**1 Peter: Trials Designed to Test Character**

1 Peter 4:12-19

**1 Peter 4:12-19**—Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; **13**but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. **14**If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. **15**Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; **16**but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. **17**For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18**And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? **19**Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

None of us particularly enjoys suffering. We run from it, get out from underneath it, and avoid it at all costs. But what if God is using suffering and hardship as a means of shaping and molding you into greater holiness? What if God is using the circumstance of life with all its difficulties as a means of sanctifying you? This text tells us that we should not be surprised that it is coming but more—to rejoice in the sufferings. To do that effectively, we need to have God’s perspective. Otherwise, we will chafe and complain in its challenges.

**Context**

Peter is writing this epistle just before Nero’s persecution, which followed the great fire that ravaged Rome in the summer of 64 AD.

The familiar phrase "Nero fiddles while Rome burns" is often said of the tyrannical dictator who had an insatiable desire to build and needed to destroy the old in order to construct the new. Nero needed a scapegoat to blame for the fire so conveniently chose the Christians. They were already hated and marginalized in the culture. Worse, there was such animosity toward Christians that Nero used them as human torches to light his garden parties at night, crucified them, and put them inside animal skins to be devoured by ferocious animals.

Peter has repeatedly encouraged these believers by reminding them that although they are rejected by the world, they are chosen of God. His theme of unjust suffering and hostility because they name the name of Christ will come, but take heart. Their reward will be great.

**4 thoughts on the Power within Suffering**

1. **Do not be Surprised**

**12** Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;

1. Jesus told His disciples to expect persecution

**John 15:18**—If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you.

1. Other NT writers say the same

**2 Timothy 3:12**—Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

**1 John 3:13**—Do not be surprised, brethren, if the world hates you.

1. Peter describes these believers as “beloved”

**2:11**—Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.

* 1. Pastoral—tender, compassionate, caring

**1 Corinthians 4:14**—I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.

**1 Thessalonians 2:8**—Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us.

* 1. They were loved by Peter
  2. More, they were loved by God

Such love provides a sweet pillow for believers’ weary souls to rest on in the midst of trials and persecutions.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* 1. To question God’s love in the midst of sever persecution is not uncommon
  2. Yet His love is unfailing

(i.e. Job)

1. Do not be amazed
   1. Surprised (Xenizō)—to surprise or astonish by the strangeness and novelty of a thing[[2]](#footnote-2)

**2 Corinthians 2:15-16**—For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; **16**to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?

“The same sun which melts wax hardens clay. And the same Gospel which melts some persons to repentance hardens others in their sins” – Spurgeon.

“The gospel saves and slays.”

**John 12:37-43**—But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. **38**This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” **39**For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, **40**“He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.” **41**These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. **42**Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; **43**for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

(Cf. **Romans 9:15-24**)

* 1. Godly living and biblical faith will bring persecution

**Mark 10:30**—Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, **30**but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life. **31**But many who are first will be last, and the last, first.”

**John 16:33**—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.

* 1. Expect it

**2 Timothy 3:12**—Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

**Matthew 5:10**—Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

1. Fiery ordeal (pyrōsis)—the burning by which metals are roasted and reduced; by a figure drawn from a refiner’s fire
   1. A metaphor to portray the painfulness
   2. As a furnace melts down metal to purge it of impurities so too, trials purge the believer

**1 Peter 1:6-7**—In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, **7**so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

**Psalm 66:10**—For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.

**Proverbs 17:3**—The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the Lord tests hearts.

* 1. Perhaps a familiar passage to Peter’s audience

**Malachi 3:1-3**—“Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of hosts. **2**“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. **3**He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness.

**4:1**—“For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,” says the Lord of hosts, “so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.”

1. They test us
   1. Persecution tests the genuineness of our faith

**Job 23:10**—But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

**Romans 5:3-5**—And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; **4**and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; **5**and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

**James 1:2-3**—Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, **3**knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. **4**And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

**Matthew 13:3-9**—And He spoke many things to them in parables, saying, “Behold, the sower went out to sow; **4**and as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. **5**Others fell on the rocky places, where they did not have much soil; and immediately they sprang up, because they had no depth of soil. **6**But when the sun had risen, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. **7**Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. **8**And others fell on the good soil and \*yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty. **9**He who has ears, let him hear.”

**20**The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; **21**yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away.

* 1. They shape us into Christlikeness
     1. Consider the unjust sufferings of Christ
     2. Cultivates shared suffering, refined faith and character, develops humility, supports compassion, and a longing for the eternal

**Philippians 3:10**—that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; **11** in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4**—Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, **4**who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

**1 Peter 5:10**—After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.

1. [As though some strange]…thing were happening to you
   1. God’s sovereignty is always in play
   2. Experiences of unjust suffering for Christ are not accidental
   3. They are inevitable—why?
      1. Because the gospel will offend
      2. Telling people of their sin offends
      3. Righteousness offends
      4. Judgment offends
      5. Christ will offend
2. Be reminded:

**Job 5:17**—Behold, how happy is the man whom God reproves, So do not despise the discipline of the Almighty.

**Proverbs 3:11-12**—My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord Or loathe His reproof, **12**For whom the Lord loves He reproves, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights.

**Hebrews 12:4-5**—You have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood in your striving against sin; **5**and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, Nor faint when you are reproved by Him.

**Revelation 3:19**—Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.

It has been aptly suggested that Gentile converts to Christ, as distinct from Jewish believers, would be particularly unused to persecution on account of their religion. Naturally, therefore, they would regard suffering consequent upon becoming Christians as a strange misfortune, wholly out of place, something which contradicted the promised blessings of the gospel.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. **Keep on Rejoicing**

**13**but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. **14**If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

1. To the degree
2. There is a correlation between our earthly suffering and our eternal reward

**Romans 8:18**—For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

**2 Corinthians 4:16-18**—Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. **17**For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, **18**while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

**Hebrews 11:26**—considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward.

**2 John 8**—Watch yourselves, that you do not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward.

**Revelation 2:10-11**—Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

1. You are blessed

**Luke 6:22-23**—Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. **23**Be glad in that day and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

1. We share in the sufferings of Christ

We fellowship Christ’s sufferings when we suffer for His name’s sake, when the hatred that struck Him strikes us because of Him Never is there a thought of fellowshipping in the expiation [atonement] of Christ’s suffering, our suffering also being expiatory. In Matthew 5:12 persecution places us in the company of the persecuted prophets (high exaltation indeed); here it places us in the company of Christ Himself, into an even greater communion . Is that ‘a strange thing’ or to be deemed strange? It is what we should deem proper, natural, to be expected, yeah, as Peter says (following Matt 5:12), a cause for joy.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**John 15:20**—Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

1. Keep on rejoicing

**Matthew 5:10-12**—“Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. **11**“Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. **12**Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

1. The revelation of His glory
   * + 1. The day that the Son of Man is revealed

**Luke 17:30**—It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.

* + - 1. He is gloried now, but His glory is not yet revealed on earth.

**John 17:5**—Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

1. **Suffer for the right things**

**15**Make sure that none of you suffers as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler; **16**but if anyone suffers as a Christian, he is not to be ashamed, but is to glorify God in this name. **17**For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? **18**And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner?

1. **Entrust your Soul to God**

**19**Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

**Conclusion**

The Lord has not promised us exemption from crushing disappointments, pain, bereavement, or persecution. Any one or all of them could come. If they do, don’t be surprised or perplexed. Accept them as part of Christianity, and call upon God’s strength to endure.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Psalm 31:1-5**—In You, O Lord, I have taken refuge;  
Let me never be ashamed;  
In Your righteousness deliver me.  
**2**Incline Your ear to me, rescue me quickly;  
Be to me a rock of strength,  
A stronghold to save me.  
**3**For You are my rock and my fortress;  
For Your name’s sake You will lead me and guide me.  
**4**You will pull me out of the net which they have secretly laid for me,  
For You are my strength.  
**5**Into Your hand I commit my spirit;  
You have ransomed me, O Lord, God of truth.

**Source**

Most of the message and notes come from:

Richard W. DeHaan, Good News for Bad Times: 1 Peter

R.C.H. Lenski, The Interpretation of I and II Epistles of Peter, the three Epistles of John, and the Epistle of Jude

John MacArthur, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1 Peter

John MacArthur, The Fiery Trial, Part 1, 1 Peter 4:12-14, Jan 7, 1990, gty.org

Jerome H Smith, The New Treasure of Scripture Knowledge

# Alan M. Stibbs, The First Epistle General of Peter (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)

[www.blueletterbible.org](http://www.blueletterbible.org)

1. MacArthur, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Strong’s G3579 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stibbs, 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Lenski, 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. DeHaan, 123-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)