

Sermon: Suffering and Smiling
Impact Church London,
Aug. 29, 2021

RECAP & INTRO: Suffering and Smiling

It will happen to you, but you can get through it happy and well.

Philippians 1:29

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake..."

1 Peter 3:17

"For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

Suffering: *"We want to contextualize it so we don't aggrandize it. We want to recognize it so that we won't minimize it. We don't just want to survive it, we want to thrive within it."*

Contextualize it: Put it in context

1 Peter 3:17

"For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil."

Suffer (πάσχω / paschó): "to suffer, to be acted on" (to feel heavy emotion).

It is to have to experience the unpleasant effects of choices and actions and events that you may not always want, or have control over. It's impossible to avoid: it's a matter of degree, frequency, and intensity.

There is obviously a large continuum upon which many experiences fall into this category, from being inconvenienced all the way to imprisonment or death. This is why context also matters!

If you are going to suffer, make sure its for the right reasons.

1 Peter 3:7

For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

1 Peter 4:15-16

"But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter."

Don't Aggrandize it: Make it bigger than it is!

Don't blow it out of proportion, don't make an identity around it, and don't invest meaning in it that it doesn't have.

There is no redemptive quality to suffering.

Ephesians 1:7 (& Colossians 1:14)

"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins..."

Redemption comes through his blood, not our suffering.

Suffering does not make us more like him, or make us more fruitful.

John 15:5

"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Galatians 5:22-23

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

Suffering doesn't make me close to God!

1 Corinthians 6:17

"But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him."

You can't get any closer to what you already are!

But what about Jesus? He learned obedience by the things suffered.

Hebrews 5:8

"...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered."

That was true of Jesus not us. Jesus did a lot of things we can't do. Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the whole world, we can't do that!

Jesus vicariously learned obedience, vicariously repenting and obeying on our behalf. We are now called to the obedience of faith, to bring every thought captive to the obedience **of Christ**.

Greg Boyd in "Is God to Blame"

"Our picture of God not only influences our emotional response to God, it strongly influences our understanding of everything else in our life... it influences how we interpret suffering and evil in our life." (Is God to Blame, 2003. p.21).

Recognize it: God Does

1 Peter 4:12

"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you."

Trial / test (peirasmos / πειρασμός): an experiment, a trial, temptation. Temptation or test – both senses can apply simultaneously (depending on the context).

Don't Minimize it: Face it!

Don't write it off, ignore it, say it doesn't matter or is ineffective. Be honest, but be hopeful, don't fear, and keep smiling! Smile, not because you have ignored it, pretending it didn't happen, but because of your hope in God.

1 Peter 4:4-5 (NLT)

"Of course, your former friends are surprised when you no longer plunge into the flood of wild and destructive things they do. So they slander you. 5 But remember that they will have to face God, who stands ready to judge everyone, both the living and the dead."

Don't have to run and hide, run to God the judge of the living and the dead and let him be the one who validates you, recognizes you, affirms you and has the last word over you !

We don't want to just survive!

1 Peter 4:7

"The end of all things is at hand..."

Sometimes when you go through suffering you can get terminal, hysterical even. "That's it, this is the worst it's ever been, if this keeps happening, it's all over." We adopt terminal language when things get tough.

Clearly, in the midst of suffering and even in "the end," Peter has so much more in mind for the followers of Jesus than just surviving. Look at the language he uses:

"Do not fear, do not be frightened" (3:14), " Be Prepared". (3:15), "Arm yourselves" (4:1), "Be alert" (4:7), "Love...deeply" (4:8), "Offer hospitality" (4:9), "Rejoice" (4:13), "Commit themselves" (4:19).

Thrive: prosper, flourish, develop and grow vigorously

God has a unique way of bringing the best out of us, when the devil is trying to do the worst to us. God takes the energy of the event and turns it into something good. Think about Jesus's sufferings...

1 Corinthians 2:8

"But the rulers of this world have not understood it; if they had, they would not have crucified our glorious Lord."

God didn't kill Jesus and make him suffer, yet through it he saved the world.

1 Peter 4:13

"...but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."

1 Peter 4:14

"If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified."

Armed with that knowledge you can do more than survive but thrive in the presence of suffering, thrive even in the hostile culture that Peter was writing to Christians in. We can still get involved, belong, connect, love. We can serve actively and passionately with the gifts God has given us, no matter what the suffering. Don't let it knock you into survival mode only.

1 Peter 4:8-10

"And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." 9 Be hospitable to one another without grumbling."

10 As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

Conclusion:

Suffering is inevitable, but not because God makes it so.

We have been called to share in Christ's life. We therefore share in its consequence; glory and life, but also the impact of how that light causes others and the world around us to respond.

But know this: suffering is not the plan, action, or requirement of God, neither does he orchestrate it or inflict it. In fact, suffering seems to be dependent on whether or not others initiate it and what circumstances we find ourselves exposed to. Suffering is not even up to God, as he is not the initiator of it.

1 Peter 3:14

"But even if you should suffer...

1 Peter 1:6

"...if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,"

1 Peter 4:19

"Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator."

According to God's will, not because it is God's will.

Suffering is no good but : "We want to contextualize it so we don't aggrandize it. We want to recognize it so that we won't minimize it. We don't just want to survive it, we want to thrive within it."

1 Peter 4:13

"...but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy."

Suffering but SMILING!