

Closing Marks

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Today we reach the end of Peter's first epistle (letter). He packs his closing verses with some solid advice for believers, advice that will carry them through difficulties and struggles and persecution. He'd already made clear that suffering was to be expected (1 Peter 4:12), and here he re-iterates this truth, saying that believers "throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of suffering" (1 Peter 4:9).

One thing believers in those days had in common was the fact that difficulties surrounded them *because* they claimed the name '**Christian**'. Wherever they went they were despised and abused by many *because of* their faith in **Jesus Christ**. While one could find themselves discouraged by this reality, Peter affirms it here with this reminder that they were not alone in the struggles that they bore because they carried the Name of Jesus into the world!

Similarly, whatever struggles we face today because of our faith and commitment to Christ, we can be assured that we are not alone in those struggles. Suffering is part of the Christian journey. Our brothers and sisters face it too. It takes different forms in different places and cultures, but in every place, those who shine God's light into the darkness will be resisted, rejected, mistreated and

abused. But none of us suffers alone! We have a brotherhood and sisterhood ... a family (1 Peter 2:9) ... ready and willing to suffer with us in this fight against evil; this fight for good! Ironically, it seems that the more good we do, the greater the suffering we often experience. But in it we can rejoice with “inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8) because we know that through it our faith is strengthened (1 Peter 1:6-7), assuring for us the “salvation of our souls” (1 Peter 1:9).

Throughout this epistle Peter reminds believers, past and present, that God uses suffering to shape our character, solidify our commitment, and sanctify us as Christians. Further, through suffering we enter into close communion with Jesus Christ, our Suffering Saviour (1 Peter 4:12-13). Suffering was/is to be viewed as a **blessing** for these reasons (1 Peter 4:14)!

Peter’s closing remarks are found in 1 Peter 5:6-14. I invite you to take time now to read these verses carefully and prayerfully. As you read, ask yourself, what is Peter advising those early believers to do as they endure suffering for the Kingdom’s sake? What actions steps is he suggesting you take as you suffer for the Name of Jesus? Here’s what I discovered:

1. Trust God’s Timing (1 Peter 5:6)

No suffering lasts forever! God's plans for us are always for our good. His plan is to lift us up, to make us shine brighter for His Kingdom. So while we face suffering we need to humbly submit to the goodness of God and the perfection of His timing. His mighty hand of protection and deliverance is with us each step of the journey. And He knows how long we must endure each struggle in order to net the rewards they each are intended to bring. "*In due time*" -- at the very moment when we have gained that strengthened character, that solidified faith, and/or that sanctified commitment to Christ and His ways that each struggle is intended to bring, "*He (God) will lift us up*"! If we trust fully in His timing, knowing that it is guided by His perfect wisdom and love, we will endure and ultimately gain the gifts each struggle seeks to provide. If we push ahead of Him, choosing to run from the struggle rather than endure it, we will miss out on the growth that He has planned for us.

When you face difficulties and trials because of your faith, are you ready to surrender to God's timing? Though the struggles may be difficult, are you able to believe that He will bring good blessings from them? Are you ready and willing to walk hand in hand with Him through suffering, knowing that His desire is to use every circumstance in your life to "lift you up in due time"? Do you seek the gift of patience (a fruit of the Spirit) so that you can endure through suffering?

Peter encourages us first to trust God's timing!

2. Believe in God's Care (1 Peter 5:7)

Every anxiety, every worry, every concern is to be cast upon God. Why? *"Because He cares for you!"* When we suffer (or a Christian brother or sister or loved one suffers), we may become overwhelmed with fear and worry. We may find ourselves racked with anxious thoughts that attack our hope and our peace. All that fear and worry and anxiety only adds to our suffering. So, Peter's advice here is profound. Let it go! Cast it on God's broad shoulders! Whatever anxiety or fear or worry you hold in the face of suffering, He is ready and able to take it from you. He is all-powerful. He is supernaturally able to carry all the anxieties and worries and fears – all the 'cares' -- of all believers everywhere, simultaneously. That's our God! Do you believe it? It's true. What so easily overwhelms us is readily handled by Almighty God.

But here's the catch! We have to release it to Him. We have to "**cast it**" on Him! That's an intentional, decisive action. And, as Peter knows, we can only find the courage to cast our cares on Him as we learn to believe that He cares for us! Which is why he says, "Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you!" Relief from all that worry and anxiety that all too often floods our hearts and minds in the midst of suffering will only come to us as we choose to take this step;

as we choose to cast ALL our cares on our caring and compassionate God! He wants to take those cares. He wants to lighten the load of our suffering!

So, when you find yourself worrying and fearing the struggle that you are enduring, name your anxiety and release it to Him! The suffering will continue, but the load will be greatly lightened as you do. Take Peter's wise advice: Believe in God's caring and cast your cares on Him.

3. Trust God's Protection (1 Peter 5:8-9)

We have an enemy who is eager to destroy our faith and claim us for his kingdom. His name is Satan. (He is also known as the devil.) And he is at the root of any suffering that we face because of our faith, make no doubt about it. Knowing our enemy is important. But knowing our Protector is even more important as we face struggles for His sake.

Peter reminds us in these two verses that to defeat the devil's schemes against us we must remain self-controlled, alert, and firm/steadfast in our faith! We have received faith as a gift from God. Steadfastness of faith is also a gift that He grants us, but it is a gift that we have to nurture with the Spirit's help. Our faith is strengthened as we lean on the Spirit to keep us aware of and alert to the enemy's tactics so that we can overcome and remain safe. The Spirit does that as we give care and attention to the spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation on

God's Word, godly living and righteous service ("doing good"). Even in the midst of persecution and suffering, we are to remain steadfast in these faith practices so that we can stand firm and defeat Satan.

It is as we stand firm in faith through our struggles that God proves Himself victorious, using what Satan had planned for evil to bring about good in us and through us. It is faith -- provided by God and inspired/nurtured by His Spirit -- that protects us from Satan's wicked schemes. So, while it is true that "your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (verse 8) you are not to fear because God is at your side, always, protecting you. As you trust in God and the faith He provides you will have the power, even in your suffering, to resist the devil (verse 9)! Through faith, you will recognize clearly that Satan's plans for you and I are evil (they are meant to destroy), but God's plans for us are good (they are meant to bring life)!

How often do we fail to lean into the faith that God has provided? How often do we fail to practice the disciplines that can keep our faith alive and strong and steadfast? How often do we allow our enemy to gain the victory because we don't stay alert and self-controlled? How often do we lose the battle because we do not trust the protection that God provides?

God needs us to resist the devil and trust His protection so that we stand firm, enabling His “good” to be realized in every situation ... especially in our suffering!

4. Lean on God’s Grace (1 Peter 5:10)

Peter began this letter with a prayer for grace (1 Peter 1:2b), and here he returns to this word as he closes the letter. “The God of all grace”, he declares, “Who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To Him be the power for ever and ever. Amen”.

God is “**all grace**”! He continually lavishes undeserved favour on us out of the storehouse of His boundless love. His riches are ours, bought and purchased for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

This God of all grace called us “to His eternal glory” (verse 10). This God of all grace has allowed us to suffer “a little while” (verse 10). This God of all grace will “restore” us fully, making us “strong, firm and steadfast” (verse 10). This God of all grace is all-“power”ful now and “forever”more (verse 11).

Whatever we are suffering, whatever struggles or trials we face, we can count on God’s grace. We can lean on it to carry us. His grace is abundant. Even if we fail and falter in the midst of our sufferings, His grace is there for us. Phillip

Yancey asks, “What’s so amazing about grace?” Well ... grace is amazing because it takes us at our worst and chooses to redeem and restore us so that His glory and power can be seen in us.

This was Peter’s unwavering hope for those early day believers, and he declared it knowing that this is and always was God’s plan for each of them. It is God’s plan for us too. Through joys and through sorrows, through blessing and through suffering, our **God of all grace** takes us as we are and redeems us and restores His glorious image in us! As the well-known hymn declares,

His love has no limit. His grace has no measure. His power, no boundary known unto men.

But out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.

“It is by grace you have been saved!” (Ephesians 2:8)

Are you taking Peter’s advice and leaning on God’s grace?

5. Count on God’s People (1 Peter 5:12-14)

It wasn’t just Peter that was praying for and supporting these believers scattered across Asia Minor. They had a large family rooting for them. In closing off his letter Peter makes that clear to them.

He mentions Silas, a faithful brother, who helped him compose the letter. He also mentions the church in Babylon (aka Rome), and Peter’s spiritual son Mark, who sent their greetings. Despite the persecution and struggles, the church continued

to grow at that time. And believers could count on the prayer support of believers all over Asia Minor who were also battling Satan's schemes. None were alone. God was with them administering His grace, and their Christian brothers and sisters world-wide were with them too. And even where they were, "scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia" (1 Peter 1:1), there were Family members to greet them with love and affection ("a holy kiss" – verse 14).

Knowing that we belong to a glorious family of believers who are committed to live out the Kingdom's values should fill us with courage and conviction to stand firm in suffering. God is in the business of restoring us each and every day. Our brothers and sisters stand with us through their prayers, their spiritual counsel and their practical support. Are you relying on that support or are you wrestling alone? In these days of isolation, it can be easy to forget that we are surrounded by faithful Family. If you're struggling, reach out! We are not intended to journey on our own.

Together we can stand fast and "do good". Together we can resist Satan and witness God's victory. Together we can see God's good plans for us accomplished as His glorious image grows stronger in each one of us. Together we can bring Him glory as we live grace-filled lives that offer peace and love to

those around. I'm hopeful that when we are able to gather again we will be filled with stories of how we've held and supported each other through these difficult days; stories that affirm that we are a Family!

Peter reminds us that we are not alone, that we are all in this together, and that together we can claim God's grace and "do good" in this world! Are you counting on God's people?

Bold obedience is possible as we walk humbly with our God and link hands of faith with our brothers and our sisters. No adversity will defeat us. Joy inexpressible will be ours and the salvation of our souls will be realized as we persevere in the power of the Spirit, joining willingly in the sufferings of Christ Jesus our Lord. This is the message of 1 Peter. Are you claiming it?