

3 Ways to Stay Joyful in Seasons of Suffering

Shrouded by the cover of darkness, Peter crouched by the crackling fire. Only moments earlier, he swore his uncompromising devotion to Jesus.

Yet, in the blur of Jesus' arrest, Peter ran, terrified at the prospect of suffering for the name of Christ. Restored by grace and commissioned to do great things for the kingdom, Peter penned 1 Peter 4 with a transformed perspective.

Under Emperor Nero's orders, the Roman governors prosecuted Christians as criminals. Peter encouraged the beleaguered believers scattered across Asia Minor to stand strong in the face of persecution. The threat of imprisonment and martyrdom loomed large, and Peter, himself, was eventually executed under Nero's cruel reign. The instructions in 1 Peter 4:12-19 serve as a template for the 21st century church undergoing persecution for the gospel today.

1. **Don't be surprised.** " Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place among you to test you, as though some strange thing happened to you" (1 Pet. 4:12). God uses seasons of suffering to teach us obedience, steer us toward surrender and bring glory to Himself.

Suffering shouldn't surprise us; it should refine us. Our attitude in times of testing determines the fruit of a trial. 1 Pet 4:13 heartens us: "But rejoice insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, so that you may rejoice and be glad also in the revelation of His glory." We share not only in Christ's glory but also in His sufferings. When I go through difficult situations, I'm tempted to huff, "Why me?" or lament "Woe is me." Peter's words challenge me to instead prayerfully respond

by seeking to understand how God can best use seasons of suffering to advance His kingdom.

2. **Don't be ashamed.** 1 Pet. 2:14 shares the promise of blessing in times of testing. "If you are reproached because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified." When we endure persecution for our stand for righteousness, not because of our own wrongdoing, we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in a unique way to empower us, embolden us, enable us and equip us. "Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God because of it" (1 Pet. 4:16). Verses 17-18 begs us to sit with this truth: We may undergo hardship temporarily for our faith, but it's nothing compared to suffering for eternity for our lack of it. When our perspective is eternal, our suffering has purpose.
3. **Don't be derailed.** "So then, let those who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good" (1 Pet. 4:19). We can trust God to use seasons of suffering to bring us closer to Jesus and make us more dependent on Him. Nothing should deter us from our readiness to joyfully serve as Christ's representatives or derail us from our God-given purpose. We don't have to let the fear of man or the intimidation of God's assignments keep us from obeying His call. The safest place we will ever be is in the center of God's will. {eoa}

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