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## Why I Want To Be Part Of The Suffering Church

September 28, 2014

Statistic tell us that 1 in 10 suffer from depression.<sup>1</sup> Life is hard. While technology can make our coffee faster. We need to drink more of it to keep up with life. Life can be particularly hard for Christians. Last week we learned why Christians can feel incredibly lonely. We don't fit into culture. A desire to live a holy life doesn't mesh with modern society. Last week we also learned the great antidote to a Christian's loneliness in this world. It is the church. The church is a place where the word of God creates intense love between the people of God. If you want deep community and loving friendships, the place to find them is the church.

*This week we move from a loneliness that is cured by the church to suffering because we are part of the church. Paul writes.*

Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 2 Timothy 3:12 (ESV)

Why do Christians suffer? Is there any hope in our times of suffering? What good can Jesus possibly bring from our suffering? These are all questions we will look at this morning.

If you are new. My name is Kurt. I am one of the pastor of CrossWinds Church. We are a multi-campus church with campuses in Spirit Lake and Spencer. We stay in sync across all campuses in our teaching to do together across campuses what we couldn't do alone as one campus. Both of our campuses are currently in a series of studies on the book of 1 Peter called, *Hope*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.everydayhealth.com/health-report/major-depression/depression-statistics.aspx>

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*in Hard Times.* In this study we are discovering how God carries us through the tough times in life. This morning we are in 1 Peter 2:4-10 where we are learning about suffering because of Christ. Let's read this passage.

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:4–10 (ESV)

We will study these verses under three headings. They are: Why is Jesus called the cornerstone? Why is suffering part of the church? Why is a suffering church the place I want to be?

### Why is Jesus called the cornerstone?

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 1 Peter 2:4 (ESV)

You hear them at airports. Beep. Beep. Beep. When you hear that sound you know a motorized cart is behind you. These overgrown golf carts in airports help those with trouble walking make it to their next flight. When I travel I inevitably find one of those motorized carts heading my direction. I have to make a choice. Do I jump to the left or the right. The one place I can not stay is the middle. Jesus is similar to one of those motorized carts. You have to decide what you believe about him. Do you reject him and hate or embrace him and

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love him. There really is no middle ground. This is what the Bible means when it talks about Jesus as a cornerstone.

### What is a cornerstone?

For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” 1 Peter 2:6 (ESV)

Peter is quoting from Isaiah 28:16 where we learn that God promises to lay a stone in Zion. Zion simply means Jerusalem. Isaiah tells us God was going to do something in Jerusalem that was going to be the cornerstone for a new people of God. Whoever believes in him, this cornerstone is a person, will never be put to shame. To understand where Peter is heading we need to understand the way they built ancient building. Buildings in the ancient world were typically made of rock but the rocks were individually cut and shaped to create the walls and the floors. The way the architect designed the building is everything in the building was measured off one stone, the cornerstone. This was the most important stone in the building. It needed to be laid exactly level because the level of the rows of bricks were determined from it. It had to be in the perfect location. The cornerstone determined the building.

What Isaiah was saying and what Peter was teaching is that in Jerusalem God laid a cornerstone to a new building called the church. The cornerstone of the church is Jesus Christ. As members of the church, each of us is a stone in God’s new building, God’s new people. Everyone in the church derives their identity and eternity from Christ, just as every other stone in a building was

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connected and placed by the cornerstone, we are part of God's new building, the church, and we are connected to the cornerstone.

Isaiah also says whoever believes in this cornerstone, Jesus Christ, will never be put to shame. If Jesus is the cornerstone of your life, you will never be ashamed. That is a promise from God. If Jesus is to be the cornerstone of our life, everything in our life must be measured off him. This means money can not be our cornerstone that determines our life or we will fail miserably. Our children can not be our cornerstone. If you live for your children you will crash and burn. A spouse can not be a cornerstone. If you live for your spouse, they will disappoint you. A job can not be a cornerstone. If you live for your job, you will be fired. Nothing else can hold the weight of being the cornerstone in your life other than Jesus.

Jesus isn't just the cornerstone that we need to be connected to if we want to be part of God's house. Jesus also isn't just the cornerstone that everything in our life needs to be built on. For some, Jesus is the stone that makes them stumble.

### **Those who reject Jesus will stumble over Jesus.**

As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 1 Peter 2:4 (ESV)

So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." and "A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. 1 Peter 2:7-8 (ESV)

Peter is quoting from Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14. The Old Testament doesn't just tell us that God would send a cornerstone to Jerusalem that

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everyone should build their life upon but the Bible also tells us that many people would reject Christ. People would not just ignore Christ but they would be offended by him. They would hate Christ. They would persecute Christ and ultimately kill Christ.

The picture Peter is giving us from Isaiah is somebody walking down the path in their sandals and a rock is sticking up in the path and they strike their foot toes on the rock and fall on their face and knock out their front teeth and blood is running out their nose as they are screaming in pain holding their toes. What would you do to the stone in the path? You would take a sledge hammer to it. This is the kind of reaction that Jesus produces in some people. He is offensive. He makes them angry. This is the kind of reaction the Jews had to Jesus. They wanted to snuff him out at all costs.

As the people of God, who are part of the spiritual house God is building called the church, just as the cornerstone loved by God but rejected by this world, we should expect that as living stones who are part of his house we are loved by God but we will also be rejected by this world. The world will hate us because we are Christians, just like they hated Jesus. There is really no middle ground with Jesus. You will either love him or hate him. He is like a motorized cart in the airport. Beep! Beep! Beep! What will you decide?

### **Is Jesus your cornerstone or your stumbling stone?**

The Bible doesn't give us a lot of wiggle room on this one. Is Jesus your stumbling stone so you find him offensive? Do you discount his words? Do you not believe he will answer your prayers? Do you think you can trust him? Are

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you willing to build your sex life, home life, business life and family life measured off of him as the cornerstone of your life? That is the Christian life. If we are part of God's house, Jesus needs to be the cornerstone of all things.

This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:11–12 (ESV)

You may not want Jesus as your cornerstone but there really isn't much discussion on this one. That is the way God chose it to be.

### **Why is suffering part of the church?**

you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 2:5 (ESV)

Peter tells us that just as Jesus is the cornerstone, we are also stones that are being cut and assembled into God's spiritual house. In Peter's language he infers there is a close parallel in this world between Christ as the living cornerstone and the rest of us who are stones in God's house, the church. Just as Jesus was precious to God and chosen by him, as living stones in God's house, that is us, are also precious to God and chosen by him. Just as Jesus suffered because people hated and rejected him, as living stones in the house we must expect that we will also suffer a portion of what Jesus suffered. Suffering will be part of the Christian life. This is something we don't talk about but it is very clear in the Bible and Peter talks about it often.

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**Just as Jesus experienced suffering in this life before receiving glory from the Father, as living stones in his house, we can expect to experience suffering in this life before we receive glory from the Father.**

We must expect that the pattern of our life will follow the pattern of Christ's life. We will experience earthly suffering before we receive heavenly glory.

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, Colossians 1:24 (ESV)

Paul says that Christ's sufferings were not all of the sufferings the church, God's house, would endure. Paul is thankful that he can suffer for Christ and add to what was lacking in the total sufferings of God's people. Clearly Paul expects the church to suffer just because it is the church and connected to Christ.

One of Peter's consistent themes 1 Peter is that just as the sufferings of Christ preceded the glories of Christ, as living stones who are part of God's house connected to the cornerstone of Jesus we will experience suffering in our life before God gives us glory. Our lives will follow the same patterns as Jesus'. Let me show you some of the verses in 1 Peter where Peter helps us understand sufferings before glory.

inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 1 Peter 1:11 (ESV)

Peter tells us the prophets of the Old Testament predicted these two aspects of Christ's life. Sufferings first, glory from God second.

But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13 (ESV)

Peter says we should be thankful for the privilege of suffering for the sake of Christ because it whets our appetite for the day when Christ will be revealed.

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When life is soft and comfortable, we don't look forward to the day when Christ returns. Suffering whets our appetite for Christ's return, his glory is revealed and we are recipients of it.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you... knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 5:6–11 (ESV)

At the end of the book, Peter acknowledges that we will go through times of suffering. He doesn't say it is all limited to persecution for the sake of Christ but we will have times of anxieties and worries and depression. We will have times where our hearts are broken. As Christians, life will be hard.

When we are going through those times he tells us to remember a few things.

1. **Remember we are not suffering alone.** We have brothers and sisters around the world that are going through times of anxiety and suffering like us. Be encouraged. If they can make it by relying on Christ, so can we.

2) **Remember hard times do not last forever.** All hard times are only for a little while. Even if hard times last for the rest of our earthly life, in the grand scheme of thing, they are just a little while.

3) **Remember God promises to restore, strengthen and establish us forever in his eternal glory.** When all is said and done, we will be basking in God's presence for all of eternity. We are recipients of the maximum amount of glory and grace that God can every display. That makes eternity sound pretty good!



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The pattern is always earthly suffering followed by heavenly glory. That is something to look forward to. In my mind I always ask the question, “Why?” Why does God want his people to go through times of earthly suffering before he gives us heavenly glory? Here are some reasons.

## God has a good purpose in hard times.

### 1. We learn obedience through suffering.

Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.  
Hebrews 5:8 (ESV)

The sufferings of Christ strengthened his obedience to his Father. When we suffer our obedience to Christ grows. We learn to love God more. We seek God more in suffering. God uses suffering in our life to increase our obedience to him.

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word. Psalm 119:67 (ESV)

If we never suffer, trust me... we would not be very obedient to God and his Word.

### 2. Suffering puts an end to sin.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 1 Peter 4:1 (ESV)

We all know what it is like to dabble in sin. We know what it is like to get full of our ourselves, to become proud and to become egotistical. We know what it is like to rebel against God. When God brings suffering in our life it really clears the head. We get humble in a hurry when someone we love is diagnosed with cancer. We get humble when we are sick. We are quick to repent of our hidden

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sin. We are quick to get on our knees and find time to pray when we were too busy for it before. God uses suffering in our life to strip our lustful sinful desires from us like a vacuum suck dirt out of a carpet.

### 3. Suffering helps us to comfort others.

For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; ... 2 Corinthians 1:5-6 (ESV)

When we suffer God comforts us in our suffering. One of the reason God comforts us in our troubles is so we learn to comfort others in their troubles. If we never suffered, we would be a very egotistical people with absolutely no compassion. Once we have suffered we weep with those who weep. We cry with those who cry. We take time to comfort others with the comfort we have received from God. Suffering makes us incredibly useful to God when it comes to helping others in their suffering. Suffering teaches us compassion. If you have never suffered you will be an irritable stuck-up snob that does little spiritual or practical good with your life.

### 4. Suffering teaches us to rely on God rather than ourselves.

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. 2 Corinthians 1:8-9 (ESV)

It is good for us to come to the end of our rope. When we come to the end of our rope we discover that God is the one who is holding us, not our rope. God is the one who is meeting our needs. When we have nothing in ourselves left to rely on we discover that God is the one who gives us every good gift and gives

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us our daily bread each day. I have faced those end-of-the-rope moments. Some of you have faced those moments. In one sense I wouldn't wish them on anyone because they are so hard. In another sense, I wouldn't trade away those times because it was in those times I learned that God is large and in charge and he cares about us. He is actually involved in life. He rescues his children because he loves them. It is by passing through those moments that God does his deepest and most significant character changes in our lives.

The pattern of all stones in God's spiritual house is suffering first with glory to follow. Do not despair. God always has a good purpose in our hard times even though they are not easy.

The reaction of many people at this point is to play distant from the church. Why would I want to be part of God's house if God guarantees I will suffer because I am part of it? Peter tells that the glory that comes from being part of the church outweighs the sufferings of the church.

### **Why is a suffering church the place I want to be?**

Peter pulls a constellation of texts from the Old Testament that describe the incredible blessings given to ancient Israel in the Old Testament. He tells us they all apply to the church.

#### **The church is a chosen race.**

**But you are a chosen race,... that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)**

Peter quotes from Isaiah 43:3 where Isaiah tells ancient Israel that they were God's chosen people. In that passage God says through Isaiah that he would rescue his people out of exile in ancient Babylon. He would rescue them

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from their suffering because God chose them out of all the people of the earth. They didn't earn it. They didn't deserve it. It was all by God's love. That is the church. Everyone in the church is chosen by God and loved by God and they don't deserve it. Isaiah goes on to say why God was rescuing them.

the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise. Isaiah 43:21 (ESV)

The reason God chose ancient Israel and rescued them was so they would always speak of the greatness of God. They were to always talk about God's excellencies and kindness. One of the reasons God lets the church go through times of suffering is because when he rescues us in this life or when he rescues us in the face of death, we will forever talk about his greatness and kindness for rescuing us.

Think of this in regard to ancient Israel's exile in Egypt. It was the exile, the hardness of Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh's insistence on the genocide of the Hebrew babies that brought ancient Israel to the point of sheer desperation. That was the workbench God needed to fashion a famous for himself through plague after plague. The plague of death of the firstborn and the splitting of the Red Sea so Israel could walk on dry ground followed by the swallowing of Pharaoh's army was all ultimately done to make God's name famous forever because of his great rescue of the people he loved. This way his people would speak about the greatness of their God forever. One of the reasons God has suffering as part of the life of the church is that it puts us in a point of desperation so God has something to rescue us from and make his name famous in our lives and through our lives because of it.

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My friends, nothing is different for us today! We will suffer now so in this life or for sure in the next one we will forever sing God's praises for the rescue God bestows on us in the face of death and the glory he gives us for all of eternity that we don't deserve. That is why you want to be part of a suffering church. He is writing a story of the most amazing rescue through our lives.

### **The church is a royal priesthood and a holy nation**

...you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.” Exodus 19:5–6 (ESV)

God's plan is that the people of his church would be close to him. They would be priests. In most religions you have some people who are closer to God than others. You have levels. God's plan is that all of us can be intimate with him. We are to be a people where everyone is a priest that can go directly to God. In addition, God's plan is that all of us would be holy and not dominated by sin in our life.

It was God's plan that ancient Israel would be close to him and their lives would not be dominated by sin. That didn't work for ancient Israel. They rebelled. Peter says that where ancient Israel failed it is now fulfilled in the church. We are a people where everyone is close to God. We are a people that are not dominated by the cancerous life-taking affects of sin.

This is why I want to be part of the suffering church. Everyone in the suffering church is close to God and everyone in the suffering church has Christ's victory over the power of sin in their life.

### **The church is God's personal possession**

...a people for his own possession,... 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

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This is great. Peter quotes two Old Testament texts that say ancient Israel was God's personal possession. Ancient Israel was like God's wallet. A wallet is very personal. You keep the photos of your loved ones in it. You keep your credit cards in it. You keep your money in it. You never leave the house without it. In the same way, as members of the church and part of God's house, we are his prized personal possession. We are close to God's heart. He loves us and will never leave us. We are precious to him.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; Exodus 19:5 (ESV)

the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise. Isaiah 43:21 (ESV)

The first passage comes from the time ancient Israel was taken out of exile in Egypt. The second one from Isaiah comes from when Israel was taken out of slavery in Babylon and both times God says that his people are his precious personal possession.

Why would you want to be part of a suffering church? The suffering church is God's most precious possession. The suffering church is the most important loved part of all of God's creation in the physical and spiritual universe. That rocks! It rocks to be part of the suffering church and be so precious to God! Does God love the world? Yes. God loves the church differently than the rest of the world. God loves the church more than he loves anything else in the world. The church is his personal possession. His wallet.

As the suffering church, we are a chosen race that was chosen by God for rescue so we would forever proclaim his amazing kindness and love. We are

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priests that can directly talk to God and a holy people that is not dominated by sin. We are loved by God more than anything else in his vast created universe. We are his own personal possession because we are identified with Jesus.

### **The church is God's restored bride.**

There is something more. It gets even better! In the days of ancient Israel, the heart of the people turned away from God. Many times God sought his people but they still ran away. In those days God raised up a prophet named Hosea who had an interesting ministry. God was to marry an adulterous woman named Gomer. Even though he loved her, she kept leaving him for other men. I am thankful God didn't give me that ministry. Hosea's faithful love for his unfaithful wife was a living picture of God's faithful love to his unfaithful people in that day.

There were three children born in Hosea and Gomer's marriage. They were given some interesting names by God. The second child was named *No Mercy*. God was done having mercy on his adulterous people. The third child was called *Not My People* because God was done with calling his adulterous people his people. Shortly after Hosea's ministry the Assyrian's conquered Northern Israel. They were wiped out and annexed into Assyrian territory, just as Hosea predicted. God was done having mercy and he was done with his people.

In the book of Hosea there is an interesting twist. God says he will not be done with his people forever. There was coming a day in the future where God was going to show mercy upon his people once again and he was going to take

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his unfaithful people back to himself and love them with a passionate love like a husband love his bride on their wedding night.

Peter quotes from Hosea and says that day is now.

Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. 1 Peter 2:10 (ESV)

Why do we want to be part of the church that suffers? Through Jesus, the cornerstone of God new building, God is restoring his people. The time of God withhold his mercy are over. The time of God putting away his unfaithful people is over. Through the cornerstone of Jesus who paid for our sin, God is creating a new people that he loves with the same kind of passion as a groom on his wedding night. That is how much God loves us. That is you and me. *The suffering church, just like the cornerstone, will go through suffering before glory... but there is not better place to be.*



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at

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