

How to Respond to Suffering 1 Peter 3:13-15

ETS: Peter explained more about how to respond to suffering

ESS: The right response to undeserved suffering still results in a blessing

OSS: I want people to live in such a way that their behavior is convicting to others.

PQ: Do you have a clear conscience about your behavior?

UW: Response

WE

REALITY: We don't want to suffer!

- **Naturally**, we are called upon to **combat** and **diminish suffering**.
 - All **medical** and **social** action is motivated by the perfectly justified passion for this goal.

Suffering is a part of the **very nature** of this **world** and **will not pass away** until this world passes away.

Reality: We all Suffer!

- Suffer: Discomfort
 - Long-term or short-term

Some are suffering **physically**

- Suffering from a **back ache**
- Suffering from botched **surgery** or **car accident**

Some are suffering **emotionally**

- Suffering from the effects of a divorce
- Suffering from the effects of an abusive parent

Emotional suffering is just as painful as **physical suffering**

- You may struggle with depression
- Grief
- Intense distress
- Loneliness and isolation
- Negative emotions
- Panic
- Rage
- Shame
- Worthlessness

Emotional suffering can cause physical symptoms:

- Diarrhea

- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Muscle pain, particularly in the neck
- Nausea
- Pain in the arms and legs
- Stomachache or gastrointestinal upset

If it is not dealt with **emotional suffering** can manifest itself in

- Aggression and violence
- Alcohol or substance use
- Attempted suicide
- Compulsive behaviors including shopping, gambling, and sex addiction
- Eating disorders
- Risky behaviors
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts

Reality: We all Suffer!

- The Bible addresses **physical suffering**, but PETER is talking primarily about **suffering** for the sake of living out your Christian faith!
 - Emotional suffering
 - Financial suffering

In **America**, we honestly have not experienced much **emotional suffering** for being a Christian!

- Unfortunately, that reality may be changing
 - Our country is growing **increasingly hostile** toward Christianity.

There is a **strong movement** in our culture to **destroy institutions**

- The CHURCH is regarded as an “**institution**”
 - To “destroy” the institution of the church is not to tear down church buildings, but rather to make the **church conform** to the **culture whims**.
- I hope I am wrong, but in the near future, it may be that if a church teaches certain things to be “**wrong**” according to the **Scriptures**, that **certain protections** will not be afforded to it.

In **2019**, Bebe Nicholson, wrote an article for Medium.com titled “Hostility to Christianity is Growing.” Here is what she wrote:

- “Last week I was at Starbucks having coffee with a friend when she mentioned that she didn’t like to associate with her husband’s family anymore. “They’re atheists,” she said. “And they’re always

lambasting me about my faith. Telling me how dumb I am to believe in God.”

- Bebe wrote: “Her statement confirmed something I’ve noticed lately. Unbelievers are growing more hostile to faith, and it’s become more acceptable to express that hostility openly. I’m seeing a lot of articles with anti-Christian sentiments. When I venture beyond my Christian community of friends, I run into people who blame everything from politics to capitalism on Christians.”

She goes on to list why some people are increasingly becoming hostile towards Christians in America

- The Objection that Christians are **Judgmental**
- The Objection that Christians are **Intolerant**
- “I’ve Been **Hurt** by the Church”
- The Claim that **Christianity** is **Responsible** for **War**

She debunks these reasons, yet more and more this is what you are hearing in our culture.

- WHY? Because as our **culture moves away** from Christian principles, upon which our nation was founded, people will start seeing those who hold onto biblical principles as being “**Judgmental.**”

- WHY? Because our **culture now insists** that you “**affirm**” or “**approve**” things which are against Scripture. Therefore, when a **Christian refuses** to “affirm” a previous recognized sinful behavior, he/she is called “**intolerant**” *by the same people who said we should all be tolerant.*

Peter is primarily addressing the topic of suffering due to one’s faith in Christ!

- He is writing to hurting people—therefore he keeps bringing up this topic.

What should our attitude be in the midst of suffering?

How do we keep from allowing hostility to derail us?

GOD

Turn to **1 Peter 3:13**

Peter has been giving us **instructions** on how to **impact** a world that is increasingly **anti-Christian**. In **chapters 2 and 3**:

- Peter told us to **submit** to **government**, to submit to **Masters**, and to submit to our **husbands**.

- He goes on to tell us to live in “**harmony**’ with one another and to respond with **peace** to **insults** and **evil**.
 - WHY? because God is watching us and because the **world** is **watching** us.

HOPE: If we do these things, we will **AVOID** suffering!

- We would like to think that if we were **model citizens**, **model wives**, **model husbands** and decent **church-going people** that we would NOT have to fear any sort of hostility or suffering due to our faith.
 - After all, isn't that the dream of every government: to have peace-loving citizens?

Reality: Our **battle** is not with “**flesh and blood**” but with “**principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places.**”

- Satan works through people to **persecute believers** no matter how good they are being!
 - The “**Gates of hell**” are constantly on the attack against the true church!

The question is **not** “Can I **avoid persecution**—because that may not be possible—**but rather** how do I **respond** to **hostility** should it happen to me?””

- HOW do handle the emotional suffering?
- WHY should we suffer?
- WHAT should our **attitude** be in the midst of suffering?
- HOW do we keep from allowing **hostility** to **derail** us?

Suffer for the Right Reason

1 Peter 3:13 Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good?"

- Question: What is Peter referring to when he states "devoted to what is good"?

If you are doing what Peter just commanded us to do: Submitting to governing authorities, masters (employers), etc. then who would even bother you?

- Yet, the reality is that even yielding to those in authority *does not mean* a good outcome!
- For example, a **wife** may yield to her **husband**, but that doesn't mean that he may NOT abuse her mentally, physically and emotionally.
 - BTW, I am ***not*** calling for wives to "*just take the abuse*"! (Another topic)

The reality is that although we may be **good**, we may still endure great persecution at the hands of the very ones we are “Submitting” to!

For believers being “Devoted to what is good” is to be devoted to **following** and **obeying Jesus Christ**.

- Since Satan is the “god of this world” and this world and its systems are “under the sway of the evil one” what is “Good” according to Jesus is often called “evil” by Satan.
 - **GOD: There is only one way to haven**
 - **Satan:** There is more than ONE WAY to heaven!
 - **GOD: Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life**
 - **Satan:** That message is too **exclusive** and **insensitive**
 - **GOD: Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life**
 - **Satan:** The only truth is **YOUR** truth
 - **GOD: The nuclear family: husband and wife in marriage**
 - **Satan:** It doesn't matter who you love and **marriage** is **optional**
 - **GOD: God is our creator**

- **Satan:** To think there is a God is religious fantasy
- **GOD: God created us male and female**
- **Satan:** You are whatever you think you are

REALITY: You may “Suffer for doing good” because often what is “Good” is considered “evil” in a world system under the sway of the evil one!

My **uncle** is a retired history teacher.

- He has been arguing that what is happening in America is akin to the **Bolshevik Revolution**.

Do you know about **Bolshevik Revolution?**

- In the 1920s, **Joseph Stalin** was rising in power in the **Soviet Union**.
 - He sent **political speakers** out to **Russian towns** and **villages** to **brainwash** the **people** about **Marxism** and the **Russian** form of **Communism**.
- **Peasants** were forced to hear the **harangues** telling them what they **must believe**.
 - *It was made clear that the teaching of Christian faith was to come to an immediate end. The church was no longer to be active.*

PROBLEM: Hundreds of years of **Russian Orthodox** teaching about the **resurrection** couldn't be rubbed out of people's souls overnight!

One large crowd of people sitting in a public auditorium listened for three hours to the speech of a **Russian commissar** as he tried to convert them to **Marxism** and the glories of the Communist party.

- When he finished, he was **exhausted**, but he had taken his best shot. He was sure he had **convinced the crowd**, so he **invited questions**.
 - Here and there people rose to ask questions, but he was satisfied he had done his best.

Just as things were about to end, and he was to sign his success seal over what he had done, a **Russian Orthodox priest** stood up at the back of the hall: "I just have one thing to say to you. Christ is risen!"

- Instantly the entire crowd responded, "Christ is risen, indeed!"

A **pastor** was sharing this story at a church service. At the end of the service a **couple came up** and introduced themselves. The women said to him in a

heavy accent, "I am from Russia. Thank you for telling your story; it moved me greatly. But I must tell you one more thing about that story, which you did not tell. You need to tell people that when the crowd said 'Christ is risen indeed!' they knew for certain they would all go to jail."

Peter's **theme** on suffering throughout this entire letter is: *"If you suffer, be sure you suffer for doing good!"*

- **1 Peter 2:15** "For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good."
- **1 Peter 2:20b** "...But when you do what is good and suffer, if you endure it, this brings favor with God."
- In **vss. 10-11**, Peter just quoted **Psalm 34** "For the one who wants to love life and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it,"

Suffer for the right reason!

- *Don't bring suffering down on yourself for anything other than the cause of Christ!*

HOW do you cope with suffering for Christ?

- How do you respond when being treated like a “stranger”?
- How do you deal with suffering for doing something that is “good”?

Suffer with the Right Attitude

1 Peter 3:13-14a “Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed...”

If there are two words that **do not** seem to go together they are “Suffering” and “Blessed.”

- Those two words just don’t seem like they should be used in the same sentence.

How many of you view suffering as a blessing? Most of us don’t.

- How can a person in their right mind, call suffering a blessing?

WHAT is a “BLESSING”?

- *Dictionary: God's favor and protection*
- *Secondary Definition: Approval*

- *I.e., You give your “Blessing” to your child to marry*

WHY will “Suffering” for God bring His Favor?

- **1 Peter 2:12-20: “suffering for good” ...**
 - **Glorifies God** when He returns
 - **Silences the ignorant talk of the foolish**
 - **“Is God’s will”**
 - **“brings favor”**

Suffering for obeying and following God results in God’s favor because you are doing His will!

Peter counted **suffering** as a **blessing**.

In **Acts 5** Peter and the other apostles are thrown into the public jail. But then an angel of the Lord freed them. So they returned the next day and began preaching again in the Temple. Again they were apprehended and stood before the Council. Peter proclaimed to the Council that they must obey God rather than man and thus they were going to continue to preach.

One of the Council members, **Gamaliel**, told the counsel to let the men go because if they were of

God there was no stopping them. If however, they were not, then they would be stopped as others had been in the past.

- **Act 5:40-42** states: “After they called in the apostles and had them flogged, they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. ⁴¹Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name. ⁴²Every day in the temple, and in various homes, they continued teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah. (CSB)
 - Notice they were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name.”

Why did Peter consider it a **blessing** to **suffer** ?

- Because he was suffering for the name of Christ
- When you suffer for Christ you are in the “**Fellowship of Christ’s suffering**”!
 - Suffering for Christ **tests** your **faith**
 - Suffering for Christ **demonstrates** your **faith**
 - Suffering for Christ brings you into a **close communion** with Christ.

HOW did Peter, the apostles and the early Christians maintain such an **attitude**?

- The answer is what they **focused upon** in the midst of the suffering.

Suffer with the Right Focus

1 Peter 3:14b-15b “Do not fear them or be intimidated but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy”

- Did you notice the phrase “**Do not fear them or be intimidated**” is **bold**?

This is the second time Peter uses the word “intimidate” or “intimidation”

- The first time was when he was talking to believing wives.
 - In **vs 6**. he told believing wives that they “become [Sarah’s] children when you do what is good and do not fear any intimidation.”

Sarah did not allow **fear** to keep her from stepping out in faith with her husband Abraham!

- A couple of times **Abraham did not exercise faith** and, as a result, **Sarah was put into a precarious situation**.
 - She was taken from Abraham by **pagan rulers** because he said she was his sister—which was a half-truth.
 - On both occasions, Sarah was put into **jeopardy** but **God watched out** for her and **protected** her and **she did not allow** these local rulers to **intimidate** her.

She did not allow fear or intimidation to keep her from **walking alongside** Abraham as Abraham **followed** God.

Here in **vs. 14b** Peter is quoting from **Isaiah 8:12-14**. The **reason** for Peter's quotation is significant.

In **Isaiah 8**, **Ahaz, King of Judah**, faced a **crisis** because of an **impending invasion** by the **Assyrian** army. The **kings of Israel and Syria** wanted Ahaz to join them in an **alliance**, but Ahaz refused; so *Israel and Syria threatened to invade Judah!*

- Behind the scenes, **Ahaz confederated** himself with **Assyria!**

- The Prophet Isaiah warned him against **ungodly alliances** and urged him to trust God for deliverance.

Isaiah told Ahaz in **Isaiah 8:12-14**: “Do not call everything a conspiracy that these people say is a conspiracy. Do not fear what they fear; do not be terrified. ¹³ You are to regard only the LORD of Armies as holy. *Only he should be feared; only he should be held in awe.* ¹⁴ He will be a sanctuary; but for the two houses of Israel, he will be a stone to stumble over and a rock to trip over, and a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.”

- Ahaz did not listen to Isaiah’s words.
- Ultimately, the Assyrians made Judah subject to them and greatly humiliated Ahaz.

Peter’s point is that we must **depend** upon the Lord in the **midst** of the suffering. Even though we may not know why we are being allowed to experience it, we must continue to let God be the Lord of our lives in the midst of the suffering.

Andrew Murray once gave these ‘four anchors’ help keep our focus on the Lord when we suffer for His name’s sake:

1. Say, He **brought me** here. It is by His will I am in this strait place and in that fact I will rest.
2. He will **keep me** here in His love and give me grace to behave as His child.
3. Then He **will make** *the trial a blessing*, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn.
4. In His good time He can **bring me out again**—how and when He knows.

So let me say, I am

1. here by God's appointment;
2. in His keeping;
3. under His training;
4. for His time.

Consider the witness we give when we

- Focus on Christ!
- Focus on Christ's holiness
- Follow Christ's example and go through the suffering!

Annie Johnson Flint was the author of 6,000 hymns and gospel songs. She was an **orphan**. She lived with crippling **arthritis**. She was stricken with **cancer**. Yet her faith was especially evident in this hymn:

He giveth more grace as the burdens grow
greater/ He sendeth more strength when
the labors increase;/ To added afflictions He
addeth His mercy,/To multiplied trials His
multiplied peace.

WE

Dr. Dale Turner, states:

- “In all fairness, if we ask the ‘*Why me?*’ question in regard to our **burdens**, we should also ask it in regard to our *blessings*.”
- “We take for **granted 100** days of perfect health, and then **grumble** about *one* day of aches and pains.
- “We drive the freeway hundreds of times without incident, and then ask, ‘Why me?’ the *one* time we have a flat tire or engine trouble.
- “We casually accept the fact when our family is together for the holidays, but when we are separated, we dwell on our loneliness.
- “How often do we say, ‘Why me?’ as we count our *blessings*?”
- “Rather than feeling sad about what we *don’t* have, doesn’t it make more sense to feel a kind of rollicking rejoicing over everything we *do* have?”

How are you responding to suffering?

The response you have to suffering says a lot about your **attitude, focus** and **reasons**

- Are you focused upon Christ?
- Are you setting Him apart as the LORD of your life or is something else the Lord of your life?
- Are you more concerned about what others think or are you concerned about what Christ thinks?

It is possible, that we as Americans will be one day be on “trial” for our beliefs in Christ.

- How will you respond to those who seek to ridicule you for Christ’s sake?
- How will you respond if your job is threatened for your beliefs?
- If they bring charges against you, will it be for “doing good”?

How are you responding to suffering?