

Peter wrote his letter to Jew and Gentile Christians scattered throughout what we know today as Turkey to provide encouragement as they faced multiple fronts of persecution and suffering. He identified both anchors and actions related to suffering in a fallen 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.

We live on a world that has been subjected to futility and corruption.

We live in a world system of operation directed by the devil.

We live among a people driven by imbedded fleshly self-centered desires.

We live under the assault of an unseen army of fallen angels.

Until something is done on these four levels, we will continue to suffer. Our choice is to learn to respond to it rather than trying to control it.

ANCHORS AND ACTIONS FROM PETER’S LETTER

You are chosen

Obey Him.

He has caused us to be born again to an amazing inheritance

Bless Him and rejoice.

Trials come to test and strengthen our faith

Love Him and believe in Him.

The gospel was prophesied in the Scriptures and revealed through preaching so...

fix your hope on the grace being brought to you in the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Don’t be conformed to the former lusts but live holy.

You were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ

Conduct yourselves in fear during your time on this earth.

Christ appeared in these last times who brought us to belief

Believe and hope.

Through believing the truth your hearts have been purified to sincerely love...

Fervently love one another.

You have been born again through the imperishable word of God.

Put aside all malice, guile, hypocrisy and slander

Long for the Word so that you may grow in your salvation.

You are being built up as a spiritual house

Come to Christ.

You are a special people of God.

Abstain from fleshly lust which wage war against the soul.

Keep your behavior excellent among the gentiles.

Submit to God ordained authority.

Don’t use your spiritual freedom to excuse evil.

God called us to suffer like Christ that we might die to sin and life to righteousness.

Wives respond in a godly way to your husbands.

Husbands respond in a godly way to your wives.

Live harmoniously with each other.

You are specially blessed when you suffer for righteousness sake.

Don't fear or be troubled by such suffering.

Keep your relationship with Christ central.

Be ready to tell people why you have hope.

Christ died for us.

Suffer of doing right rather than wrong.

Christ willingly suffered against sin.

Be willing to suffer against the flesh

Live for the will of God not the lusts of men.

The end of all things is at hand.

Be of sound judgment and sober in order to pray.

Keep fervent in your love for one another.

Be hospitable without complaint.

Every believer has been given a capacity by God to serve the church.

Employ your gift in serving others.

Tough times come to test us.

Don't think it strange.

Rejoice.

God wills suffering.

Entrust your soul to a faithful Creator and do what is right.

Elders will be rewarded at the return of Christ

Shepherd the flock well.

God opposes the proud.

Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.

Humble yourselves under the hand of God by casting your care on Him.

Your adversary the devil prowls around looking for someone to devour.

The devil seeks to bring suffering on all the brethren around the world.

God will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

Be sober and alert.

Resist Him with firm faith.

In our overview of suffering drawn from a multitude of New Testament passages we have explored...

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
4. Connect with and Comfort Others
5. Pray
6. Don't Lose Heart but persevere/endure

IV. Deliverance from Suffering

In any exploration of suffering it is necessary to include a Biblical view of deliverance from suffering.

Suffering stems from...

Those actions of people or those events of life that produce physical, psychological, or spiritual pain and or pressure in my life.

It comes from the four things listed earlier.

A cursed world.

A godless world system of operation.

People driven by a sinful flesh.

A hostile spirit world.

It is abundantly clear that God does not always eliminate the suffering that comes from these things.

If that is our expectation, we will perpetually be angry at God or down on ourselves and others. King David continually called out to God for deliverance from a place of devastation due to the actions of other people. The very fact that he intensely called out to God demonstrates the point that God certainly allows His followers to encounter times of difficulty.

Jesus told His followers,

They will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name. At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Matthew 24:9-10

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world." John 16:33

He uses difficulty in life to accomplish any number of objectives in my life some of which we listed above.

What about God's promises to deliver us? I thought God is a healing God. Should I even pray for healing and deliverance from difficulties? Does God ever bring about a miraculous removal of any of the terrible things I encounter? Does God promise protection for me and my children from all harm? Yes, God is a God of the supernatural. Scripture clearly describes some wonderful and marvelous works of the Lord. Yet we must keep truth in balance. We must not fall off of either end of the Biblical balance beam.

At the one end of the truth beam:

God is a supernatural healing, delivering God. His deliverance is both promised and pictured all through the Scriptures.

The other end post:

God does not always heal in time and space and has not promised to heal everyone. This truth also is well demonstrated throughout Scripture. The guiding factor in our discussion of deliverance from suffering must be a proper perspective.

To be Christ centered rather than comfort or self-centered we must have as our priority the desire to see Christ exalted. If kingdom growth will be best accomplished by a continuation of a given tribulation, so be it. If He will be more highly exalted by a miraculous deliverance, then so be it. There are NO magic sure-fire formulas to manipulate God to do what we demand. Job prayed every day for his children as a preemptive plan in case they sinned. They all died anyway. God ALWAYS opts for a higher purpose.

The point is to focus on faithfulness and effectiveness as a servant of God NOT on continual protection or instantaneous deliverance from all tribulation. Hebrews 11, the hall of the faithful, lists people who demonstrated their faith by an eternal rather than a temporal focus. The first group experienced a supernatural result or deliverance through faith. I call this conquering faith. The second group received high recognition while suffered greatly with no earthly deliverance. I call this enduring faith. Both required a firm faith resulting in a supernatural act of God on their behalf.

We live on this earth to promote God's kingdom not ours! Unless I maintain that focus, I will get side-tracked in my thinking regarding signs and wonders. The sin comes when I am obsessed with escape rather than effectiveness. When I become self-centered rather than kingdom centered. What is best for the Kingdom?

There are three categories of God's supernatural working from our present perspective.

1--Internal deliverance

2—External deliverance

3—Eventual deliverance

A. INTERNAL HEALING

The ultimate test of faith is not to see how excited we become because of a multitude of fantastic signs and wonders. The ultimate test of the purity of faith is to see how faithful we remain in spite of a multitude of fiery trials and tribulations. Some preachers today encourage people to come to Christ through the gate of self-centeredness not the gate of repentance and faith. They invite people to Christ for deliverance from their uncomfortableness or difficult circumstance rather than their sin.

I believe that God's current priority is the supernatural internal transformation of a dead heart into a new reborn heart followed by a continual transformation of the immaterial aspects of our nature (soul, heart mind, spirit) concluding with the eventual glorification of our actual physical bodies.

We must stop exalting external demonstrations of God's power over the supernatural power of God demonstrated in the regeneration of the lost and inner healing of attitudes and personality fractures of those who come to Him. We get all excited about someone receiving physical healing only to see them die later anyway and if not a Christian spend eternity in hell. Yet when a spiritually crippled person comes to the altar weeping in repentance before God and finds eternal salvation or finds healing for their troubled soul we see it as a second class sort of event. After all, our rebirth is the greatest miracle that could ever take place. To take a dead spirit destined to spend eternity in the fires of hell and bring about its resurrection into newness of life is a miraculous work that will not be fully appreciated until heaven. God continually works on our heart until with both do His pleasure and want to.

James wrote about ministry to people where God uses us to bring about internal deliverance.

My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins. James 5:19-20

Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. James 1:21

James encourages those without strength to call for the elders to pray. The word translated “sick” actually is the word for strength with a negative in front of it. It is used in relation to a physical weakness, a spiritual weakness i.e. weak faith and a weakness caused by a demonic foothold. James offered a process for temporary healing.

Although we have many demonstrations of God's supernatural power manifested on the physical external level, by far, the emphasis is on the supernatural work of the Spirit of God in the heart. God simply has not made a blanket promise of physical healing to everyone. Paul suffered greatly. Epaphroditus almost died. Paul instructed Timothy to take Pepto Bismol for his stomach problems. Jesus told the home town crowd demanding a miracle show to prove his worth among them that He was not sent to heal everyone.

I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed - only Naaman the Syrian." Luke 4:25-27 (25)

God is much more concerned with our maturity than He is our mirth. He is concentrating more on our holiness than our happiness. Even if that maturity and holiness requires we suffer unpleasant physical and temporal trials. Internal transformations of the soul kind, are of greater import to the kingdom than temporal re-adjustments of the physical kind.

B. EXTERNAL PHYSICAL HEALING

Striving for the Biblical balance requires that we by no means de-emphasize the supernatural power of God to remove adverse circumstances and suffering by miraculous means. God often allows life to continue through His own established natural laws. But for His own purpose and glory He may choose to transcend those natural laws.

- He can supersede the natural fallen state of our world.

- He can turn the hearts of kings and governors and devil-directed course.

- He can empower us and actually commands us to abstain from the fleshly lusts.

- He can enable us to resist the devil.

When God chooses to supersede His own natural laws it is always for a reason. Some periods and times in Biblical history were filled with more external miraculous displays of God's power with a far greater purpose than mere avoidance from misery. Many men of faith did not experience any external supernatural signs. The miracles of Christ brought authentication to His person and purpose. Many of the miracles illustrated some Biblical truth or claim. After the feeding of the 5,000-- I am the Bread of Life. At the resurrection of Lazarus--I am the resurrection and the Life. Yes, God continues to demonstrate His power through supernatural healing.

The cross of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice provides the framework for my deliverance from the suffering of a sinful world. He also allows suffering to continue and provides the supernatural internal work of endurance to His glory. Only God knows what kind of work will bring us the greatest growth and He the greatest glory. Our job is to ask, to pray, to believe to entrust our lives to our faithful creator in doing what is right.

We are to leave the results in His hands and not demand from Him but receive what is best from His hand not continually nag for our own gain rather than His glory.

Paul spoke of suffering and the eventual supernatural deliverance from death through the prayers of the saints.

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings - what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 2Ti 3:11

C. EVENTUAL or ULTIMATE RELEASE

I have longed to see God do a miracle as we prayed for a supernatural intervention for many in our congregation. Hundreds of people prayed for a successful heart surgery for my dad. God said, "NO!" As I stood by the side of my father's casket, I remember a deep longing for the power to raise the dead; to restore life to that pale lifeless shell. I realized then that God's purposes were different from mine and that far greater work had been accomplished and other begun through his death.

We have no doubt about the ability or the desire of God to heal here and now. It is clear that God has a more complicated plan that is unfolding through time. What if Christ had insisted in escaping the suffering of the cross? What if the Father had answered His prayer to bypass the cross? Where would that put us?

We are assured that all pain and sickness will one day be removed and eliminated. Those who die now find new life and healing in the presence of Jesus.

Creation will one day be released from the curse.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:20-21

We will experience full restoration of soul and body.

We ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. Romans 8:23

Satan and his soldiers will forever be eliminated from access to our new world.

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." Revelation 21:3-4

We currently live in a painful broken world and we long now for that which we cannot fully experience until we die or Christ returns. In the meantime, we have the avenue of prayer. In prayer we seek draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in our time of need. We will find help whether it be a supernatural internal transformation of our soul or a miraculous temporary relief of our physical suffering.

CONCLUSION

Suffering will be a part of life until the return of Jesus. He promises deliverance from, through, out of, in the midst of trial.

Following are some suggestions.

1--RESTORE OUR PERSONAL PRAYER LIFE

2--RECHARGE OUR PRAISE LIFE

3--REFUSE THE PURPOSES OF SATAN

4--REST IN THE PURPOSES OF GOD

5--REVIEW THE CHARACTER OF GOD

6--REFUSE TO FOCUS ONLY ON EXTERNAL RELEASE

7--RELY ON THE WISDOM OF OUR FAITHFUL CREATOR

When this is our posture, we will be able to truly thank God for the trials that come our way.

COMMUNION

The sacrifice of Christ is the foundation for healing of all kinds.

Isaiah 53:4-6

*Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.
All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.*

Matthew applied prophecy this to deliverance from evil spirits and sickness.

*And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demonized; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill in order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases." **Matthew 8:16-17***

Peter applied this same prophecy to internal spiritual healing.

*and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. **1 Peter 2:24-25***

HEALING

Are you struggling with some kind of weakness today?

Spiritual weakness?

Physical weakness?

Weakness due to spiritual warfare?

Is anyone among you without strength? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your

*sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. **James 5:14-16***