

## How To Handle Suffering 1 Peter 2:18-25

### Intro:

Good morning. Well, I received that call this weekend – you know the one. “Bro – It’s me. I’m not feeling well at all. I don’t think I be able to preach or even be in service on Sunday. What should we do?” Of course, I gave my normal answer for such occasions... After all, what’s an assistant for? “It’s OK, Bro. I take care of everything. You stay home and get better.” That done – I prayed, “Lord, What are we going to do now?” So, I was going to speak today about something uplifting, something happy, and something everyone would enjoy. Then I read Peter’s first letter and got hung up on suffering and persecution.

Have you ever thought that there is just too much suffering going on? I mean even for Christians; why do we have to suffer? I don’t know about you, but the worst kind of suffering for me to fathom or even deal with is when it seems so unfair. I can handle doing something wrong and getting caught and then having to suffer the consequences, or even suffering for sin and unbelief, but why do the righteous suffer?

The apostle Peter writes about suffering in his first epistle. Actually he addresses several different types of suffering in this one letter. I would like to focus on just one portion of this powerful letter today and one type of suffering.

If we look at the very first verse of this epistle, we see that it is Peter writing and that his audience is the believers who are within the five major areas he mentions ...

**1 Peter 1:1 - *This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the lands of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia, and Bithynia. (NLT).***

It appears that once the Gospel of Jesus started to catch on, many had to flee their original towns because of persecution and suffering. It also seems reasonable to assume that this letter of Peter’s was to be read to the believers in each of these areas where they were still being persecuted. Peter is addressing the suffering *they* are experiencing in these Roman colonies located in what is now Turkey. This is not a letter to one particular church or gathering addressing their local issue(s), but a letter that deals on a more global level. I believe it addresses issues at such a global level that we can relate to his letter today as a source of wisdom and as it is, the Word of God to us.

Thinking about suffering may not be the most pleasant thing, yet God allows it in our lives. In fact, as we will see today, He even calls us to suffer at times. Our modern mind doesn’t want to deal with suffering or death or any negative realities, but they are just that, realities. When I think of the church fathers and the martyrs of the early days of Christianity, it boggles my mind. Thank God we don’t have to face that kind of torture today.

What about those in other countries who are facing imprisonment or even death because of their faith in Jesus Christ? Maybe we are just so insulated here in America. We read about some of the persecution and torture going on in Indonesia and other Muslim countries, and what about China?

I know a man whose name is , Ray Wigdal; he is a missionary in China. He has a burden to develop an orphanage there because so many children (especially girls) that are abandoned. A family is only allowed to have one child and they all want a boy to carry on the family name, etc. Many girl babies are abandoned, especially if they have a defect of some type. Ray teaches tennis by day and is the pastor of a small but growing church in Beijing. They don't actually meet in Beijing, but they start off there. He rounds up a small group and takes them in his van to a remote location to sing, praise, pray, and hear the Word of the Lord. He started to meet in a home, but a visitor came to the church who was a member of the Chinese police. Ray was arrested for holding an unregistered gathering, and he forced to sit upright in a chair for several days until he was finally freed by an official, a friend of his. That's persecution and suffering.

I think I would like to zero in a little to a particular type of persecution and suffering that we can more likely relate to. Most of us work in the secular environment. Let's look at Peter's letter and try to relate that to our professional life if we can ...

## **READ – 1 Peter 2:18-25 (NTL)**

The first words we read are ***“You who are slaves.”*** How can that possibly relate to us? In biblical times a slave was not the same as we envision. We immediately think of the oppression of the African-American people picking cotton and being beaten by their masters and raped and sold, etc. This was not the case back then. Sometimes people incurred more debt than they could reasonably pay back. They might enter themselves into slavery for a period of time to pay off the debt. Some people might find themselves in a place where slavery was the best solution, or they could have been born into slavery. Slaves back then had some normalcy to their family life and had more control than we think. They could even work extra or do side work to earn money toward their debts. In any case, slavery had rules and a specific length of time associated with it. Also most slaves were treated like family members of the household they were enslaved to. Some even chose to remain enslaved to a household after they were freed or after they paid their debt because of the love between them and the family of the household or because this had become their desired job.

Peter is speaking to believers enslaved to pagan masters who do not treat them right or even fairly. I want to relate slaves in our text to employers in our culture and masters to the employers. What do you do for a living? Who are you responsible to for your wages? What type of work are you expected to do in order to meet your obligations?

Peter writes – ***“You who are slaves accept the authority of your masters. Do whatever they tell you – not only if they are kind and reasonable, but even if they are harsh.”*** Slaves must be in submission to their masters – whether mistreated or treated properly. Slavery was looked down upon in the Greek culture and slaves were often mistreated without true cause. Peter is writing to believers who were household slaves, domestic servants under pagan masters. This is different from Paul's references to masters and slaves in his letters.

Peter is talking to believers who were being harshly treated by pagan owners or masters, yet he has this advice for them. Have you ever been mistreated as an employee in your place of work? Have you ever been treated unfairly on your job? You may be thinking of an incident that has happened to you in the past or maybe happening to you right now. I think Peter has some advice we all can relate to and be helped by. There is emotional and spiritual damage that takes place whenever we are mistreated or suffer unfairly. Peter tells us that we are to accept the authority of our superiors no matter what. There is never an excuse for bad behavior for the child of God, or never an excuse for doing a poor job on the basis of being mistreated by our superiors. In fact, we are commanded to do everything as for God. We attempt to please our superiors all the time, even when they aren't watching us. We do this because of our relationship with God not them. We are to show them how a Christian worker behaves. **Col. 2:23 – “Work hard and cheerfully at whatever you do as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people.”** This is our call as a witness for Jesus. Work among them, work for them, and glorify God all the time.

We don't know the motives of the pagan owners. People don't always do the right thing or what we expect or even the expected Christian thing. People have their own agenda, and sometimes people never consider others feelings.

<skinny-dipping – joke> There was farmer . . .

Peter tells the believers to have respect for the authority of their masters even if they are harshly treated. Peter is aware of the harsh treatment of the believers that was going on at this time. This is the reason for his letter. He is encouraging them in the way they should behave toward these pagan masters and leaders. In fact Peter's letter is showing them how to deal with the persecution and suffering in relation to the governing authorities, the household authorities (master – servant), and marital relationships of believer to unbeliever. He is teaching them about holy living in the midst of unfair treatment. It almost seems as though he has no sympathy on their situation. He is aware of the treatment they are receiving and aware that they don't deserve this treatment, and he is almost saying, “Hey, deal with it.” They don't have the option of getting even or grumbling about it. There is no magic formula to change their conditions, except to show these pagans the love of God by respecting their authority.

Listen to what Peter says, **1 Peter 2:19 - For God is pleased with you when, for the sake of your conscience, you patiently endure unfair treatment.** (NLT)  
Well thanks a lot.

He goes on to explain that it is of no credit to us or to God and our testimony if we endure punishment when we do wrong. If we are beaten/punished for doing wrong, we are getting exactly what we deserve. There is no testimony to a changed life in that. **1 Peter 2:20b - But if you suffer for doing right and are patient beneath the blows, God is pleased with you.**

These slaves were being beaten and mistreated by the pagan masters and did nothing wrong to deserve it. Why would they do such a thing? Are people really that harsh that they would purposely mistreat someone, punish someone, and even beat someone for no good reason? I mean, we want to say, “Hey – who died and left you boss?” But, they were the boss, and the master of these believers in Jesus Christ. The masters couldn't be expected to change their ways. Only trusting in God can change a life and the motives of our heart.

It's difficult for us to understand the cultural differences for these people. The man was the head of the household in every sense of the word back then. That also means the religious head of the household. If they were pagan, there was still a religious awareness even if they didn't practice any particular one. Whatever the head of the household expressed as the belief of the household, that was what the members of the household believed. Now there are Christians in the pagan households – hmmm. This could be a problem. We don't know exactly why they were being mistreated, but this could at least fuel the attitude against them. We know they didn't do anything wrong or deserving of punishment. Not all of Peter's audience was slaves, but this particular passage is addressing this issue. We can't change the attitude of our superiors on the job to any great extent, but we can show them respect even when not being respected in return. We can perform our jobs to their satisfaction even when they will not recognize our value to the company. We can respect their authority and do as they request even when they treat us harshly or unfairly.

Notice how Peter addresses these people. There is never justification to do wrong because we are being unfairly treated. Don't we think sometimes that we have every right to do such and such because we are being unfairly treated anyway? Doesn't the master or employer deserve to be treated that way in return? Doesn't God see what's going on here? Isn't He going to do something about this situation? Unjust suffering isn't something we should be surprised at. In fact Peter tells us in verse 21, ***"This suffering is all part of what God has called you to."*** Not only that but, ***"Christ, who suffered for you, is your example. Follow in his steps."***

Peter now begins to explain why we are to act the way God wants us to act in all circumstances. This is why we please God when we bear up under unjust treatment. The treatment isn't the motivation for our behavior. It is our trust in God and knowing that He is still in control that matters. Jesus is our example for bearing up under suffering. He suffered for us, and if we are called to suffer, we should follow in His steps. Then Peter goes into some specifics of how Jesus acted under His suffering and how we are to act in following Jesus' example.

Peter refers to Isaiah's writings about the suffering servant to show how Jesus fit that model, and how He is our example of how to act while suffering. Peter tells us that Jesus never sinned and Isaiah 53:9 confirms that the suffering servant had done no wrong. The innocent sometimes suffer unfair treatment. **V.22 - "He never sinned"** – so he suffered unjustly. We can never say that we sinned because of our suffering. Jesus is our example. He suffered the most excruciating torture known to a human being and never sinned – He even asked the Father to forgive His torturers. Don't blame God for your circumstances; don't even blame your boss. Just remember Jesus is our example of how to act or react when being treated harshly. Follow His holy example of behavior all the time.

**v.22 - "He never deceived anyone."** – Deceit was a problem among slaves of this time. They were often punished – flogged – whipped for being deceptive. Jesus suffered the punishment for a crime He never committed. He is our example! Those who were deceptive suffered justly for their sin. We are not to be deceptive, even if we are accused and suffer a deceiver's punishment. Have you ever been accused of being deceptive on your job? How did you react? Were you deceptive or innocent? How did you feel about that situation? Is Jesus your example, and the model of your behavior? Never deceive!

**v. 23 - “He did not retaliate when He was insulted.”** - How quick are we when attacked on the job or even at home or in church to retaliate? Don't you want to make sure the trouble maker pays for their false accusations or insults? Jesus is our example! He never retaliated; never reacted negatively.

<Rather – and here's the key...> (or **Instead** – NIV)

**v. 23b - “He left His case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly.”** - God always judges fairly, rightly. Always! How about you? Don't you know what's right and wrong? – Oh Yeah! – Especially among those who aren't even Christians? Don't you want to see righteous judgments given out – the bad guy caught – the evil people pay the price? Don't we all? Again, Jesus is our example. “He left His case in the hands of God.” He handed every situation and even His very life over to God – knowing that God always judges fairly – and trusted that He would judge fairly in His situation. What about us? Do we trust that God is the righteous judge and will judge fairly in our situation or do we try to help God out by taking matters into our own hands? Leave your case in the hands of God. He's a professional at judging! You may not see the judgment given out against the evil doer in the time frame you would like or expect. You may never see God's judgment take place in your situation in your life time, but He promises to judge fairly, and we have to trust Him at His Word.

**Have faith that His timing is perfect. This is a key element in the process. We need to hear this over and over again. When we are unfairly treated, we must leave our case in the hands of God who always judges fairly. It takes faith and trust to really let it go.**

In light of this, Peter then explains to his audience that **“He personally carried away our sins in His own body on the cross.”** Isaiah 53:12b – “He bore the sins of many and interceded for sinners.” He bore our guilt and the punishment we deserve. God used Jesus' suffering to accomplish the greatest event in history, the salvation of humanity. Jesus was fully human, and felt the pain of suffering just like you and I. Yet, He was sinless and therefore suffered unfairly, unjustly. In His suffering, God was working out His plan to perfection. He took the beating, the wounds, and the pain He didn't deserve so we might be healed of a life of suffering or rather an eternity of suffering.

The suffering servant of Isaiah 53 took the stripes, the wounds in His own body so that a healing would be possible. In the same way Peter writes in verse 24 – **“You have been healed by his wounds!”** This is not referring to physical healing, although God does sometimes heal miraculously in the physical sense. Here both Isaiah and Peter are referring to healing metaphorically. They and we have salvation because of the wounds Jesus was willing to sustain for us. It is interesting that the slaves Peter is addressing in this text also experienced wounds from beatings by their masters. They also received these wounds – black and blue marks and contusions – unjustly. What better way to relate to them than to bring Jesus' suffering unjustly into the picture. They could definitely relate. Jesus sustained black and blues from beatings the same way these domestic servants sustained black and blue marks from the beatings. However, they have a light at the end of the tunnel. They were rescued by Jesus who took their punishment for them and us. Isaiah 53:6 – tells us how we all have gone off on our own just like wandering sheep. We needed a Shepherd to bring us back into the fold. So, Peter ends this passage by referring to this picture. **1 Peter 2:25 - “Once you were wandering like lost sheep. But now you have turned to your Shepherd, the Guardian of your souls.”** We have been redeemed. We are no longer wandering. We belong to Him and He is able and willing to deal with our case, your case. **Leave your case, your situation, with Him.**

God doesn't expect us to escape suffering and pain in our life. Actually, according to our text, He calls us to it – How nice! He does expect us to deal with it properly. Jesus is our example, and the Bible does NOT teach us how to relieve or escape our suffering, or to protect us from unforeseen circumstances. Taking hold of the "Bible's teaching will enable us to cope and will rekindle our hope." How do you handle suffering? How do you handle pain in your life? Do you wish it away, but it remains? Do you find some escape mechanism that doesn't really last? Do you complain to God and others? How do you cope with pain and suffering especially if it is unjust, unfair, or uncalled for?

We are on a training mission for God. Everything in our lives is for a purpose in our continuing spiritual growth if we have truly given our lives to God. Pain and suffering will come our way. We handle it differently the more we mature in Christ. When being treated unfairly, follow Jesus' example: leave your case in the hands of God, who always judges fairly - never retaliate when insulted or attacked. Remember God has called you to the situation you are in to help you grow and mature in your faith. Remember that Jesus suffered the same thing and worse. He is our example. Can you follow in His steps?

<Share testimony about MIS mistreatment>

Our times of suffering come upon us suddenly, when we don't expect. Sometimes it seems like a bombardment, sometimes like an unending stream. We try to rationalize what's going on in our own reasoning and strength.

When we give our situation to God and really let go of the circumstances and the people involved, He can begin the process of putting everything into His order. Yes, even our suffering is part of God's plan to mature us in His ways. We may not see the final results or plan in our lifetime, but He is in control and allows suffering to teach us to trust in Him and have faith in His plan for us.

God only wants what's best for us. He has the big picture in view – that we can't see from our perspective. Even the suffering is part of His plan and part of His perfect orchestration for our lives. When viewed from His perspective there's a whole different painting being formed.

The words of Steven Curtis Chapman's song say it all:

God is God and I am not. I can only see a part of the picture He's painting. God is God and I am man – and I'll never understand it all  
cause only God is God.