



1 Peter 5:6–14

18th Message

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# BE BETTER, NOT BITTER

*SERIES: 1 PETER: LIVING FAITHFULLY WHILE SUFFERING*

The joyous chorus of “Hosanna” we sang today marks our celebration of Palm Sunday. It also marks the beginning of Passion Week, Jesus’ last days on the Earth as a man. During this week, Jesus walked the dark path toward the Cross, unflinching as He faced insults from the people, injustice in the courts, suffering in the soldiers’ hands, and excruciating death on a cross. Of course, the suffering was followed by His resurrection and glorification that we will celebrate next week on Easter. But this week, this side of the Cross, Jesus’ path was characterized by suffering.

The recipients of Peter’s letter were familiar with suffering, living as exiles in a hostile land, losing their possessions and even their lives for their faith. This suffering and persecution occurs even today; tens of thousands of Christians lost their lives last year, the majority in Africa in tribal violence and martyrdom.<sup>1</sup> Here in Silicon Valley, we may not face overt persecution. However, we do suffer in different ways: financial ruin due to economic downturn, being unemployed or underemployed. We face health crises when cancer ravages us or takes our loved ones. We hurt from broken relationships, infidelity, addiction, violence in the streets or disasters from nature.

How do we respond to our suffering? Do we get bitter or better? Our flesh may cause us to be bitter. We worry, panic, or complain. In our disappointment, we may stop trusting in God or believing that He cares. Ultimately, we may even reject God in the face of suffering and doubt.

Peter’s letter is all about how to persevere and do good during our trials, how to be better, not bitter. Today, in the final passage of this letter, Peter explores three ways in which we respond to suffering: responding from our flesh, responding when attacked by the devil, and responding to God’s promise and provision for us.

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.**

**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, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Peter 5:6-11 ESV)**

## Submit our Flesh to God

The first word, “humble yourselves,” is in the passive voice, so we may paraphrase it as “be humbled by God’s mighty hand.” In the Old Testament, his mighty hand disciplined Israel to teach and benefit them. We are to realize that the mighty hand of God may humble us and benefit us in the long run, and we are to submit to him. His hand can use all circumstances to humble us: suffering, pain,

disappointments, failures, even the daily frustrations of life. Rather than becoming bitter, complaining, or even blaming God about them, we must accept that he allows and uses these circumstances to purify us, to humble us, to teach us about submission to his Lordship.

However, God’s mighty hand has a second purpose in scripture. In the Old Testament, God’s mighty hand also delivers, saves, and exalts. His mighty hand liberated Israel from slavery in Egypt. This same hand can also deliver you from bondage and suffering, from humiliation and depression.

## When will God deliver?

According to Peter, He will exalt you at the “proper time”. Note that this deliverance may not happen at our time schedule; in fact it may not occur in our lifetime. We may need to wait until Jesus returns before this exaltation is complete. But be assured that his proper time is perfect in his plan. We set our sights on that future hope of glory.

So we see that God’s hand can humble us with a purpose, “so that” he will lift us up to glory in the final time. Submitting in humility will lead to exaltation in glory. This is, of course, the pattern of our Lord Jesus throughout Passion week leading to Easter Sunday, and it is the pattern we accept for ourselves, too.

## How do we humble ourselves?

Peter describes this as “casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” (v.7) Are you a “worrier”? Are you sometimes anxious or paralyzed by fear? Do you worry that God doesn’t care for you, and that you need to take matters into your own hands? This reaction may be from the flesh. Of course, it is normal to be anxious or to worry sometimes. When your car breaks down in a dangerous neighborhood in the middle of the night, it’s expected that you’re a bit anxious.

But sometimes, worry can actually be a form of pride. We may be filled with anxiety because we think God doesn’t care about us, or because we are convinced we must solve all our problems in our own strength. The only “god” we trust is ourselves. That’s a form of pride, responding in our flesh rather than trusting him.

God has given us wisdom and talents, and once we use these to do what we can do for our circumstances, it is no longer necessary or helpful to keep worrying or being anxious.

We’ve done what we can, so now stop worrying and trust God. Let go and let God. Don’t continue to carry that burden of worry.

I want to give you some awesome examples of someone who responds to suffering by properly applying this verse in life. How many of you heard from Tom and Barbara Metzler last week in the Fellowship Hall? During the bout with Tom’s cancer, Tom and Barbara wept when weeping was needed. They pursued medical treatments as God provided. But throughout the ordeal, they rejoiced

in God's providence. They were not worried for their future, for they knew God cared for them. They broke taboos in Thailand by openly talking and preparing for Tom's death. They showed their Buddhist friends the confidence and joy they have in Christ, bringing the gospel into the lives of many non-believers.

My second example is our dear brother Bill Kiefer. Bill has fought prostate cancer for ten years; the most recent recurrence ravaged his body and spread into his bones. Since Christmas, the cancer has debilitated him, taken away the use of his legs. This is someone who has run during his life 27,078 miles, now confined to a wheelchair. Is Bill bitter, complaining, or blaming God? Not at all! He suffered himself to be humbled, took the necessary chemotherapy drugs, and has entrusted his life to God, literally "casting all his anxieties upon God." His positive spirit continues to amaze and encourage me. Bill is indeed better, not bitter!

Thank you, Bill and Tom for your inspiring examples applying this verse in your life.

In summary, Peter addresses the response of our flesh in this way. Be humbled under God's discipline; be exalted in God's time. When there is pride, we must submit in humility. When there is anxiety, we must give way to trust in God. Submission and trust are the keys to overcome our fleshly tendencies.

### Spiritual Warfare

A second aspect of facing suffering is to recognize that there is a spiritual battle going on, a war against the devil. The devil is unseen yet very real; Jesus Himself had to face the devil in the wilderness. Do not deny his existence in the circumstances before us nor underestimate his deviousness. The devil's goal is to steal our soul for eternity, to fool us into denouncing our faith and rejecting the Lord. And if he cannot have us for eternity, he wants to render us ineffective in the present. He wants us to falter in our walk and fail in our witness to the world. Peter's chilling description of the devil ought to scare us! "Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (v.8) Can you visualize the bloody scene of a lion devouring his prey? The devil wants complete annihilation of our faith and complete assimilation—swallowing us fully—into his body of lies.

The devil does this by deceiving, slandering, and accusing us. In his roars and whispers, in his threats and lies, he causes us to doubt, to believe things about God and about ourselves which are not true. We hear questions and accusations like:

- Is living for Christ worth this suffering?
- Does God really care for me, considering all this evil and injustice that I face?
- I'm too sinful, too weak, too inadequate.
- I will fail, I'll succumb to temptation. I am not saved because of my habitual sin.

I can recount these questions and lies so readily because I have heard these whispers myself so often during times of loss, discouragement, or stress. Especially when I prepare to preach from the pulpit or am wrestling with heavy matters as an elder. Have any of you heard these whispers? How do we fight this spiritual war? Peter tells us how in verses 8-9.

### Sober-minded

First, "be sober-minded." This means that we must think clearly. Recognize that there is a spiritual battle for our soul,

**For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12).**

These powers of darkness will exploit our vulnerabilities against us.

"Being watchful" means we recognize our points of weakness, where we are most susceptible: drugs or alcohol, wandering eyes or lustful thoughts, love of money or power, unforgiveness, jealousy, anger. Each person has different vulnerabilities; we must recognize what our own weak points are.

"Being watchful" also means we recognize the times when we are most vulnerable: when we're sick or stressed out, when our guards are down, or when we're alone and unaccountable. Be vigilant during these times when we are weakest.

So be proactive:

- Recognize that the devil is at our door
- Recognize where we are weak
- Recognize when we are vulnerable
- Be ready to fight.

### Resist

How do we fight against the devil? "Resist him, firm in your faith" (v. 9). A similar verse in James 4:7 states, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." We don't run. We resist and watch the devil run! When we are attacked, let's call upon the name of Jesus in prayer; ask Him to strengthen us by reminding us of His love and promise.

- When I'm accused, I call out, "I am forgiven and worthy because of Christ's blood!"
- When I'm exhausted & overwhelmed, I call out, "I am strong through the strength of my Lord!"
- When I'm discouraged in despair, I call out, "I have a future, a room in God's house that Jesus is preparing for me!"
- I will not be deceived or defeated by Satan's lies!
- Resist in Jesus' name!

To be "firm in faith" means we keep God's word close in our heart. Memorize, reflect on, and use scripture to resist the devil. If you're not in God's Word constantly, you are going into war without your armor. My favorite scripture for remaining firm in faith during spiritual warfare is in Ephesians 6:13-18,

**Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication.**

So be in the Word daily, weekly. Read the passages we preach each week, examine the Word on your own and learn God's lessons for yourselves. That's how you'll be grounded in the Word, firm in your faith.

Third, resist the devil in solidarity with a community of believers. Very likely your community of believers can share your burden, has gone through similar situations, and will support you in spiritual warfare. So it's crucial that you plug into church; join a Bible study, home fellowship or growth group; find a mentor or accountability partner.

If you're not in such a relationship at church, come talk to us, and we'll help you get plugged in. Resist, and join the resistance!

### God's Provision: Past, Future, Present

The next two verses gives us the assurance of God's provision for us.

**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, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (v 10)**

In the past, the God of all grace has pursued us to a relationship with him—he called us to himself. 1 Peter 1:3 says “he has caused us to be born again to a living hope.”

Having initiated our salvation in the past, He promises to complete our salvation in the future, when we will experience “his eternal glory in Christ”. He will bless us with “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). His initiation in the past coupled with His promise of a glorious eternal future ought to motivate us to persevere in the present.

But God gives us even more in the present. Right now His power fortifies us to live today a holy life that is different from the world. In this verse (1 Peter 5:10), Peter uses four strong verbs that together give us the assurance that God's power is guarding us in our present struggles.

Whatever we have lost, God restores. When we doubt our own worth, God confirms our identity as His child. When we're attacked by the devil, God can strengthen us to resist. And if we feel like an exile in a hostile world, God establishes us in a true home, in a family of believers for the present and in His house in eternity. Indeed, because of God, we can face tomorrow and today!

This wraps up today's message on persevering during suffering. Peter teaches us how to overcome our tendency to respond in the flesh, how to respond when we're attacked by the devil, and encourages us to appropriate God's promise and provision.

### Final Greetings

The final three verses of this letter contain personal greetings from Peter's co-workers in Christ.

**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 firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. (vs. 12–14)**

Silvanus, also known as Silas, was the faithful brother who carried Peter's letter throughout Asia Minor, reading it to the local churches

and delivering the exhortations. Silas also accompanied apostle Paul in his second missionary trip. The two famously sang hymns in prison after being beaten, God sent an earthquake to break their chains, and they led the jailor to Christ. “She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen” refers to the local churches in Rome, or may refer to fellow “exiles” in the world. “Mark, my son” was John Mark, who ministered with Paul and Barnabas on their first journey and traditionally was the author of Gospel of Mark. All of these co-workers sent greetings and support.

### Summary of 1 Peter

Peter refers to this letter as the true grace of God to help the readers stand firm. This entire letter is a gift (grace) from God to those exiles and to us today. What does this letter teach us? I want to wrap up our sermon series in 1 Peter by reviewing the major themes we encountered in the letter. I hope this thematic summary encourages you to remain firm in your faith.

**Salvation:** God saved us through Christ; our salvation will be perfected in the last days.

**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. (3:18). For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable. (1:23) (you)...are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. (1:5)**

**Sanctification:** We have been set aside as a holy people with a new identity and purpose.

**But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession (2:9). You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. (2:4-5)**

**Submission:** Holy living in community requires submission to God and to each other.

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. (5:6) Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority... (2:13) Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect... (2:18) Wives, in the same way submit yourselves to your own husbands... (3:1) you who are younger, be subject to the elders (5:5)**

**Suffering:** As chosen ones, we are to persevere through trials and suffering and do good, being good examples to the world.

**Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed... (4:12–13) Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good. (4:19)**

I pray that this series in 1 Peter has been beneficial to you. I encourage you to re-read this letter in your own time with these themes in mind, asking the Spirit to guide and convict you of the true grace of God. To Him be the glory forever!

### Personal Sharing

I wish to close this morning's message with some personal sharing.

After preaching last Sunday, I received a phone call from my sister in Los Angeles, who informed me that the health of my aging father

has taken a downturn. After praying about it, I decided to fly down to LA to be with my sisters. I was there most of the week, returning only last night in order to preach this morning.

During my time in LA, I spent days and nights with my dad. I sat with him, holding his hand, massaging his arm, stroking his hair. I stayed by his bed through the night, listening to his labored breathing, wondering when the end would be.

How did I feel? I felt scared, anxious, worried. I wondered if God cared, if he was big enough to rescue my father. I talked to my dad, though I wasn't sure he could hear. I prayed for his salvation, though I did not know if he desired it. I doubted God, blamed God, begged Him to take my dad, to end the suffering, begged Him to keep him alive to receive salvation. I felt guilty for not doing more, I felt terrified, helpless, hopeless.

You see, everything I preached about this morning—responding in the flesh, fighting the flaming arrows of the devil, every exhortation to trust God—I have lived through in the recent months, weeks, days, hours. This is my life. How do I respond?

Three days ago, on April 6, 2017, my father, Benjamin B. Tu, breathed his last breath and died. I was sitting next to him, holding his hand, reading him scripture.

How do I respond? Am I better? Am I bitter? I don't have the answer; it's too raw and overwhelming.

Was God with me? Absolutely! Throughout the week, He sent angels to intersect my path and confirm His love for my dad and me. In the final hours of his life, I asked my father one last time, "will you accept Jesus as Lord?" Fearing that he could not hear me, I asked the caregiver to write on a small whiteboard my question in Chinese. We brought the whiteboard for him to read. I saw my father's eyes scan the board, reading each word carefully. Then his eyes darted up and read the words again, "will you accept Jesus as Lord?" Then he blinked his eyes and nodded, "yes." Praise God! After years of praying, sharing, and hoping, my father finally accepted the peace of God and will enter the kingdom of heaven. Praise God!

I will be returning to LA next week to lead the memorial service for my father. He will be buried on Easter weekend—in God's perfect timing! If you think of us, please pray for the service to be honoring to God and to my father.

**And peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:7)**

1) <http://www.christianpost.com/news/90000-christians-killed-in-2016-1-every-6-minutes-study-172464/>

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