

1 Peter 4:12-19 | “Walking through Fiery Trials”
Preached on July 18, 2021 by Pastor Matt Brown

Today we will be studying through 1 Peter 4, verses 12 through 19, so you can turn in your Bibles to that passage.

After speaking about the end times, Peter now goes back to talk once more about suffering, which has been a common theme in his letter. *[pauseeeee]*

Let me ask you this question to begin: is the Christian life easy? Is it all smooth sailing once you get saved?

In the recent past, there was a trend among some pastors and evangelists to describe life after conversion as easy.

They made it sound like becoming a Christian meant beginning a trouble-free life.

They almost portrayed it as becoming a Christian meant everything in your life would just be wonderful all the time. *[pause]*

This also relates to what we learned in Sunday School recently as we watched a Christian documentary that showed what prosperity gospel preachers teach.

They teach that suffering is not what God desires for his children, and you just need more faith to avoid it or get out of it.

But these things are definitely not true, and the impact of that kind of thinking on the Christian life is disastrous. *[pauseeee]*

Yet in truth, pastors or evangelists don't have to push this kind of thinking because we inherently *think it*.

We assume, “Since I'm a child of God, God is for me, He is with me, He wants to bless me, then why wouldn't I have an easy life?”

“If God is in control, and He loves me, why would I struggle at all?”

“Wouldn't he just protect me from all suffering?” *[pause]*

Have you ever heard this taught or thought this to yourself?

Yet is this the teaching of Scripture?

In one sense, we could say that becoming a Christian does make your life easier in certain ways.

You receive eternal life, more joy, more peace, less fear, and more stability in your identity and for your soul.

You have a Heavenly Father, who you can trust, and the hope of Heaven that you can look forward to.

Even in your life and relationships, some things *may* get better if you follow God's wisdom, since that is the way that God has created this world and our relationships to function.

You will most likely have less relational conflict if you are honest, and don't stir up things by being mean to others. *[pause]*

Yet on the other hand, we have to say that in some ways, the Christian life becomes *harder*.

You may have less relational conflict because you are nice to people, yet because of your faith, those very people may hate you and persecute you.

You may have more joy and peace inside, yet antagonism from others may ramp up even more, making that joy and peace even more needed.

So the question of an easier life for a Christian is a complex one. *[pause]*

In some respects, life *is* easier, but in other respects, it's harder.

But in all respects, it's better and it's worth it because of who we follow, and the promises and blessings He gives. *[pauseeee]*

As we consider our text for today, what does Peter teach us about these things?

Let's READ THE PASSAGE to find out...*[pause]*

What does Peter say about suffering for Christ?

First...he says to...

I. Expect suffering. (12)

We see this from verse 12, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you."

We often do the opposite, don't we?

We do exactly what Peter tells us not to do - we are surprised by suffering.

We think that suffering should never happen to the Christian, or we think that suffering is the exception in the Christian's life. [pause]

Let me ask you, when you hear of a Christian treated badly by the media, politicians, or others, are you surprised?

I often hear shock in the words of some when they talk about situations like these.

It's almost like they are thinking, "Can you believe this?!"

But why are we shocked? Why are we surprised?

Peter says, "Don't be surprised!"

And even Jesus said that the world would hate us and persecute us.¹ *[pause]*

I presume that the reason that we are shocked is because as Christians living in America, we have had it pretty easy over the years in our country when it comes to persecution.

In the past, our country accepted Christians and Christian values more readily, but now, not so much.

And we got used to the approval we received in our country.

But our minds need to always be equipped with the truth of what the Bible teaches, and not influenced simply by what we have experienced in the past. *[pause]*

The Bible teaches us to not be surprised, so therefore, we should be expecting suffering for Christ, no matter how nice we have had it in the past.

So next time that you hear of a Christian reviled or a Christian value attacked, don't be shocked, but expect it. *[pauseeee]*

Really, what American Christians have faced in the relative ease of the past is abnormal, not the increasing animosity that we are starting to feel more now in our country.

Look throughout history across the world, and you see that suffering for Christ is the norm. *[pauseeee]*

But why is it important for Peter to even command this?

By the way, this is a command to not be surprised by suffering.

So why? How does it help us?

Well think of it this way, how would you feel if you went to the doctor for a physical issue that you had and your doctor said, "Well, that's very unusual."

How would you feel if you were struggling with something at work and your boss said, "I've never ever seen that happen to anyone before."

Pretty discouraging, right?

Kinda scary, isn't it?

¹ See John 15:18-21.

But now imagine going to that doctor for an issue and he says, “Oh, this happens all the time to people.”

Or your boss says, “Yeah, that’s a normal part of the job.”

Produces a different reaction in you, doesn’t it?

Especially if your boss or doctor told you beforehand to expect something to happen, then you are able to handle it better. *[pause]*

This is because when you understand and know that something is the norm, then you are prepared to handle it better and persevere through it.

But if you are surprised by suffering for doing right, then you aren’t prepared mentally or spiritually to go through it.

If you’re surprised, you will want to give up because it’s hard, when you were expecting easy.

And so you will be more prone to want to throw in the towel because you won’t think it’s worth it.

You will think that you are facing something rare or exceptional. *[pause]*

This is one reason why expecting suffering is so important, it prepares us to handle it when it comes and helps us to persevere.

But there’s another reason why expecting suffering is important...

When you expect suffering, you don’t feel that something is wrong with God or you. *[pause]*

I want you to think about this.

If you are surprised by suffering for Christ, you will think that something is amiss with God.

You will think that God is not good, or loving, or in control.

For you might think, “How could God allow this to come into my life? I thought he was loving and sovereign?”

This can lead you to become bitter towards God or worse.

That’s a dangerous place to be in! *[pause]*

But if you expect suffering, then you don’t think about these things, for you remember...

“God told me that these sorts of things would happen. This is a normal part of the Christian life.”
[pauseeee]

Not only will being astonished by suffering make you think something is wrong with God, it could lead you to think that there's something wrong with you. *[pause]*

If you think that suffering is abnormal, then when you face suffering, you will think that you did something wrong.

You will think that God is angry with you, for why else would I face this?

You will think that you have failed in some way, for this must be punishment, right?

You will believe that you are the rare exception, and be discouraged - "why isn't anyone else facing this?" *[pauseeee]*

When you think that suffering is strange, you will think that you are a strange Christian, doing things wrong.

That is such a disheartened place to be in, and could lead to a shipwrecked faith! *[pauseeee]*

Expecting suffering is more important than you thought, isn't it?

This is why Peter wants us to not be caught off guard by it, but to expect it to happen. *[pauseee]*

So Christian, don't be surprised by suffering, but expect it. *[pauseeee]*

In talking about this, Peter also highlights the purpose of this suffering.

He calls these situations "fiery trials" that test us.

The word he uses here for fiery trials actually means, 'burning'.

This points to the fact that suffering burns with pain.

It hurts! It's not easy! It burns! *[pause]*

But why does he use fire imagery to talk about suffering?

Because he's emphasizing that these trials are for our purification. *[pause]*

You see, when you want to make metals more pure, you put them through intense heat.

This process isn't bad, but actually a good thing, for it produces something beautiful and pure.

So the fiery trials of our lives burn, but they purify and refine us.

Although they hurt and are painful, they are doing something good in us. *[pauseeee]*

A Christian's true character is refined and revealed under pressure.

So these trials test us to see if we hold up under the pressure, and they also refine our character and trust in the Lord. *[pauseeee]*

This truth is so important to remember: God's good purpose for fiery trials is to refine us.

This is actually a good thing (for the true Christian) because it means these fiery trials aren't meant to destroy us, but refine us.

These fiery trials aren't meant to punish us, but to purify us!

And that is one part of the reason that we are to...

II. Rejoice in suffering. (13-14)

Peter says to not be surprised by fiery trials, but to rejoice.

That's so counterintuitive!

What do we usually do, instead?

Complain, become angry, fret, etc. *[pause]*

So maybe you could get on board with the first command and expect suffering, that's somewhat easy.

But this second one gets really hard.

We could easily expect suffering and then complain about it.

Or expect it and grit our teeth and make it through unhappily.

Yet Peter says to expect it and rejoice. *[pause]*

The reason is because we share in Christ's sufferings and because this rejoicing now will lead to more rejoicing and gladness at Christ's return.

This verse is similar to what Jesus said in Matthew 5...

"Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. *Rejoice and be glad*, for your reward is great in heaven..."² *[pause]*

To the degree that we suffer like Christ, we can rejoice!

We are sharing in his sufferings, meaning, we are going through a small glimpse of what he went through.

² Matthew 5:11-12a.

You are able to have that in common with your Lord, it's not unusual, for even He went through it.

We learn what it means to be like Him in his suffering. *[pauseeee]*

There's this special connection made when you go through the same thing as someone else.

Maybe it's someone who has faced cancer before you.

Well with Christ it's even deeper than that, for we are sharing in the sufferings of our Savior and Lord.

We are able to remember that Christ experienced this, but he experienced it most fully, and my suffering is light compared to his, yet I'm following in his steps, and identifying with him. *[pause]*

So really our shared suffering demonstrates that we are truly His, we are linked with Him.

And if he suffered and was victorious, so I will suffer too, but be victorious in Him.

And so we can rejoice, knowing that we aren't the first ones to encounter this, but our very Lord went before us in this way. *[pauseeee]*

We can also rejoice in suffering because we look with joy to our future joy.

Christ will come again, and our present joy is going to be superseded by supreme joy and exceeding gladness.

The suffering that you face now won't compare with the future joy you will possess.

We will get to see him in all his glory, be with him, and be like Him - what a day that will be! *[pauseeee]*

A Christian can and should rejoice in hardship.

We have joy as we see that God's in control and doing something good.

We have joy as our sufferings display our union with Christ.

We have joy as we look forward in great anticipation to the glory that is to come.

And we have joy as we know we have God's favor and blessing, and presence in the Spirit.

That last one is what Peter points out. *[pause]*

He says that even if we are insulted for Christ's name, we are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon us. *[pause]*

Being insulted for Christ does not take away our blessedness, but demonstrates that we are blessed.

We are His!

And the persecution we face only highlights even more so that we have the Spirit resting upon us.

It is assuring us that we have God's favor and approval and presence.

And in those fiery, painful moments the Spirit strengthens us and helps us. *[pauseeee]*

Those who revile and insult Christians think that they are bringing us down and taking away our joy...

...But Peter shows us that reviling and insults don't take away our blessedness or joy, but display them even more so.

Suffering for Christ's name is an indicator that you are Christ's, and you are blessed because you are Christ's. *[pauseeee]*

When you face suffering for Christ's name, what's your response?

Rejoicing or grumbling?

Rejoicing or outrage?

Christian, rejoice in suffering for Christ.

You are blessed, you are identifying with Christ, you have the Spirit's presence and help, and someday you will rejoice at Christ's glorious coming. *[pauseeee]*

Not only should we expect and rejoice in suffering, but thirdly, we should...

III. Glorify God in suffering. (15-16)

So a lot of you know that I love coffee.

Some would even call me a coffee snob, but I'd rather say that I'm just a coffee enthusiast.

If you ever talk to me about coffee, something that may come out is that I will explain that not all coffee is the same.

There's good coffee and bad coffee.

In fact, I would go even so far to say that not all coffee is true coffee.

*Some coffee such as diner coffee or things like that are just bean water, but true, rich coffee, now that's where it's at. *[pause]**

Well in verses 15 and 16, Peter wants to point out that not all suffering is the same.

There is bad suffering and good suffering.

What I mean by that is that there's suffering for righteousness and suffering that's for wickedness. *[pause]*

He says that we shouldn't suffer because we did evil.

We shouldn't suffer "as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler."

His point is that you can't claim everything as suffering for Christ.

A person who breaks the law and murders or steals can't say, "Look! I'm just suffering because I'm a Christian!"

A person who does evil can't say, "I'm suffering for righteousness, everyone!"

And a person who is a meddler can't either. *[pause]*

A meddler is one who sticks their noses into other people's business.

They are someone interfering into the lives of others, causing disruption and agitation.

So if you meddle in other people's affairs and suffer for it, you can't claim that you are suffering for Christ's name. *[pause]*

Peter is once again trying to remind us that the type of suffering he's talking about is suffering for righteousness, not suffering in general.

If we suffer as a Christian, that is, because of Christ, that's something to rejoice in and that is what he is talking about as it concerns being blessed. *[pause]*

So don't suffer for doing evil, but if you suffer as a Christian, don't be ashamed.

There's absolutely nothing to be ashamed of there.

The other things are shameful, like murdering, stealing, evil, and meddling, but not suffering as a Christ-follower.

Suffering as a Christ-follower should not bring any guilt or embarrassment, for you are doing it for the Lord's sake.

You are doing what's right, and there's no shame in doing what's right. *[pause]*

And actually, in those moments, we should use our suffering as opportunities to glorify God.

We should live and respond to suffering for Christ in such a way that God is honored in our lives.

We don't lash out, we don't walk around ashamed, we don't grumble, we don't despair, but we point to God through it all. *[pauseeee]*

If someone reviles your Christian beliefs on things, are you ashamed?

If someone makes fun of your faith or insults you because you follow Jesus, do you honor God in how you react?

Do you glorify Him in being named a Christian? *[pauseeeee]*

So we expect suffering, rejoice in suffering, glorify God in suffering, and lastly, we...

IV. Remember the big picture of suffering. (18-19)

There have been times where I've seen people building something in the community.

And usually when something is in the beginning stages of a project, it doesn't look too good.

So people start wondering, "What is that going to be? It looks odd."

But then once the project is completed, it all makes sense, and it looks amazing.

That's because you finally saw the big picture. *[pause]*

Well in verses 17 and 18, Peter is pushing us to look at and remember the big picture of suffering.

He says, "For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?"

And "If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"
[pause]

Now that's interesting, isn't it?

Judgment for the household of God?

We know that this doesn't mean condemnation because Scripture tells us that Christians face no condemnation.³

And another reason is because we are God's household, and verse 18 says that the righteous are saved.

So what's he saying here?

He's describing that what Christians go through is a loving, purifying judgment.

³ See Romans 8:1.

It is an earthly judgment, meant to burn off the sin and worldliness that we have.

This judgment is not condemnation, but we do face chastening and discipline that helps us to grow. *[pause]*

God's judgment of His household is also a weeding out of those who aren't truly saved, for that's what suffering will do.

This means that God is purging his house, not in wrath, but in love!

He's getting rid of the remaining sins in our lives, and making us, the church, to become more and more without spot or wrinkle. *[pauseeee]*

The Christian's life isn't easy, but it is with difficulties that we are saved.

What I mean by that is that we are saved by grace and that is a gift, and so it's easy in that sense.

But the demands of discipleship and the process of sanctification is hard.

We go through a sanctification process that is often painful, as God is ridding us of sin rooted in us. *[pause]*

So Peter says that God's judgment starts with his household, but notice that that's not where he stops.

The household of God is where God starts his fire, which purifies, but it's not the end, for he will move out from his people, who is his house, to unbelievers. *[pause]*

God's fire, in the form of suffering, purges Christians now, but God's fire will be way worse for unbelievers in the end.

So if God's own people face this, then imagine what will happen to those who do not respond positively to the gospel message.

That is a serious and grave reality. *[pause]*

Pastor Steven J. Cole sums this section up well when he says...

“Peter is teaching that the trials God's people go through for refining are the initial stages of God's judgment on all sin, which will culminate in the second coming of Jesus Christ, when those who have not obeyed the gospel will go into the flames of hell...”

If God uses such severe trials to purge sin from the righteous--if the process of salvation is that difficult--think of how much worse the day of judgment will be for the godless and the sinners!

So if you're tempted to bail out of the faith when you encounter trials, ask yourself, 'Where else will I go?'"⁴ *[pauseeee]*

Why would this be important for Peter's readers (and us) to hear?

Because if we are facing the fires of purification now through trials, it means that we won't face the fires of condemnation in eternity.

There may be suffering now for you, but that very suffering demonstrates that you won't suffer eternally!

And that very suffering is actually refining you, it's doing something good and glorious. *[pauseeee]*

In this life is the worst suffering we will experience because for the rest of eternity it will be pain-free joy and perfection with our Lord and Savior.

But sadly, the unbeliever will only experience exponentially worse than this for eternity. *[pause]*

If you have never truly repented of your sins and turned to Christ alone to save you, then do that today.

If you don't, if you continue to reject the good news of what Jesus did on the Cross and in His resurrection, then there is only the promise of the fires of Hell for you.

The judgment of God will come down on you and it will declare, "Condemned to eternal fire."

Don't delay, but turn to Christ today.

Repent of your sin, and trust in Christ, who is the only way to be saved.

He will forgive, give you eternal life, and in Him, you will no longer be condemned for your sin because he took it on the Cross. *[pauseee]*

So Christian, remember the big picture of suffering!

Remember that this suffering is purifying you for your good, and it's temporary.

And remember that this suffering is worth it because the alternative is way, way worse. *[pauseeee]*

So as Peter finishes out and summarizes everything in verse 19, let that be our summary as well...

As you suffer for Christ, entrust your life with the faithful Creator!

⁴ Cole, Steven J. "Hard Lessons about Hard Times."

<https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-21-hard-lessons-about-hard-times-1-peter-412-19>

Peter concludes this section by summarizing and telling us how to live in light of everything that was mentioned.

He says, “*Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.*” [pause]

If we suffer for Christ, it is according to God’s will.

As God-followers, we must rejoice in that truth, for it is extremely encouraging. [pause]

If we suffer for Christ, it is only because God willed it. [pause]

Some may take that as God being mean, but when you truly understand who God is, you take great encouragement in that truth.

Because God is all-good, all-wise, all-sovereign, and all-knowing.

So that means if I suffer, I can know that God isn’t out to destroy me, but he’s working all things together for good.⁵ [pause]

Though it’s not easy, though it’s painful, though it burns, I can trust him because it means that anything that I face is not some random chance happening.

Anything that I face doesn’t and will not catch God off guard.

Anything that I face is not some plan gone wrong, but it is in the capable hands of the faithful Creator.

He knows about it, he wills it, and through it all, he will take care of me.

So I entrust my soul with my faithful Creator. [pause]

That’s who He is - he is the faithful Creator.

The all-powerful Creator of heaven and earth.

The trustworthy and sovereign maker of everything.

I can trust my suffering and my life with Him, who knows all things.

And so I put the protection and care of my soul into his hands. [pause]

It’s not in my hands, thank the Lord.

It’s not hanging in the balance and up to chance, but it’s in the hands of the Creator, and so I give it to Him, and do good as I live out my days. [pauseeee]

⁵ See Romans 8:28.

Jesus demonstrated this perfectly, as we are told that “when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.”⁶

And as he hung on the Cross, suffering, and breathing his final breaths, he used the same word for entrust, as he said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”⁷ *[pause]*

Will you entrust your soul with the faithful Creator?

Will you trust in his care and protection?

Will you trust him with every moment, even if you suffer for His name?

⁶ 1 Peter 2:23b.

⁷ Luke 23:46.