

# The Christian Meaning of Suffering (1Peter 4:12-19)

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**Memory verse:** *Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you. Cast all your cares upon him, for he cares for you.*

## I. OVERVIEW (1 PETER 4:12-19)

In this passage Peter restates and develops what he has already said about suffering for the sake of Christ. What is new here?

First, Peter teaches that our suffering is actually a participation in the sufferings of Christ and is an occasion for rejoicing.

Second, he declares that right in the midst of their suffering, the Holy Spirit rests upon those who are suffering, and this is a great consolation.

Finally, he explains that God uses suffering to purify the Christian community, God's household. God uses the abuse that pagans unjustly heap on Christians to prepare his people for the return of Christ.

Peter also warns the community ***not be surprised at the fiery ordeal*** that will come upon them as followers of Christ. In fact, it should make them happy and lead them to glorify God, for if they share in Christ's sufferings it means they will also share in his Glory.

**Read:** 1 Peter 4:12-19

**[12] Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you to prove you, as though something strange were happening to you.**

**[13] But rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that**

***you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.***

***[14] If you are reproached 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 a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker;***

***[16] yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God.***

***[17] For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?***

***[18] And "If the righteous man is scarcely saved, where will the impious and sinner appear?"***

***[19] Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will do right and entrust their souls to a faithful Creator.***

### **A. Rejoice in the Midst of Suffering**

Peter says that Christians should not be surprised or ashamed at the unjust abuse (literally, “*a fiery ordeal to test you*”) heaped on them because they are followers of Christ.

In fact, they should rejoice “. . . ***because the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.***” Jesus promised the special assistance of the Holy Spirit to persecuted Christians (Mt 10:19–20).

### **B. Judgment Begins with the Church (4:17)**

The discussion of suffering for Christ now takes a surprising turn. Peter declares: ***for it is time for the judgment to begin with the household of God.*** This seems counter intuitive. We should expect judgment to begin with the evildoers – those abusing the Christians.

But Peter seems to be saying that the “appointed time” has come for the judgment of God to begin – not with evil doers but first with “the house of God.” The “various trials” (1:6) and “fiery ordeal” (4:12)

experienced by Christians (the Church) are in fact the beginning of God's purifying judgment.

This judgment is not for condemnation but for purification, so that his "house" might be prepared for the return of Jesus and for entrance into **"the glory that is to be revealed"** (4:13).

### C. The Judgment of Sinners

**"If the righteous man is scarcely saved . . ." what awaits "the impious and sinner?"**

If the righteous have to endure such difficult trials that they are tempted to give up, how difficult will it be in the final judgment for those who reject the Gospel?

But Peter's focus is not on the fate of unbelievers. His goal is to encourage faithful Christians.

He says that those who now suffer "according to God's will" should "entrust their souls to a faithful creator" even as they carry on doing good.

He is encouraging Christians to be like Christ who "handed himself over to the one who judges justly" (2:23) when He suffered as the innocent servant of God on our behalf.

## Reflection and Application (4:12-19)

### A. A Difficult Message

Peter's message may not be what we want to hear. We might prefer to hear God promise to keep every "fiery trial" far away from us.

It is even more difficult to be told that we should expect to be abused and vilified for "doing good."

It is hard enough to stand up under criticism or punishment when we have done something wrong, but when we have done nothing

wrong, nothing deserving blame, and still are insulted and reviled, we are “surprised” and even enraged.

### **B. A Great Privilege**

Peter tells us not to be surprised, but to treat this as “sharing in the sufferings of Christ” himself.

- This is in fact a great privilege.

Further, we can expect that the **“spirit of glory and of God”** will be present to us in the midst of our suffering, giving us strength and consolation to endure it.

- We are never alone in our suffering.

### **C. But Why Do the Righteous Suffer?**

We may still wonder why God allows this and ask what possible purpose it can serve. Peter's answer: it is the appointed time for God to sift and purify his own “house” and to prepare it for full communion with himself.

The Letter to the Hebrews gives a similar answer (Heb 12:5–13). When we encounter trials from the world because of our faith, we should treat this as “discipline” that our loving Father gives to his beloved sons and daughters.

Though painful for a time (what Peter calls “a little while”) this discipline yields “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” to those who are trained by it.

Our task is to “hand over” our lives “to a faithful creator,” knowing that after he has purified us, he will vindicate us just as he vindicated his Son.

# Concluding Exhortations (1 Peter 5: 1-11)

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**Memory verse:** *“Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith.”*

## I. OVERVIEW

Peter's letter closes with some brief exhortations, first to the leaders, then to the younger members, and finally to everyone.

- The unifying theme is the importance of humility before one another and before God.

Whether serving as a shepherd or following the lead of the shepherds, all are called to the humility that brings unity in God's household and peace with God.

## II. EXHORTATION TO ELDERS (LEADERS) (5:1-4)

**Read:** 1 Peter 5:1-4

**[1] So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed.**

**[2] Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly,**

**[3] not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.**

**[4] And when the chief Shepherd is manifested you will obtain the unfading crown of glory.**

### A. Role of the Elders

The Elders or leaders (often translated as “presbyters”) are the shepherds of the local Churches addressed by Peter (1:1). Our English word “priest” is derived from the word “presbyter.”

Their pastoral authority to guide, to instruct, and protect the flock under their care is derived from the supreme pastoral authority of Christ the “**chief Shepherd**” (5:4; Acts 20:28-32).

And because they stand accountable for the welfare of the Lord’s sheep, Peter warns them not to misuse their own authority grudgingly, greedily, or oppressively (5:2-3).

### B. Tend the Flock of God

Peter describes the pastoral role of the Elder (Gk: *presbyteros*) in three short contrasts, each one speaking to a common temptation for leaders.

- **First**, they are to oversee the people not by constraint (force) but willingly, as God would have it.

The work of leading a local church, especially during times of persecution, can be difficult and burdensome. A leader must face a constant stream of issues, complaints, and needs.

Peter is calling leaders to accept this responsibility willingly, not grudgingly, as God would have them do.

- **Second**, they are to govern not for shameful profit but eagerly.

Here the temptation is to take a role of leadership in order to gain some kind of financial advantage for oneself. Instead, leaders are called to accept their role “eagerly”, not for their own benefit but for that of the sheep (see Ezek 34:2-6).

- **Finally**, there are told: “Do not lord it over those assigned to you, but be examples to the flock.”

Jesus too warned his disciples about this temptation:

*“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant (Mt 20: 25-26).*

Leaders should not be overbearing or think too highly of themselves on account of their standing in the Church. They should set an example by their own lives, exercising humility and patience with their flock and protecting the sheep as true shepherds do.

### C. The Unfading Crown of Glory

If the leaders fulfil their pastoral task in this way, Peter assures them, that **“when the chief Shepherd is revealed, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”**

Peter coins another word, “chief shepherd,” to show the pre-eminence of Christ. “The great shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20), the “good shepherd” (Jn 10:11), is Christ himself.

- Leadership in the Church is always by delegation from Christ, not by one’s own authority, and all leaders are accountable to him.

## III. EXHORTATION TO ALL THE FAITHFUL (5:5-11)

### A. Overview

Peter concludes his exhortation with a call to humility, which should express itself in complete acceptance, not just passive resignation, in the face of the trial’s God permits.

Saint Peter also reminds us that we always have to be watchful against the assaults of the devil, who will pounce on us if we lower our guard.

**Read:** 1 Peter 5:5-11

**[5] Likewise you that are younger be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."**

**[6] Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that in due time he may exalt you.**

**[7] Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you.**

**[8] Be sober, be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.**

**[9] Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experience of suffering is required of your brotherhood throughout the world.**

**[10] And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you.**

**[11] To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

### **B. Be subject to the Elders**

It is not clear if Peter is speaking to the young in age, new Christians or lay people in general, but the message is that the flock must heed the ordained shepherds of the Church.

### **C. God Opposes the Proud**

Peter then exhorts everyone: **all of you, clothe yourselves with humility in your dealings with one another.** All are called to humility, whether presbyters or younger members.

- Humility is the great leveler.

Though there are different roles in relationships of subordination in the Church, the fundamental posture for all of us to adopt is humility before our brothers and sisters.



The quotation "**God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble**" is from the Greek version of Proverbs 3:34.

The proverb pleads for humility with a promise that God will exalt us in his favor. The proud, who are puffed up and insubordinate, will one day be humiliated.

Jesus makes a similar promise to all his followers: "*Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted*" (Mt 23:12).

#### **D. Cast All Your Cares (Anxieties) Upon Him**

Like any good father, God invites his children to unload their worries upon him so that peace and comfort can be given in return.

The verb "to cast" points to the vigorous unburdening of our anxieties as we deliver them over to the One who is able to bear them up.

Humbling ourselves before God is not just a passive posture – we are to "cast" or "throw" all our anxiety and care upon the Lord, because he genuinely cares for our welfare.

#### **E. Your Adversary the Devil**

Peter points the finger at Satan, accusing him of being the unseen perpetrator of Christian persecution (5:9).

His deadly intentions and predatory tactics make him comparable to a ravenous lion on the hunt for food. (Lions were greatly feared in Biblical times and were sometimes made a symbol of one's enemy).

This is the third time Peter exhorts the faithful to be sober, and adds the call to be vigilant, watchful. Earlier he referred to the importance of sobriety:

- to put our hope in heavenly things (1:13);

- to help us to pray (4:7);
- Now he adds that it puts us on guard against the devil.

***Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.***

How is the devil seeking to prey upon the Christian faithful?

Certainly he is acting in and through the human agents that persecute Christians. But even more he is at work in our desires and thoughts, trying to tempt us away from following Christ.

Peter calls him the “opponent” or “adversary” of the Christian people, a term that derives from the “adversary” in a court of law (see Mt 5:25; Luke 12:58).

The devil as adversary or accuser is portrayed graphically in the Book of Revelation;

*“The huge dragon, the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, who deceived the whole world, was thrown down to earth . . . Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: ‘now have salvation and power come, and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Anointed. For the **accuser** of our brothers is cast out, who **accuses** them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:9-10).*

Peter, however, changes the imagery to that of a “roaring lion” who prowls around seeking someone to devour. This image reveals the devil’s raging malice – he is seeking to do harm wherever and whenever he can find an opening to attack believers in Christ.

Where does he seek entry?

Through things like unconfessed sin, worldly attachments, disordered desires, and debilitating fears.

What are we to do?

- Peter calls us to **resist him, steadfast in faith.**

### F. A Faithful Father

Peter concludes with one of the most eloquent and powerful promises of God's faithful care found in the Bible.

- God's grace is sufficient to help his people through whatever suffering they may be called to undergo.

God has a good and eternal destiny in store for his people. Whatever sufferings they have to endure for "a little while" God promises that he *himself* will **restore, confirm, strengthen and establish them** in due time.

The picture here is of a faithful Father carefully watching over our full restoration until we are established in strength in Christ.

Does this promise of restoration apply to this life here and now? It certainly does, at least in an initial way, however, the true and complete fulfillment of this promise is in eternal life.

### G. Praise God!!

Peter is so overcome by the thought of God's loving care and his promise to faithfully bring us through all our trials and temptations that he bursts into praise: **To him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.**

### Reflection and Application (5:5-11)

The truly remarkable feature of Peter's closing remarks is the picture it offers of God our Father – a personal God, always available to us and ready to intervene on our behalf.

Sadly, many Christians see God as someone who is distant, remote - a God who does not do anything we can experience, or make himself known to us in a personal way. But God is within reach!

But Peter gives us a different picture - a picture of a personal God who acts and intervenes on our behalf.

- God is the one on whom we can cast our anxieties, because he actively cares for us.

Even if we have to suffer “various trials” for a season the Father will exalt us in due time by his own mighty hand.

- He is the God of “all grace” who can supply all our needs.
- He loves us and wants us to have a personal relationship with Him.
- He wants to give us a better life, a **new** life – starting now, today!
- He has chosen us and called each one of us by name (John, Mary, Rosie, Carlos, Bill) and has called us to eternal life with him in Christ Jesus.

Finally Peter underlines God's personal care for us, assuring us that God *himself* will **restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish** us.

- And we are reminded that God has the power to accomplish our full restoration.

All this is immensely good and consoling news for us, especially in times of severe trial.

By revealing the Father's personal care for us, Peter invites us to establish a personal relationship with the Father and to leave all our anxieties and cares in his mighty hand.

# Final Greeting (1 Peter 5:12-14)

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## I. OVERVIEW

We come now to Peter's final greeting. Having finished his message, he first explains what he has done, then offers greetings from those who are with him, and closes that the prayer for all Christians.

***[12] By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God; stand fast in it.***

***[13] She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings; and so does my son Mark.***

***[14] Greet one another with the kiss of love.***

***Peace to all of you that are in Christ.***

### A. Sylvanus

Peter explains that he has written the letter through Sylvanus - a brother in Christ. Sylvanus is also known in the NT as "Silas" and was once a member of Paul's missionary team (2 Cor1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; Acts 15:40).

Peter identifies himself as the author of the letter, and he names Sylvanus as either the writer of the letter or, more probably, as the bearer of the letter to the Christians of Asia minor.

"Silas" is a variant of "Sylvanus."

### B. Babylon

#### ***She who is at Babylon***

Peter next gives greetings from those who are with him, first from the chosen one at Babylon (NRSV: "your sister church at Babylon"). The letter originated from "Babylon," a code word for the city of Rome (see Rev 14:8).

Babylon always represents an evil power although God can on occasion utilize it in order to achieve his ends.

The city of Babylon was not only an image of the dominant, evil political power in the world, which Rome had now become, but because Babylon had been the place of exile for Israel it also fits extremely well with Peter's emphasis on Christians as "sojourners and exiles" (1:1; 2:11).

### C. My son, Mark

Next Peter extends greetings from **Mark, my son**.

This is John Mark, an early believer from Jerusalem (Acts 12:12) whom Christian tradition identifies as the author of the Gospel of Mark. Here he is associated with Peter. He was also a onetime companion of Paul (Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11).

### D. The Kiss of Love

Offering his final greeting, Peter concludes, **"Greet one another with the kiss of love."**

Greeting with a kiss was a sign of deep family bond. It was a practice adopted by the early Christian community as the standard means of showing affection as brothers and sisters within the household of God.

### E. Final Benediction

Peter began the letter with a blessing, **"may grace and peace be yours in abundance"** (1:2), and now he concludes the same way: **"Peace to all of you who are in Christ."**

It is a peace that comes only through the power of the risen Christ.

Amen.