

“Stand Firm: Hope for Hard Times”

An Introduction to 1 Peter

September 15, 2019

I’m so excited to introduce our new fall series entitled, *“Stand Firm: Hope for Hard Times.”* It will be a study in the book of 1 Peter.

If you’ve been at Trinity for any length of time, you know that we value all of the Bible as God’s inspired, inerrant Word. *“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work” (1 Tim 3:16-17).* And so the Bible is not mere information. It is meant for our transformation; to grow us up so that we are mature and ready to please God in any life circumstance.

So why 1 Peter? Why spend the next several months studying this book? Because it is essential for every believer to have a biblical, Christ-like, hope-filled response to life in this fallen world. If we don’t know how to respond to suffering before it strikes, we will get knocked off of our feet—we will struggle with our faith, we will lose perspective, and we will fail to see God’s purposes fulfilled in our life.

God doesn’t want you to be knocked around by your trials. Rather, He wants you to embrace your trials with a sense of purpose. That is, to *steward your trials and hardships as opportunities to:*

- ***Glorify God, by entrusting yourself to Him (hoping in God).***
- ***Grow to be like Christ in humility and holiness***
- ***Extend Grace to others, relating to all people in the Spirit of Christ.***

These are the very things that Peter wants to encourage His readers to embrace in the face of a hostile world.

The book of 1 Peter was written to instruct believers how to live victorious, God-honoring lives under the pressure of persecution. As

you read 1 Peter, it’s important for you to keep in mind that this is a book written to believers who lived under intense pressure every day. Verse 1 is telling. It was written to those who *“reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”* These believers are scattered as aliens because they have been dispersed by persecution. Peter wrote to believers who were living during the time when Nero was emperor of Rome. This letter was written very close to the time when Nero burned much of the city of Rome and blamed the fire on the Christians.

Now with that in mind, consider what Peter wrote in **[4:12-13]**.

Peter’s purpose in writing was to encourage believers not to buckle under such duress but to cling to the hope of the gospel and resist becoming bitter by trusting in the Lord and keeping their eyes on Jesus imminent return. All throughout the book, Peter is teaching these believers the kind of Christ-like character that they are to exhibit regardless of how others treat them—*“not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing” (3:9).*

If I had to sum up the book of 1 Peter in one sentence, it would be something like this: ***Stand firm in the true grace of God by entrusting yourself to God with holy living, responding to your circumstances with resilient hope, and relating to all people in the spirit of Christ—*** even the very people at whose hands you suffer.

So Peter is writing to a church this is suffering under persecution, knowing how easy it would be for them to buckle under pressure, and *encouraging them to not lose their perspective of hope, to not forsake their call to holy living, to not abandon their mission of evangelizing the lost, and to not forget their true identity as God’s people.*

So how are we going to benefit from an exhortation to persecuted believers? Well, the very truths that the believers needed to endure persecution in the first century are not only the very truths we need to be established in in a culture that is increasingly hostile to Christ, but they are also the truths that we need to carry into the everyday trials and tribulations of our lives.

By the way, this is a great book for us to study with our kids because it's all about having the right perspective and doing the right thing when the pressure is on.

So let me introduce you to some of the **main themes** of 1 Peter by contrasting our natural tendencies under suffering with God's unchanging desires for us.

Take a moment to think about how you tend to respond to suffering—especially when it is induced by someone else.

Most of us have a natural tendency to respond to suffering by growing faint-hearted and discouraged, or even despairing. But...

1. God's will is for us to walk through suffering with resilient hope.

If there's one thing that Peter wants to give his readers, it is hope. He begins by reminding them in 1:3 that by God's great mercy, they have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their hope is one of life—resurrection life and power by virtue of their union with Christ.

Peter is bringing them back to an eternal perspective. One of the side effects that suffering can have in our lives is that we can become exclusively focused on our immediate circumstances. But Peter reminds us of what we have to look forward to. He puts

heaven back on the horizon in 1:4. You will “obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

The persecution is probably resulting in the devastation of their assets, but they have a heavenly inheritance which cannot be touched. They may feel humanly weak and vulnerable, but their souls are being protected by the power of God as they trust in Him.

Then Peter exhorts them in 1:13 to fix their hope completely on the grace to be brought to them at the revelation of Jesus Christ. They are to set their hearts on the confident expectation of Christ's return knowing that the promise of the gospel will endure. Peter concludes chapter 1 by reminding them that though their lives and the lives of persecutors are as momentary as grass which withers away, their eternal hope is grounded in the imperishable, living and enduring word of God.

Not only is the believer's hope based on an eternal perspective, but also the assurance of God's justice. Take note of the precious promise in 3:12: “*For the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and His ears attend to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.*” So even if you suffer for doing what is right, Peter says, you are blessed (3:13). Your heavenly Father will not allow any of your righteous suffering to be wasted. Nor will He allow those who mistreat His people to get away with their wickedness: “but they will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (4:5).

Finally, Peter encourages them to have hope knowing that that though they are on a road of suffering, it will ultimately lead them to blessing and glory. **[4:14]** It's interesting that while 1 Peter is primarily

about suffering, the word *suffer* is used 11 times in the book while the word *glory* is used 10 times. Just over half of the uses of *glory* refer to Christ while the other half refer to believers who will eventually share in His glory. And so Peter encourages them to keep on rejoicing in hope knowing that their suffering for Christ will result in glory with Christ. [4:12-13] Why? [5:4]

So Peter encourages these suffering believers to persevere in hope, by clinging to an eternal perspective, to persevere in hope remembering that God is just, and to persevere in hope knowing that this road of suffering ultimately leads to a destination of glory.

Most of us have a natural tendency to respond to suffering by giving in to temptation. Our focus turns to survival and wanting to comfort ourselves. Suffering tends to make us self-serving. But...

2. God's will is for us to walk through suffering in pursuit of holiness.

Peter's introduction to the theme of holiness in chapter 1 is clear and distinct. [14-17] So Peter is saying, in the midst of your suffering don't turn back to your old ways. Don't give in to your flesh. Rather you must walk through your suffering with a focus on your vertical relationship with God—walking in the fear of God. You are to be holy not in some of your behavior or even most of your behavior, but all of your behavior—which you know flows out of the attitudes of your heart. Peter is saying, you may be suffering, but don't forget your calling to live a holy life. Don't forsake the work of sanctification that the Holy Spirit is seeking to do in your life through this crucible of fire: "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

[2:11-12]

We distinctly get the sense here that the most important thing is not our circumstances or how other people treat us, but how we live in response to God with hope and holiness.

So what does it look like to pursue holiness in the midst of suffering? It means putting off sin when our natural tendency is to respond sinfully to being sinned against. So Peter begins chapter 2 by exhorting us to "put aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the work that by it you may grow in respect to salvation..." (2:1-2). In other words, keep maturing in your faith by turning from sin and living a life of holiness before those who harm you.

Very simply put, keep humbly doing the right thing even when you are suffering at the hands of those who are doing you wrong. Why? So that by your life of hope and holiness others may see Christ in you. [3:13-17]

Perhaps one of the most helpful things for us to grasp in 1 Peter is that our vertical relationship with God must dictate how we respond to our horizontal relationships with people. This is so important because...

When we walk through suffering, our natural tendency is to focus on ourselves, rather than serving others. Especially if our affliction is being caused by someone else, we can tend to become bitter, defensive, and even resentful or vindictive. But...

3. God's will for us, as we walk through suffering, is to relate to all people in the spirit of Christ.

Here's what I mean by that: Our consistent response to people, whether they bless us or sin against us, should be, "*because I am in Christ and Christ is in me, I will relate to you in the Spirit of Christ.*"

That is, I will not relate to you merely on the basis of how I feel. I will not relate to you in response to the way you have hurt or offended me as the guiding principle. I will not use your words or actions as a reason to respond sinfully against you. Rather, I will respond to you in the spirit of Christ, not forsaking truth and not forsaking mercy.

This is what it means to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts. It means that when people mistreat me, I don't insubordinate myself from the Lord and respond out of personal vindictiveness but rather I use that opportunity to represent Him. Amazingly, relating to people in the spirit of Christ can turn conflict into evangelism (our mission which should not be abandoned in times of suffering or persecution). **[3:15]**

Now this doesn't mean we are merely doormats for people to walk all over. But even when we need to take a stand, we can "fight" in the spirit of Christ.

So what we are going to discover is that Peter addresses a multitude of different relationships in 1 Peter, because he wants us to relate to *all* people in the spirit of Christ.

For example,

- We are to relate to *fellow believers* in the spirit of Christ **[1:22]**, **[4:8-11]**
- We are to relate to *governing authorities* in the spirit of Christ **[2:13-17]**
- *Servants* are to relate to their *masters/employers* in the spirit of Christ **[1:18-20]**
- *Wives* are to relate to their *husbands* in the spirit of Christ **[3:1-6]**
- *Husbands* are to relate to their *wives* in the spirit of Christ **[3:7]**
- We are to relate to those who persecute us in the spirit of Christ **[3:13-16]**

- *Church leaders* are to model the spirit of Christ as servant-leaders of humility **[5:1-5]**

Perhaps the best summary statement of relating to others in the spirit of Christ is found in **[3:8-9]**

When we walk through suffering our natural tendency is grow disillusioned with God and to question the wisdom and kindness of His ways in our life. But...

4. God's will is for us to walk through suffering by faith, entrusting ourselves to God (2:21-25; 4:19)

So far we have seen from 1 Peter that God's will is for us to walk through suffering with hope, holiness, and relating to all people in the spirit of Christ. This final theme of faith, entrusting ourselves to God, is what makes the previous 3 work.

Hope is entrusting our future to God, even when the present is bleak. Hope is entrusting our well-being into God's hands, that ultimately he knows what is good for us even when it comes through pain.

What about holiness? Holiness in the context of 1 Peter is doing the right thing even when its costly; not compromising matters of purity or loyalty to Christ even at the risk of persecution. The only way to really do the right thing when its costly is to entrust ourselves to God. It's saying, "*Lord, I don't know what the cost will be to my livelihood or my life, but I will obey you and do what pleases you and trust you with the outcome. My life is in your hands!*" That's entrusting yourself to God.

This same principle of faith is needed in our relationships. If we are going to relate to others in a spirit of humility, if we are going to bless those who curse us and overcome evil with good, if we are going to

witness to those who oppress us, it will require that we entrust ourselves to God; to trust that regardless of how people treat us, He will administer justice in the end; He will vindicate the righteous with glory.

Walking by faith, entrusting ourselves to God, in the midst of a hostile world is simply what it means to follow Christ. Look carefully with me at [2:21-25].

So here we see Jesus, persisting in holiness—committing no sin, speaking no deceit.

Here we see Jesus being persecuted by people to treated Him unjustly and abusively, yet not returning evil for evil or threatening them.

How did He do it? He kept entrusting Himself to God who judges righteously. He entrusted His life, His circumstances, and His future to God to work out His purposes and vindicate Him in the end—though it would cost Him His life.

And so Peter concludes that this is how we are to live. ***“Those who suffering according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right”*** (4:19). *“And 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”* (5:10).

So join me on this journey as Peter encourages and exhorts us to...

- Stand firm in hope.
- Stand firm in holiness.
- Stand firm in relating to all people in the spirit of Christ.
- Stand firm in faith, entrusting ourselves to God.