, than focus on the glories and the beauties of heaven. That's our problem. That's why our suffering is so bad. I think I heard a Middle Eastern Christian had a conversation with a Westerner and he said, "The difference between us and you," the Middle Easterner said, "Is that for you guys, suffering is something special." He said, "For us, it's just a way of life." I think if we suffered more, maybe we would be more heavenly-minded.

Have you ever heard of the dot and the line analogy? Does that sound familiar to anybody? Some of you heard of that. If I had a whiteboard up here and I put a dot on it, that would represent your life. It's just a dot. 70, 80 years, it's just a speck on the board. You barely see it and that's it. But if I drew a line across the board, that would represent eternity. It just goes on, and on, and on. It never ends, it's never over. And the question is, which one do you want to live for, the line or the dot? Which one do you want to focus on? Which one gets you through suffering? It's the line. Right? Let me tell you, friends, you don't want to spend your time focusing on the dot. That's like focusing your time on mud pies. You have something greater, you have something bigger. Get your mind off of things of this life and focus on Christ. That's one of the points of 1 Peter: you have something better in Him; you have a holiday at sea to look forward to. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

said, "You're a child of God and an heir of eternity. God knows you and you belong to Him, so go and live like it."

And that leads to another way you can get through your suffering is, you understand who you are in Christ, and secondly, understand what you have in Christ. Understand who you are and understand what you have in Christ. Peter goes on to say that, "You have some wonderful privileges in Christ that can get you through suffering." You have some benefits. We all go to work for the benefits. Right? When you're having a bad day at work, you think about the vacation time, don't you? Or you think about, "Well, at least, I got insurance for my kids." Or you think about the money coming in. It's about the benefits. You have wonderful benefits, if you're in Christ this morning. God shows you it's all of Christ, but as He chooses you, He gives you privileges, all by His grace.

For one thing, one benefit you have is you have an inheritance. If you look in chapter 1 verses 3-4, Peter talks about our inheritance. He says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." That word "inheritance" is directly tied to the idea of being chosen. You don't choose your inheritance, do you? It chooses you. None of you woke up today and said, "You know what? I think I'm gonna inherit a million dollars today. I'm just gonna make that happen." It doesn't work that way. Too bad. An inheritance is a gift and it's the same way with salvation. Salvation is given to you as a gift. It's all of mercy; it's all of grace. This is why Peter says, "It's reserved in heaven for you." Heaven is the safest place on earth; it's the infinite safety deposit box. If it's in heaven, you cannot break into it and trash it. Peter says, "That's where your inheritance is," which means that, no matter how much you fail, no matter how bad your job is, no matter how bad your marriage is, no matter how bad your alien-ness is, you will succeed if you have Christ. You'll be okay in Him; you have an inheritance. You come from Pontus, or Galatia, or Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, wherever you come from, if you're in Him, you have an inheritance.

You also have an example. That's another thing you have in Christ. You have an example of suffering. You have a perfect example. In chapter 2 verses 21 through 23, again, we're just hitting some highlights in the book of 1 Peter, but if you look in chapter 2 verse 21, it says,

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, "Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;" and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.

The word "example" in verse 21 is a colourful word. It could translate "pattern". It referred to a writing pattern that schoolchildren used to learn their letters. It was a block of wood that was placed under their paper and they would just trace over it, that's how they learned how to write. Peter says, "You have that in Christ." You have something to trace over, you have something to imitate. If your life is hard, you can look at His hard life and see how He handled it.

He says also in verse 21, you can walk in His steps. You can put your foot in His footprints, is the idea here. If you want to know how to suffer, look to Jesus, follow Jesus, He went through the darkness too.

A couple of other things you have in Christ, "You have an end to the suffering," in chapter 4 verse 7. (I'm not gonna read all these, just to go through them briefly.) Chapter 4 verse 7 says, "The end of all things is near." Remember, the idea, "It'll be over one day." You have a purpose to the suffering. And in chapter 4 verse 12, "Suffering is there to test you and refine you." "You have leadership in the suffering," in chapter 5 verse 1. It says that, "Elders or leaders are there to guide you through suffering, to help you in it." But all this is to remind you of what you have in Christ: You have a friend. You have someone to go through the suffering with you.

I think the worst part of suffering is being alone. Can you identify with that? You're alone in the cancer, you're alone in the job, you're alone in the marriage. Listen, if you're a Christian this morning, you are never alone. If you're in Christ this morning, you will never bear the load all by yourself. Several years ago, I was going through a tough time in ministry. I was being criticized a lot. There's a lot of ammunition, if you want to criticize me. There's a lot of opportunities. I felt like I was alone. And a sweet old lady in the church, who knew nothing about this ... I didn't tell anybody in the church what was going on ... and this lady gave me a card, I still have it in my Bible. It says this, it says, "Loneliness, our friend, when it forces us to enjoy the fellowship of God, as much as we would enjoy the fellowship of others." Isn't that neat? She didn't know I was struggling with that. She just came up and handed me this card.

I think we could put the word "suffering" into this card. I think we could say, "Suffering is our friend, when it forces us to enjoy the fellowship of God, as much as we would enjoy the fellowship of others." Friends, suffering is there to help you enjoy the fellowship of God. That's the point of it. It's there to draw you closer to Christ. It's not there just to hurt you. It's not random. God has a reason for it: He wants to draw you closer to Himself. Jesus was a man of sorrows, and until you experience sorrow, you'll never draw closer to Him. He was other things as well. He was a joyful man, He was a holy man, but He was also a sorrowful man. He was acquainted with grief, and until you're acquainted with grief, you can't know Him. That's why God gives it to you. In his book on death, Erwin Lutzer says,

Death is not the end of the road, it's just a bend. And the road winds only through paths, which Christ Himself has gone. Jesus does not expect us to discover the trail all for ourselves. Often, we say that, "Christ will meet us on the other side." That's true, but it's misleading. Let us never forget that He walks with us on this side, and then guides us to the other side. We will meet Him there, because we have met Him here.

And Lutzer goes on to explain that we've all gone to a travel agent, asking them to help us get to Hawaii or Alaska, because they have been there. They have actually travelled to those places. Jesus is God's travel agent. He's been to heaven, so He can help us, show us how to get there. More importantly, He can show us how to get there through our suffering, because He has suffered too. This is what you have in Christ. If you have cancer this morning, Jesus never had cancer, but He suffered worse than that. He suffered the wrath of God. He experienced all the hatred, and anger, and rage God has towards sin. If you had a bad job, Jesus had a bad job too.

His parents were so poor, they had Him in a manger. If you had a bad marriage, Jesus was never married, but He had bad disciples. One of them betrayed Him; all of them left Him at His trial. He suffered too.

You think of it this way, search all the religions of the world and you will never find another God who suffered for His people. Allah, Krishna, Buddha, none of them ever did anything like what Jesus did. In fact, none of them suffered at all. My friends, God suffers with you. He goes through the darkness with you. He holds your hand in the storm, because He loves you. Martin Luther said it this way, he said, "Affliction is the Christian's theologian. It brings a man closer to God than anything else ever could." He said, "I never knew the meaning of God's Word until I was afflicted," and some of you can identify with that this morning. The Scriptures became real to you when you were in a time of pain.

It brings us to one more way to get through our suffering, and that is to understand how you are to live in Christ. Understand who you are in Christ: You are chosen in a holy nation and a priesthood. Understand what you have in Christ: You have an inheritance and an example. But also, finally, understand how you are to live in Christ. Peter goes on to say that if you have all of this, an inheritance, and an example, and a purpose, if you've been chosen, then you need to live like it. And you live like it through the storm. The way some people act, as soon as tragedy strikes, boom, their life is over. Right? "I'm done. Just turn on the TV and I'm gonna zone out for the next 40 years." Peter says, "That's not the way it's supposed to be. Life goes on in a trial."

If you notice in chapter 2 verse 18, just before talking about Christ suffering, he starts mentioning specific people groups in the church to remind them that life goes on. He says in verse 18, "Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable."

We'll talk about this more later, when we get to the passage, but the word "servant" there could translate "slave". Many of the Christians in the first century were slaves. We don't know how many, but one early critic of the church said, "It's full of slaves." And as you can imagine, they suffered. To be owned by another human being and treated like their property was a suffering kind of thing. And Peter reminds them to obey their masters, "Obey those masters who are good and obey those masters who are bad. Submit to those who are gentle, submit to those who are not."

Then he mentions another people group in chapter 3 verse 1, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives." In other words, "Wives, be submissive when you suffer." And we'll talk about what that means. That doesn't mean be a doormat. That's not the idea. But he says, "Be supportive, even when your husbands don't believe." In verse 7, he turns it around, he mentions husbands. In chapter 3 verse 7, "You husbands in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she's a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered." Again, we're gonna dive into all that "weaker" there, just, it's actually a complimentary term; it referred to a priceless piece of china that was more expensive.

Peter says, "Treat your wives that way, husbands, even if they don't submit to you, even if they cause you to suffer."

Then he mentions everyone in verse 8, "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit." But the point is that life goes on, even where you're suffering. Life goes on, even when times are hard. You still have to be a godly slave, wife and husband in a trial. You don't check your Christianity at the hospital door and say, "I'll be religious when I come out of the room." You take it in there with you. I remember when my grandfather died, my grandmother would not stop working. Fixing meals, sweeping the floor, serving all of us, she wouldn't stop. And finally, I said, "Granny, if you keep doing this, you're gonna wear yourself out. Why don't you sit down?" And she said, "If I sit down, I'll lose it." She said, "This is helping me get through the pain." I think there's some wisdom in that. When you're going through a trial, there's time for reflection, and there's time to slow down, and let it all sink in for a minute, and absorb it, and sort it out in your brain. And there's also a time to pick yourself up and go on with life. There's a time to go back to sweeping the floors and fixing meals again. And you can't sweep the floors when you're in a hospital bed, but you can still be a godly wife, amen? And you can still be a godly husband. If things are bad at your workplace, maybe it's hard to have a good testimony there, but you can have a good testimony when you come home and spend time with your kids.

This is Peter's point here. See, the world doesn't stop turning in the dark. The house doesn't fall to pieces in the storm. This is the beauty of the Christian life. We can honour God, even when we're suffering. We can do the right thing, even when the world is all completely wrong. That's what's supernatural about the Christian life. It doesn't take any amount of miracles to do the right thing when everything's going right. It takes a miracle to do the right thing when things are going wrong. C. S. Lewis said, "The righteous are the only ones who can handle it." That's what he means. One ancient Roman said this, he said, "Say what you want to about these Christians, but they die well." Friends, that's what we're good at, we die well. That's our specialty. If you're in Christ this morning, that's what you signed up for. It won't make you a better hockey player. Being a Christian won't make you better in school. And maybe you'll be better, maybe you won't, but there's no necessary correlation. What the correlation is, is that it will make you better at suffering.

I love this quote: John Bunyan said, "Christians are like bells, the harder you hit them, the better they sound." We sound good when we're hit. That's our speciality. If you do a study of church history, you'll see that some of the most well-known Christians suffered horrendously. You would think that these men and women of God would be given gravy trails to heaven. "Follow the yellow brick road." They weren't.

Now, just a couple of examples. Martin Luther had stomach problems and battled with depression. There was one time Luther was so depressed, that his wife Katharina put on an all-black garb, a black dress, and she went around in mourning. And finally, Luther said, "Well, honey, who died?" And she said, "Well, according to you, God did." He got over it. John Calvin was called a walking hospital by his friends, because he was so sick all the time. He never could get well. Jonathan Edwards died in his 50s from a smallpox vaccination; the greatest theologian America ever produced died in his 50s by an accident. George Whitefield had asthma; arguably

one of the greatest preachers of all time had asthma. Who would have put that together in the whole scheme of eternity? Charles Spurgeon had gout. John Owen buried 11 of his children. J. C. Ryle buried two of his wives. John Bunyan spent 12 years in prison. And he said the hardest thing about his time in prison, was that he had a blind daughter that he couldn't see. And he said, "When she would come in to visit for just the brief moments in time," he said, "When she would leave, it was like ripping flesh off my bones." These are the men, and we can mention the women, who turned the world upside down for Christ, and they suffered horrendously. And they did it, so they could show others how to find God in the dark, to show others that God is still with us in the storm.

John Wesley said, "Even in the greatest afflictions, we should testify to God." Wesley said, "Even when things are at their worst, we still testify, or witness, to Christ." Alexander McLaren said, "Christ wrought out His perfect obedience through suffering and we should learn to do the same." Charles Spurgeon said (I can't finish a sermon without one Charles Spurgeon quote), "It's easy to sing when we can read the notes by daylight, but he is the skilful singer, who can do it in the dark, for he sings from his heart. He has not a book that he can see, save that which the Holy Spirit put there, and it is the Spirit, the divine author, who will get all the glory for his songs." Friends, this is why we suffer, so we will give God all the glory. This is why we go through trials, so that when we come out of it, or so that when people watch us in the midst of it, they will say, "There has to be a God, because there's no way anybody in their right mind would act like that."

We do this, so God will be glorified in our song. And so those are three ways to get through suffering in the book of 1 Peter, three ways to find God in the dark: understand who you are in Christ, understand what you have in Christ, and understand how you are to live in Christ. You live through the pain. Life goes on, even when we're suffering. We're gonna be looking at this book for the next couple of months.

Just a quick note on the Apostle Peter. This man really understood suffering. History tells us that Peter was ... After writing this book, sometime afterwards, he was captured by Nero and crucified upside down, because he said he was not worthy to be crucified as Christ was. He said, "Could you do it upside down, just so I don't mock my Savior?" And they said, "Okay." Matter of fact, history tells us, he watched his wife die of crucifixion right before he died, but God still took care of this man. Today, he's in heaven and we still remember him.

This brings us back to the book of Job. God took care of Job in the end, didn't He? You guys remember that story? The last chapter tells us that, "The Lord restored the fortunes of Job, when he prayed for his friends, and the Lord increased all that Job had twofold." God gave him back twice as much as he had. "And Job died an old man, and full of days." Friends let me tell you, the Lord will do the same thing for you, but in fact, He will give you more than twice as much, He will give you 100 times as much. Let me read to you this, Mark 10:29-30, Jesus says, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sister, or mother, or father, or children, or farms for my sake, and the gospel's sake, but that he will receive one hundred times as much in the present age." Houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and in the age to come, eternal life. Jesus says, you may not get your health back, if you follow Him, but you will get eternal life and that is much better, amen? You may not get your family members or your

friends back, but you will get more than that. You will get new family, and new friends, and brothers and sisters in Christ.

That's how Peter closes his book in chapter 5 verse 10. He closes by saying, "After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal grace, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you." God will take care of you, friends. The same God who is with you, who chose you in the beginning, will establish you in the end. The same God who was with you in the trials, will be with you in heaven. The same God who is with you in this storm, will be with you in the future. That's the message of 1 Peter: one day the suffering will end, and the darkness will be over, and the lights will come on. May we all live in light of that day.

Friends, my prayer for you is not that you won't suffer. Maybe, I selfishly pray that a little bit, but I know that you live in a world where people suffer. There's no way around that. My prayer is that you will suffer with hope when you do, and you will suffer with joy, because you have a foundation, you have a comfort in the storm. And that's what we're going to look at in the book of 1 Peter. Again, if you'd like to learn more about our church and how to join, just stick around afterwards, we'll do a Q&A, but for now, let's pray the Lord will bless us as we study how to be a church that suffers well for the glory of God and for His Kingdom.

Heavenly Father, I pray that this morning would be an encouragement to our church family, and in no way a discouragement. I think there's a healthy balance in talking about suffering. I don't want these dear people to suffer, but at the same time, I want You to be glorified in them. And I know that that is part of that process of glorifying Yourself, is to take us through times of trial. I pray that when You do that for our church, you would strengthen us and establish us in grace, that You would be our foundation in the midst of the storm. What I pray for those who are going through a trial this morning, that this series would be encouraging for them, that it would give them something eternal to hold onto, something greater than the things of this life. Lord, for those who are going through or having smooth sails right now, we rejoice with them in that, we thank you for that, and just pray that this would be food for thought for them, for when the trials do come. Well, we thank you for Christ, who has gone on before us and given us an example, given us salvation. May this series glorify Him, may our church hold high His name. We pray it in Christ's name, amen.