

Your Faith Under Fire Pt 1

1 Peter 1:6-9 (05/29/16)

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1 Peter 1:6-9 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; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Remember this song by Bobby McFerrin in the late 80s? “Don’t worry, be happy, in every life we have some trouble. When you worry, you make it double. Don’t worry, be happy.” Tell that to a mother who just saw her child run over in the lane by a moving van, or a wife who just found out her husband’s been cheating on her. How do you respond to trials and difficulties that come your way? The world gets angry, plans revenge, nurtures hatred and bitterness. Some resign themselves to fate: “That’s the way the cookie crumbles.” “I’ve been dealt a bad hand.” Today it’s bad karma. The numbing effect of alcohol or pain killers entices others. And when life really turns bleak and miserable, suicide is seen as an escape.

How do you handle the difficult circumstances and people in your life? This is such a dominant theme in the Bible and for your Christian life that we’re taking two weeks for “Your Faith Under Fire.” Everyone in this place is dealing with some kind of trial right now. It may be an easy trial or a really fiery one. Let me assure you right up front, you will not get through life without your faith being tested. And on the other hand, God has ordained every difficulty in your life for your good.

Before we plunge into this rich and helpful portion of God’s truth, let’s notice something interesting. Peter doesn’t just say, “Don’t worry, be happy,” but he sandwiches his teaching about trials and distress between two slices of rejoicing. Verse 6 begins with rejoicing and vv. 8-9 ends with rejoicing. This is a paradox of the Christian life. Paul said it like this in 2 Cor. 6:10, “As sorrowful yet always rejoicing.” And we know some of the severe trials he went through. This is an acid test of your faith. While you may be greatly distressed, greatly grieving, greatly troubled, can you rejoice? Can you be both glad and sad at the same time? Let’s open our passage with several principles to help us handle distressing trials to the glory of God.

First, God says that regardless of what else is going on in your life, you have reason to greatly rejoice.

1:6a “in this you greatly rejoice.”

With all God’s mercy poured into your life in verses 3-5, God says you need to greatly rejoice. That’s the keynote, the tone of God’s people. Your eternity is secure in Christ, you are heaven bound, you are blessed by unspeakable blessings, and in this you greatly rejoice. That’s more than just rejoicing. Rejoicing is when she says yes to the first date. Greatly rejoicing is when she says yes to your marriage proposal! You’re the happiest dude on the planet. Rejoice because you have food to eat. Greatly rejoice because you have a reservation in heaven!

This is how God says you and I need to approach every trial and situation we face. Always greatly rejoicing! You are going to heaven instead of hell! We aren’t talking about pasting on a smiley face here. This is so much deeper and richer. God repeatedly says that the tone of the Christian life is joy – great joy. In Acts they went on their way rejoicing, counting it an honor to suffer for Christ. “Count your many blessings, name them one by one!” Sometimes, in hard times, you need to sit down with your notebook and start listing and thanking God for all His rich mercy in your life.

Second, God assures you He will bring trials and difficulties into your life.

1:6b even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

Did you even begin to think that when you came to Christ, He would make your life trouble-free? Some interpret “Jesus will solve all your problems” as God will pay off all my debts, my investments will always have high returns, my wife will just lovey dovey me all the time, our kids will end up on the front page of Perfect Parenting magazine, I’ll find a knockout job and never lose it, God will take away all my lousy feelings, I’ll be happy, happy, happy, I won’t struggle with lust and temptation anymore, and I’ll die in my sleep. Then trouble comes. A Christian offends you, someone lies about you, a drunk sails right through a light and T-bones you, sending you to the hospital with a ruptured spleen. Now you’re laying there thinking, where is God? What kind of God is this to let these awful things happen to me? I thought He was going to take care of me! Oh, He is taking care of you, only not the way you thought! God will bring trials into your life. Let’s see what He says about these trials:

- God says your trials will be limited in time – “even though now for a little while.” Everything is great in your Christian life, but you’ve got some “now” to go through. “A little while.” For a little while God will bring some difficulties into your life. At max your trial will be maybe 50 or 60 years, but that’s a mere blip on the screen of eternity. But it is now. For now, expect some hurt, pain. It won’t last long. Kind of like a root canal. It will end shortly, but there it is and it hurts. This is how you have to view your troubles – now, for a little while.
- God says these trials are necessary – “if necessary” is a first class conditional, meaning, if and it’s true. God knows you need trials. He doesn’t cut away the cocoon to let you out of the hardship of pushing and groaning your way through. No struggle, no butterfly. No trials, no growth, no being transformed into the image of Christ. God knows what we need and is in absolute control of every trial. He is faithful; He won’t allow you to be tested beyond what you are able to bear. God is in your trial, and He has a purpose for it.

That’s why Peter in 1 Peter 5:4-6 says God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, and then charges us to “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He might lift you up in due time.” The mighty hand of God is God’s sovereign providence over all the people and circumstances, all the troubles and heartaches and hurt and pain that He allows to come into your life. Don’t fight it. Don’t get angry at God. Don’t curse God by thinking, God, what are you doing? Don’t you know it’s me?

Remember Joseph? Betrayed, falsely accused, and forgotten in prison, but he humbled himself under God’s mighty hand of providence. He knew God was with him. And sure enough, God did lift him up as Prime Minister over Egypt, preparing rescue for his people. The next verse in 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Casting all your anxieties, cares, inner struggles on Him, because (here comes one of the sweetest promises in the whole Bible for believers) He cares for you.” He cares for you right now, here, in your circumstance, as tough as it is. Joseph knew that and did not react and get angry at God for the tough times.

- God says these trials are distressing – “you have been distressed.” You may think God’s plan has gone haywire or failed; surely God isn’t in this horrible circumstance. Thing again and know this. God is in every circumstance of your life, even distressing situations are God’s plan. When Pastor Greg Laurie couldn’t get a response from his son Christopher on July 24, 2008, after he had left to go to the church, they grew concerned. Shortly they got the news no father or mother wants to hear. Christopher had been killed in a car crash. This trial was distressing. Greg says, to this day, “That pain and sadness doesn’t just disappear.”

You probably have had some distressing, painful, hurtful trials in your life. That word distressed means God doesn't shield us from painful experiences, nor does He deny our emotions. He knows we have a hard time with tragedies and loss of loved ones and all the pain people go through. Christianity doesn't deny hurt. Jesus was distressed in the garden as He faced the cross. It wasn't sin. You may spend hours weeping, grieving, being distressed over a trial God has brought into your life. That's okay.

But remember, we can greatly rejoice even in our distress. We don't react like lost people who quickly curse God for the troubles they experience. You've heard them curse God with angry blasphemy. You may have done it yourself. "Where was God when my son was killed by a random bullet? It's all so senseless. If this is the kind of God we have, I don't want anything to do with him." No, even in tragedy, our faith feeds our trust and hope and joy in God. We know God is in this. No child is taken from us unless it was part of God's plan. We may not know God's immediate purpose, and we probably won't, but we're going to trust Him because He is a kind and loving God! These trials are for a little while, they are necessary, and they are distressing, but they are in God's hand! Spurgeon had some heavy duty and distressing trials in his life. Among other distressing experiences was his severe gout and watching his own students turn from the truths of the Word in the Downgrade Controversy. But you never read of a more joyful believer, even in the pain! Warren Wiersbe says this, "When God permits his children to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat!"

- God's trials come in many different shapes and kinds – "by various trials." Now this my friends, as McGee put it, is wonderful. God doesn't have cookie-cutter trials. Various means many-colored. He has all kinds of trials for His people. James 1:2 says exactly the same thing, "Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials!" This is why biographies are so good. You see all these different kinds of trials God brings to His people and how they handled them.

Adoniram Judson is known as the father of American missionaries. Before he left for India he wrote a letter to a young lady's father asking for his daughter Ann Hasseltine's hand in marriage. If Mr. Hasseltine consents, Judson wrote, his precious daughter would go with Adoniram to pagan lands and he may never see her again. That was a test for a loving father! He consented, and sure enough, he never saw his daughter Ann once they left for India. Adoniram went through fiery trials that are hard even to read. Accused of being an English spy, he spent some 20 months in a death prison, 30 by 40 feet and 5 feet high. Every night they put a bamboo stick through their bound legs and held their legs high, with the weight of their bodies on their shoulders. His wife visited regularly and he survived.

How could men handle such trials? Tyndale as he burned at the stake in 1536 cried out in concern for another, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes!" Latimer, as he and fellow preacher Ridley were burned at the stake under Bloody Mary, cried out, "Mr. Ridley, play the man! We shall this day light such a candle in England, as I hope, by God's grace, shall never be put out." In the 1930s Bill Wallace of Knoxville, Tennessee, went to China as a Jesus-loving medical missionary. He brought physical and spiritual healing to many Chinese people, but then the communists came in. A pistol was planted in his room and he was arrested and charged with being an American spy. Through much abuse in prison, Bill Wallace finally paid the ultimate sacrifice by dying on a foreign field in the service of his Savior

You and I don't know the "color" of trial God has for us, but one thing we do know. God has grace for every trial. 1 Corinthians 10:13 says no trial gets past Him into your life without His consent. Your friend may be dealing with breast cancer, while you may be dealing with a nasty person at work. Steve may have just been rejected for a job he thought for sure he'd get, while you may be dealing with an angry parent who is making life miserable.

Some trials come in the flavor of romance. Henry Martyn left England for India as a missionary in the 1800s, but not before falling head over heels in love with Lydia Grenfell. He boarded a ship without her, but he never forgot her, hoping all along the way they would be united at some point. He never

did see her again. He died in Turkey at 31 years. Yet through all that distressing love knot in his heart, he greatly rejoiced in His Savior throughout his lonely journey.

Third, God has a purpose for every trial, every distressful circumstance He sends your way.

1 Peter 1:7 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;

“So that” indicates purpose. When a doctor probes you, he’s not just trying to inflict pain. If there’s a lump that shouldn’t be there, he may have to do surgery. It all may hurt, but you know he has your good in mind. The same is true with everything God is putting you through right now. No matter what He brings, He has a good purpose. So what are His purposes?

- God is using trials to prove your faith is genuine. The proof of your faith means the proven reality of your faith. God’s tests aren’t to destroy your faith, but to expose its reality, its genuineness. Fire tests gold to prove it is the real deal. God puts your faith through the fires of trials to prove it’s the real thing. And notice, as precious as gold is, \$1250 an ounce or so, your faith is infinitely more precious. No amount of gold can purchase faith. Faith connects you to God, to eternity, to heaven! You can’t buy it or sell it. But God will test it to prove to you that your faith is real. He’ll test it to prove to others your faith is real, too! When God tested Abraham in Genesis 22, it wasn’t to prove him false but to prove his faith was real as he offered Isaac up in obedience.
- God is using trials to purify and strengthen your faith. This is the second reason God has for putting your faith through the fires of trials – to purify it and strengthen it. God is going to allow people to treat you badly to help you grow, not to destroy you. He’s fine-tuning your faith in Him, shaving off needless selfish baggage, exposing your weaknesses and sins, and showing you your need of Him. This is what Spurgeon’s predecessor John Rippon meant when he wrote his hymn “How Firm a Foundation.”

*The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

This is exactly what Job meant when he said in Job 23:10, “But He knows the way I take; When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” Job went through severe financial loss, family loss, and health loss. Then he had to endure a pack of accusing counselors. God uses the fires of trial to burn out our pride and self-sufficiency.

Look back at the trials you’ve gone through and ask, “Did I come out better or bitter?” “Am I more patient and kind and compassionate with people I disagree with, or resentful and angry and even hateful?” Has God used trials to help you grow and change, to learn to return good for evil, forgiveness for offences, love for rejection? Have you been able to rejoice through the distressing times?

Let’s reflect on the two statements I made at the beginning. One, no believer goes through the Christian life without their faith being tested. Two, God has ordained every difficulty in your life for your good. Ask God to keep your heart humbled under His mighty hand. Sooner or later, He will lift you up. And through it all, remember, “He cares for you!”