

Unlocking Freedom: “1 Peter: Hope in a Foreign Land”

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Introduction

Please open your Bibles to **1 Peter 1:6** as we continue down the path of our study in Peter’s letter to the persecuted church. Peter writes, *“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials...”*

In this passage we see the concept of “joy” as the phrase “greatly rejoice” literally means to “**jump for joy!**” and the concept of being “distressed” which literally means “to grieve or **feel great sorrow**”. How is that these two polar opposite concepts can be married together in the same verse? And is it possible to feel both at the same time? What Peter has done here in verse 6, is he has taken a snapshot of our lives. He has, through his own experiences, his knowledge of what these scattered saints are going through, and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter gives perspective to the difficulty and trials of life. All throughout life we are told by well intentioned people how to respond when we are overwhelmed with life’s trials. Some people say that every trial we face is a consequence of our sinfulness, therefore somehow implying that if we are obedient to God we will not go through trials in this life. Therefore, repentance is the message to those in the pit of despair. **Illustration:** Faith healing and Ian Fuzzle. This understanding of difficulties and trials can do great disservice and harm to our faith.

Others have said that when you are going through trials it is best to not keep your emotions locked up inside - let God know how you feel by raising an angry fist to the heavens. This carries with the implication that God is the author of your trials and therefore He is to blame for your difficulties. I actually don’t think any of these perspectives on trials are biblical. It is okay to be angry with God, it is okay to feel overwhelmed by emotion- and it is sometimes accurate that our trials are a result of sinful choices, but to say any one of these things definitively concerning our various trials in life and the trials of another is foolishness. On the other hand, to say that in the midst of trials, if our perspective is correct, we can rejoice greatly – this is biblical. **So how can we find joy in the midst of trials?** This is the question we will seek to answer this morning as we continue our study in 1 Peter. And as we work our way through these 4 verses – one long sentence – my hope is that these truths will bring a lifetime of perspective to your days on this earth - May we come back to the remarkable truths found in these verses time and time again!

Read **1 Peter 1:6-9**. *Open in Prayer.*

“Nothing happens in our life by accident.” This is a statement I have heard before, is it something you believe? Does everything happen for a reason? Many of us would tend to say yes. But then again, it’s easy to praise God for His hand of provision and His purpose in our lives when things are going well – you just got that raise and promotion at work...your child made the sports team...you received a good report from the

doctor...you had a good tax return. When moments like these happen we often, with smiles upon our faces, turn our attention upward in gratitude to the God who has provided for us such a blessing. But what about when our days are difficult. Instead of getting that promotion, you show up to work just to find out that you have lost your job unexpectedly causing you to have to start all over again. You receive a phone call from a teacher telling you that your child has been suspended. You go to the doctors for a routine check-up and receive bad news. What about those days of trials? Can we learn anything from them? And how is it possible to have joy in the midst of them?

Illustration: August 29, 2011 is a day that I will always remember. It marked the beginning of the greatest trial that our family has been through – and many of you walked alongside us as we made our way through it. On that day our world was torn apart unexpectedly - our “normal” changed forever. Leading up to that fateful day our hearts were overwhelmed with the blessings of God. We were a family of 3 excitedly anticipating the addition of 1 more boy to our family. We celebrated each milestone along the way, spoke of this child with great love, and had our house all set up for his homecoming. The due date was just weeks away – in fact, by all speculations, he could be born at any time. Oh, the joy we felt as our hearts were full. We never expected what would come next. On Monday, at 12:04 that afternoon, I received an unusual text message from Emily that she hadn’t felt the baby move at all that morning – but she did not feel a need to panic. In just an hour’s time, her concern grew, so she left work and I woke up little (2 year old) Carter from his nap and we made our way to the Doctors office. At 1:45 pm the doctors confirmed through ultrasounds that our precious Owen’s heart had stopped beating. It doesn’t take long for the emotions of that trial to still impact me this morning – over 8 years later. I remember after the funeral we had a ‘follow-up’ appointment with the doctor and as we sat in the waiting room, we shared the space with a teenage girl who’s mother was holding a baby that she had not wanted. She and her boyfriend were laughing away as they shared a screen on their phone and there was this precious baby child born to a teenage couple who didn’t plan it, didn’t know how to raise her, or didn’t seem to want her – and as we silently watched them immaturely interact with their newborn – we couldn’t help but think, why us and not them? There are so many people who consider the baby they carry as an inconvenience in their lives, but that’s not us, so *why God have you chosen us to walk through this trial?* Why have you allowed such a horrible thing to happen to us? These were the questions that pressed my heart and mind during those days. This was our ‘trial’ that reshaped our lives and changed us forever.

Each one of us will have one, and some of us may be going through one today – what’s the purpose of these trials? Can we learn anything that would encourage us in the midst of them?

1. **The Purpose of Trials** (vv. 6-9)
 - a. **We will all go through various trials in this lifetime** (v. 6)

The first thing we notice about the purpose of trials in our life is that we all will go through various trials in this lifetime. This word used for ‘various’ in the Greek means, ‘many colored’. And when Peter, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, uses this specific

phrase he wants us to know two things. First, we should expect a life of multiple trials. Each day, in a way, is filled with trials and difficulties. It is not a one trick pony, but a reoccurring event. **2 Timothy 3:12** “All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” **John 16:33** “In the world you will have tribulation.” **1 Peter 4:12** “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.”

Trials are an everyday constant in our lives. Expect them.

Second, those trials we walk through daily will all be a little different from each other. Some of them may be physical trials, others may be emotional. Some may be spiritual trials, and yet others may be mental. Some may be BIG trials that take years to work through, and others may be small trials that pass in a moment. But the one constant here in this verse is that we will encounter trials of all sorts throughout our lifetime – therefore, like a storm building over the ocean, prepare yourselves for them. Having this perspective will help you know how to respond when they come your way.

Also, notice with me the nature of these trials: temporary (no matter how long they may take, all our trials are temporary with eternity in mind –), necessary (there is great purpose, reason, and value to the trials we walk through), and (if we couple it with God’s power in verse 5) our trials are in God’s control. *In this we greatly rejoice!*

b. **God uses these trials in our lives to refine our faith** (v. 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.” The purpose of our various trials is to test our faith, refining it like gold, in order to remove the imperfections so that at the coming of Christ we may be found with those who are faithful - praising, honoring and giving glory to our Savior. In this verse we see Peter compare and contrast our faith to gold. He **contrasts** it in that faith is more precious than gold, which is perishable. Faith is everlasting. When you enter the presence of God, whatever gold you have stays here – it is worthless the moment you breath your last breathe on this earth – but faith is eternal, it is all that matters that day. Peter than **compares** our faith to gold - like gold, our faith is to be tested by fire for the purpose of perfecting it. Genuine faith will grow stronger, not weaker, through trials.

What the trials and testing of our faith does, is it strips us of all pride and self-righteousness and demands that we rely on Him. By breaking down our manmade foundation, the testing of our faith, the trials we go through, replace that broken foundation with a firm foundation in God and His sovereignty. Sometimes this takes a long time and sometimes it happens quickly. And while our faith is being tested by the fires of trial, we may ride the waves of doubt and the emotions of uncertainty – but let me remind you through God’s Word that these trials are necessary to grow our faith – your scars have purpose. **Malcolm Muggeridge**, an English journalist in the early 1900’s, became a Christian just before his death, and late in his life he said, “*Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, everything I have learned,*

everything that has enhanced and enlightened my existence, has been through affliction and not through happiness.” (Chronicles of a Wasted Life).

However, this perspective cannot be had if we don't believe that God has purpose for our trials. So, like I said earlier, when thinking of these trials in our lives, we must remember that God is in control in the midst of them. This is the overall implication here – that God is using trials as a goldsmith, watching the heated metal, skimming off the imperfections, until He can see His reflection in it. To know that God is sovereign and in control during these times of trial is a great comfort to our faith when we are walking in the valleys of the shadow of death. God has not forgotten you. He wasn't asleep in the belly of the boat when the storm hit, He wasn't on vacation – He is working all things, including our trials, for good according to His sovereign plan (**Romans 8:28**).

Personally, I can attest to the truth in these verses of 1 Peter. The darkness and heat of the trials I have walked through in my lifetime of 38 years has strengthened my faith and has increased my dependency upon God and His Word. I can honestly say that I am a better father, husband and man of God because of the trials God has allowed and used in my life. *And for this I greatly rejoice.*

c. **Joy can be found in the midst of trials by looking to our Savior and His salvation.** (vv. 8-9)

That's twice now that Peter has used the phrase '*greatly rejoice*'. And when we think of trials in life, difficulties that mark our days, we don't often think of this phrase. Yet when our perspective is correct, and our gaze is upon our Savior and His salvation, we see our trials as temporary and we understand the purpose they have. Turning our troubled spirit to a joyful one. So how do we gain this joy from the pits?

i. **We look to the Savior with Love.** "*And though you have not seen Him, you love Him...*" Our love for Christ flows out of hearts that have understood the love Christ has for us. "*We love because He first loved us.*" (**1 John 4:19**). The love of our Savior for us, seen in the cross, is the central motivation for the Christian life. And when we just barely grasp the love of Christ we understand that it is He who loves us that is allowing this trial to happen. Like a loving Father, allowing a child to make a mistake or suffer through difficulty in order to learn from it, our heavenly Father loves us and knows exactly what we are going through. Allow the love of God seen in Christ give us perspective in the midst of trials.

ii. **We look to the Savior with Faith.** "*And though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him...*" Faith is actively choosing to trust God in spite of my circumstances. We can do this best when reminded of His promises – "*I am with you even to the end of the age.*" (**Matt. 28:20**). "*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*" (**Hebrews 13:5**). When the world seems to spiral out of control, and the darkness of your day makes you feel like you are alone – remember the words of our Savior, and trust in His promises and provision. Allow your heart to find joy and peace and comfort in the words of Jesus.

iii. **We look to the Savior with Hope.** *“Obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”* As we look to our Savior with the hope of our salvation (future tense) we realize that the trials of this world are simply temporary and so small in comparison with the eternal life we will live with Christ. When the difficulties of this world close in around you, close your eyes, and picture your life with Christ upon the streets of gold surrounding by so great a cloud of witnesses! This is the hope we have of salvation from sin’s penalty, sin’s power, and sin’s presence. And this is the outcome of God’s love and your faith. Salvation.

Conclusion

What is it that you are going through right now? What trials accompany your thoughts and actions? Are you discouraged today? If so, find assurance, find comfort, and find hope as you learn to trust God in the midst of your trials. *Let’s pray.*