

Joyful in the Fire

1 Peter 4:12-19 (ESV)

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. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. ¹⁵ But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. ¹⁶ Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name. ¹⁷ 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? ¹⁸ And

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

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Background

Peter is specifically addressing suffering that comes from following Jesus and bearing his name. Yet the principles he gives us also speak into our broader experience of suffering.

DISCUSS

1. Don't be surprised: Suffering is the normal Christian Life (v12-13)

When suffering comes, something in us assumes it shouldn't be happening. Underneath that assumption is the question, "if God loved me, why would this be happening?"

Yet Peter tells us not to be surprised. Suffering for Christ does not mean Christianity has failed or that God has abandoned us; it is the cost of following a Lord who himself suffered and died for us (John 15:20).

More than that, Peter says we can rejoice, because we share in Christ's own sufferings *and will share in his glory* (v13). This is not pretending suffering doesn't hurt. Even Jesus wept and prayed in Gethsemane for the cup to pass. Grief and joy can coexist, because our joy is rooted not in the absence of pain but in our relationship with Christ, who suffered, died, was raised, and will come again.

Think of a time when suffering caught you off guard. What did you assume about God, and how might remembering Christ's suffering have changed how you carried it?

2. Blessed and Refined: The Spirit Rests on You (v14, 17-18)

Peter could simply have said God knows we are suffering. Instead he says something more specific: the Spirit of glory and of God rests on us. We are not left to face the fire alone. That fire also does a work in us (v14b). Like a metal that can only be purified at high heat, suffering can bring impurities to the surface and ask us plainly: who or what do I really trust? Is it God, or my money, my status, the opinions of others?

Peter is careful here. This refining is not God punishing his own household, but a purifying discipline. We should never tell someone that God gave them suffering to teach them a lesson; we simply don't know that. What we can say is that whatever God has permitted, he can use for our good, to deepen our dependence on him.

Suffering has a way of showing us what we really trust. What has a recent hard season revealed about where your confidence actually rests?

3. Unashamed: Entrusted to a Faithful Creator (v15-16, 19)

Peter is careful to distinguish suffering for Christ from suffering for our own wrongdoing. But when we suffer for bearing Christ's name, we are not to hide it or be ashamed, because our identity is set not by the world's verdict but by whose name we bear.

That can be costly, in friendships, at work, in the choices we make when the values around us don't align with Christ's. Yet our faithfulness does not rest on our own strength. Peter's closing word is simple: entrust yourselves to a faithful Creator, and keep doing good (v19). Not because we understand every reason for our suffering, but because we know the One we trust. He made us, he holds our lives, and he is faithful.

Where might staying faithful to Christ cost you something, and what would it look like to entrust that situation to God and keep doing good?

Pray For:

1. Trust in Suffering

Pray that we would trust God when suffering comes, remembering that suffering does not mean he has abandoned us.

2. Growth Through Suffering

Pray that God would use our difficult seasons to deepen our dependence on him and reveal what we truly place our trust in

3. Faithfulness to Christ

Pray that we would have courage to remain faithful to Christ, entrusting ourselves to our faithful Creator and continuing to do good.