

We have been exploring the anchors and actions prescribed by Peter to a group of people suffering as outcasts in a broken world.

Anchors are fundamental truths about life from an eternal perspective.

Actions are behaviors prescribed by God in light of those anchors of truth.

Suffering in this world is both unavoidable and inevitable.

God uses suffering for a variety of purposes.

God also prescribes how we should respond to those difficulties.

I. The Biblical picture of suffering

II. The Biblical purposes of suffering

A. Trials and suffering bring about Purity and Maturity

B. Suffering Cultivates Compassion for others

C. Suffering Teaches us To Trust In God's power Alone

D. Suffering is the Path to Personal Glory and Blessing

E. Persecution and suffering enables the spread of the Word of God

F. Suffering Brings glory to God

G. Suffering is used by God to Discipline us – Training to avoid sin

III. Biblical Responses to Suffering

A. Natural Human Response to Suffering

B. Supernatural, Godly response to suffering

1. Rejoice don't grumble

2. Trust don't doubt

Jesus responded to suffering in all of these ways.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23

Peter instructs us to respond to suffering with faith, especially when the path is dark. Faith shines brightest in a dark room. It doesn't take much light to shine in a dark room.

Let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. 1 Peter 4:19

The term “entrust” used here has to do with placing something in trust. You entrust your paycheck to the bank every payday. You trust them to protect your money and honor all agreements made. We entrust our precious souls into God’s hands to protect and honor the promises He has made concerning us. That is exactly what Jesus did right up to the point of death.

The curtain of the sanctuary was split down the middle. And Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into Your hands I entrust My spirit.” Saying this, He breathed His last. Luke 23:45-46

We must not ration our trust to God fixing or eliminating our suffering but to keep our soul through it. Paul did all he could to encourage the Ephesians and committed them into God’s hands.

"Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified. Acts 20:31-32

Job made this powerful declaration.

Though He slay me, I will hope in Him. Job 13:15

Hebrews 11 catalogued an impressive list of people who knew what it meant to entrust their souls to a faithful creator in the midst of difficulty.

Noah trusted God in a world where no one else did.

He and his family got saved.

Abraham trusted God and left everything and ventured into the unknown.

He and his family were abundantly blessed.

Moses chose ill treatment with his people over the riches of Egypt.

He led the Israelites to freedom and the Promises Land.

Daniel trusted God in the face of execution.

He received protection from a den of hungry lions.

Others in the list trusted God in the face of horrendous suffering.

...and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection; and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in

goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated (men of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground. Hebrews 11:35-38

They received nothing in this life but everything in the next.
And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised, because God had provided something better for us, so that apart from us they would not be made perfect. Hebrews 11:39-40

But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. Hebrews 11:16

This kind of trust pleases God.

And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him. Hebrews 11:6

Paul trusted God no matter what his circumstance.

I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:12-13

Once we decide to trust God no matter what the next response come easier and actually become an indicator of true trust.

3. Praise and give thanks don't complain

"in **EVERYTHING** give thanks for this is God's will concerning you."

4. Connect with and Comfort Others

The responsibility to connect with others goes both ways. We need to reach out and encourage others and be humble enough to ask for help from others. James instructed those who felt weak to call on the elders for prayer and encouragement.

Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart. Eccles. 4:9-12

5. Pray

This response could not be any clearer.

*Is anyone among you suffering? **Let him pray.** James 5:13*

Crying out to God personally and with others appears all through the Bible.

6. Don't Lose Heart but persevere/endure

a. Don't lose heart

We have a Savior who knows by experience the task and trials before us.

Consider Jesus who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Heb 12:3

See last week's notes to review the passages associate with this response.

Sometimes the only way to make it through suffering and trials is through meaningful connection with others. We must also remember that we will not always receive help from others. Even Paul struggled to trust God alone.

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. 2 Timothy 4:9-11

At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 2 Tim 4:16-18

The opposite of losing heart is enduring.

b. Persevere \ endure

"persevere" 1--to remain, make your home, abide, stay, live. 2--"under"

The word resulting from the marriage of these two terms is strong. We are told, when it comes to tribulations, to persevere, endure, remain under, keep in there, make your home there, live under the trial, hang in there, don't try to squirm out from under it.

To formalize the concept a bit:

*Endurance is the ability to continue pursuing and doing what we know is right before God, in spite of my feelings, or fatigue **and** in spite of any pressure to escape, grumble, or crumble under the load.*

This endurance commanded by the Lord is not merely gutting it out until it is over. It is not a teeth clenching determination to get through it. "If those kids don't stop that racket, I will go nuts!" To hold back my verbal explosion for another ten minutes is not endurance.

It is continually responding to each trial that comes into my life in a way that God has indicated that I should respond; to see each trial as an opportunity to learn and grow. Any athlete knows that without endurance and pushing through the pain, there is no improvement or growth. Any skill takes time and energy and investment. Endurance is the ability to respond as Christ would respond; with love, gentleness and a servant's heart in spite of the pressure to pop and explode.

Endurance refuses to take the fleshly escapes offered by the evil one and, drawing on the enabling power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, respond to the situation according to the principle of sacrificial love and acceptance. Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians launched into a short history lesson from Israel's wilderness journey. Paul referenced several tragic failures to trust in spite of God's miraculous provisions along the way. He sadly stated, "with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness." He informed them that these things happened as examples for all of us not to respond to trials as the Israelites did and affirms a powerful promise of God.

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.

Unfortunately, many who quote this passage fail to include the last phrase. They end with the promise of escape. By miss interpretation many have blamed God for their failure to properly respond to temptation. God didn't take away the trial. God didn't help me escape the trial. God didn't rescue me from the circumstance. It was beyond what I was able. The passage actually does not teach removal of suffering but endurance through it. God promises to provide a way for us to

endure the trial. That may include removal of it or us from the trial. It may include the resources to endure the difficult circumstance. Our responsibility is to recognize the means of “escape” that God provides.

With so many exhortations to endure, one wonders how many of the preachers today seem to imply that if you have enough faith life will somehow be without difficulties. If there are no difficulties, there is no need for endurance. Endurance assumes difficulty.

Following are some observations from a number of New Testament passages speaking to the subject of endurance.

Endurance in tribulation is the means to character development.

And not only that, but we also rejoice in our afflictions, because we know that affliction produces endurance, endurance produces proven character, and proven character produces hope. Romans 5:3-4

Consider it a great joy, my brothers, whenever you experience various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. But endurance must do its complete work, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing. James 1:2-4

"It is for discipline that you endure...for our earthly fathers disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He (God) disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

Endurance comes from the Word of God and His work in our life.

For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures. Now may the God who gives endurance and encouragement allow you [to live] in harmony with one another, according to [the command of] Christ Jesus, so that you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with a united mind and voice. Romans 15:4-6

Enduring suffering enables us to encourage and be encouraged.

*If we are afflicted, it is for your encouragement and salvation; and if we are encouraged, it is for your encouragement, which you experience when you **endure** the same sufferings that we suffer. 2 Corinthians 1:6*

*"For this reason I **endure** all things for the sake of those who are chosen, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory.: 2Tim 2:10*

God mightily empowers us to endure difficult circumstances and people.

*May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all **endurance** and long-suffering, with joy giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the saints' inheritance in the light. Col 1:11-12*

Endurance is a heart thing.

*May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's **endurance**. 2 Thessalonians 3:5*

Endurance is something God commands us to pursue.

*But you, man of God, run from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, **endurance**, and gentleness. Fight the good fight for the faith; take hold of eternal life that you were called to and have made a good confession about in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:11-12*

*Therefore, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with **endurance** the race that lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, the source and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that lay before Him endured a cross and despised the shame and has sat down at the right hand of God's throne. Hebrews 12:1-2*

*Make every effort to supplement your faith with goodness, goodness with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with **endurance**, **endurance** with godliness, godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 2 Peter 1:5-7*

*Therefore, do not throw away your confidence (in suffering), which has a great reward. For you have need of **endurance**, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. Hebrews 10:35-36*

*Blessed is the man who **endures** under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."*
James 1:2-4,12

How do we endure those pesky, painful, persistent punches from life and people?
Here are some bullet points drawn from some of what we have already considered.

1. Realize that God has not promised a trouble free life.

2. Entrust your Souls to a faithful creator to do right.

3. Understand God's purpose for trial

- **It produces purity and maturity
- **It cultivates compassion for others
- **It teaches to trust God alone (tests my faith)
- **It is the means to glory and blessing
- **It spreads the Word
- **It brings glory to God
- **It keeps me obedient

4. Consider the reward of endurance

The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Rom 8:18

Momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." 2 Cor 4:17

Do not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary. Gal 6:9

5. Consider the example of other who endured.

Brothers, take the prophets who spoke in the Lord's name as an example of suffering and long-suffering. See, we count as blessed those who have endured. You have heard of Job's endurance and have seen the outcome from the Lord. The Lord is very compassionate and merciful. James 5:10-11

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,
Jesus, Job, prophets, missionaries

6. Lay aside every sin and encumbrance

Evaluate your life.

let us also lay aside every encumbrance

Sometimes our struggle is the consequence of unaddressed disobedience.

Sometimes our struggle is due to clutter in our life and a cloudy focus.

Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. 2 Timothy 2:3-4

7. Focus on the Lord Jesus Christ

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12:1-2

CONCLUSION

Two choices:

Commit to the pursuit of life in the Spirit. (Endurance)

Capitulate to the pressure to settle for life lived in the flesh. (Escape)

God tells us to continually pursue and develop endurance. Endurance is the mark of maturity. Do you want to really experience all that God has? What are you facing this morning?

Finances, sickness, depression, fear, worry, anger, family problems, marriage problems, even little irritations, relationship problems, controlling your tongue, adjusting your attitudes, sin problems, discouragement, depression?

Whatever the trial, whatever the person or circumstance that brings pain and pressure into your life...Scripture through exhortation and example through prescription and pattern has made clear our responsibility to respond to suffering

as Christ. For only after we have done the will of God will we reap the great reward sometimes in this life and the next but most assuredly in the next.