



FOREIGNERS & EXILES

HOW SUFFERING WORKS:
FIRE & WATER

1 PETER 3:13-18

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:6-7

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

1 Peter 3:13-16

For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit.

1 Peter 3:17-18

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.

1 Peter 4:12-13

[O]ther cultures have provided its members with various answers to the question "What is the purpose of human life?" Some cultures have said it is to live a good life and so eventually escape the cycle of karma and reincarnation and be liberated into eternal bliss. Some have said it is enlightenment—the recognition of the oneness of all things and the attainment of tranquility. Others have said it is to live a life of virtue, of nobility and honor. There are those who teach that the ultimate purpose in life is to go to heaven to be with your loved ones and with God forever.

The crucial commonality is this: In every one of these worldviews, suffering can, despite its painfulness, be an important means of actually achieving your purpose in life. It can play a pivotal role in propelling you toward all the most important goals. One could say that in each of these other cultures' grand narratives— what human life is all about— suffering can be an important chapter or part of that story.

Timothy Keller Walking with God through Pain and Suffering.

But modern Western culture is different. In the secular view, this material world is all there is. And so the meaning of life is to have the freedom to choose the life that makes you most happy. However, in that view of things, suffering can have no meaningful part. It is a complete interruption of your life story— it cannot be a meaningful part of the story. In this approach to life, suffering should be avoided at almost any cost, or minimized to the greatest degree possible.

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I was raised up believing I was somehow unique
Like a snowflake distinct among snowflakes,
unique in each way you can see
And now after some thinking, I'd say I'd rather be
A functioning cog in some great machinery
serving something beyond me

Fleet Foxes, *Helplessness Blues*

These sufferings of grief in all kinds of trials have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith— of greater worth than gold...— **may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.**

1 Peter 1:7

These ...trials have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith— of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire— may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

1 Peter 1:7

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

1 Peter 3:17

It is better to suffer than to sin.

Even those Christians who do not suffer persecution for the faith are called to the suffering of self-denial. Sin is often thought of as being motivated by the temptation for pleasure.

But perhaps the real power of sin lies in the avoidance of pain and suffering. It is better to suffer unfulfilled needs and desires than to sin. Is this not what self-denial means? Jesus linked self-denial with following in his footsteps when he said, "Those who would be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34).

For instance, isn't the temptation to lie often an attempt to save face rather than face the consequences of the truth? Isn't the temptation to cheat on an exam an unwillingness to suffer the loss of reputation or other consequences that failure might bring? Isn't sexual sin often the alternative to suffering by living with deep emotional and physical needs unmet? According to Peter, the pain and suffering that self-denial brings is a godly suffering that is better than yielding to sin.

Karen Jobes, 1 Peter, Baker Exegetical Commentary

Suffering comes along. Timidity and cowardice, selfishness and self-pity, tendencies toward bitterness and dishonesty—all of these “impurities” of soul are revealed and drawn out by trials and suffering just as a furnace draws the impurities out of unrefined metal ore. Finally we see who we really are. Like fire working on gold, suffering can destroy some things within us and can purify and strengthen other things. Or not. It depends on our response...the fiery furnace does not automatically make us better.

Timothy Keller Walking with God through Pain and Suffering.

Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion. The disciples woke him and said to him, "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Quiet! Be still!" Then the wind died down and it was completely calm. He said to his disciples, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" They were terrified and asked each other, "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.

Mark 4:38-41

“It was the cruelest question they could have asked, because the very reason he was in the boat, indeed the world, and the reason he was going to die on the cross for them was precisely because he cared for them.”

Sinclair Ferguson

When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire,
you will not be burned;
the flames will not set you ablaze.

For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior...
you are precious...

Do not be afraid, for I am with you.

Isaiah 43:2-5

For Christ also suffered once for sins,
the righteous for the unrighteous, to
bring you to God.

1 Peter 3:17