

# God, Why am I Hurting?

## 1 Peter 1:6-8

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*God, why am I hurting?* If that is not a question in the back of your mind today, great! Just wait. It's coming. I would say that on varying levels of urgency, the majority of us could ask that question today. By hurting I don't just mean an ache or pain, but also the aches and pains of the heart and the soul.

Peter writes to a group of geographical exiles who are also spiritual exiles. They were exiled from their homeland and exiled from the culture around them which did not embrace the values and beliefs that flowed from their Christian faith. 1 Peter is a letter of honesty; a letter that looks pain in the face and gives an answer—the Christian answer.

Maybe you are in pain today. You are searching for answers or at least some hope. Christianity has an answer, but the answer requires something. Before I answer the problem of my pain I have to answer the problem of my sin. God addressed it for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for our sins. He entered into our pain and he bore our guilt. For pain to be understood properly I have to by faith believe in God's solution for my sin. Peter writes as a Christian to Christians about suffering as a Christian.

*"In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 1:6-7 ESV)

This passage is Peter's first teaching on suffering. It will continue throughout the letter. He begins with a word of joy, *"in this you rejoice."* *"Rejoice"* refers to our salvation and our living hope in a resurrected Savior. So the Christian has an enduring source of joy, rooted in the gospel that exists alongside pain. We can continue to rejoice even while we continue to suffer. That may sound crazy but it is not emotionally inconsistent. Joy and pain are not mutually exclusive. They get along just fine, and can even be friends.

In this passage, Peter gives four certainties for any Christian experiencing suffering:

### **Trials are Temporary**

*"Though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials..."* (1 Peter 1:6)

Peter's first point is chronological. *"For a little while"* you have been grieved. The duration of our trials is finite. When we are in them they seem like they will last forever. *This will never change. This will never be fixed. I will always feel this way. This pain will never go away.*

Peter urges us to look at our trials in the big picture of time. He fills out what he means here in 1 Peter 5:10, *"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."* There it is again, suffered for *"a little while."* Christian suffering is, in the grand picture of this life and the next, very temporary. It will not always be like this. It will not always feel like this. Christian pain has no ultimate future. Why?

There is a coming eternal glory where Christ himself will restore, confirm, and strengthen us. He'll answer our questions. Encourage our hearts. Someday we not only will understand our present pain, but when we see God's purpose for it, we will agree with it. We will see how it produced good in us or gave glory to God. God doesn't affirm evil and we never will either. But God uses evil to thwart evil and bring glory to himself.

*"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."* (2 Corinthians 4:17) All a Christian's trials are temporary and all a non-believer's joys are temporary. Eternity is the reversal. All the unbeliever's sorrows are unending and all the Christian's joys are eternal. Bring that to mind. *Whatever pain I am experiencing, it is temporary.*

### **Trials are Painful**

*"Though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials..."* (1 Peter 1:6)

"Grieved." This doesn't need a lot of proof texts; we know this from personal experience. I appreciate the honesty of the Bible about human pain. It doesn't sugar coat it. It doesn't ignore it. It stares it square in the face. Of course our whole salvation is based on the suffering of our Savior Jesus.

"Grieved" sums it up nicely. What do trials feel like? Grief. Sorrow. Frustration. Injustice. Mourning. Distress. These come at us through "various trials." There are so many categories of potential pain and suffering: Physical. Relational. Financial. Political. Violence. War. Emotions like worry, fear, anger, depression, misery, and many others. Do we have "various trials"? Unfortunately, yes.

I also find that over time in my life, my trials change as well. There are things that when I was younger would have devastated me; now they don't. Other things that wouldn't have bothered me then, now they do.

This truth points out the obvious. Trials come in great variety and in varying degrees of difficulty but all of them are painful.

### **Trials are Revealing and Refining**

*"So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 1:7)

"So that" indicates a purpose statement. Look again at verse 6. *"If necessary you have been grieved."* "If necessary" implies someone is making that judgment. Who? The answer is God. His ways are higher than ours and often they don't make sense to us. The righteous suffer. The unrighteous prosper. The kind, godly man dies young. The wicked die old. But behind all of it is a God, as the hymn says, who *does each day what he deems best.*

Pain has a "so that." Pain has a purpose. We rest in a sovereign purpose in it all. Christianity has it. Atheism doesn't have it. Secular humanism doesn't have it. Evolutionary theory eliminates the possibility. But the same faith that believes in a Savior who suffered according to the will of his Father believes in a sovereign purpose in all Christian suffering and urges us not to waste these experiences knowing God never wastes them on us.

But what purpose do they serve? *“So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* (1 Peter 1:7) Peter draws an analogy between the fire of a trial and how gold is tested and refined by fire. Let’s start with gold. Gold in the first century was the most valuable substance they had. It also was the most long-lasting. If you have seen the jewelry from King Tut’s tomb, you know the ancient world had incredible skill with purifying and forming gold.

Like today, they would test and purify gold by using fire. Gold doesn’t come out of the earth pure; it has to have non-gold removed from it; impurities removed. So they would heat it to a very high temperature which would cause the impurities to float to the surface. They would be removed and the karat (purity) of the gold would increase. It would become more fully and completely gold.

Fire *reveals* the gold and fire *refines* the gold. He is saying our faith is like gold and our trials are like fire. Fire reveals the genuine gold and trials reveal the genuineness of our faith. You don’t have to be around the church long to see this. A family goes through a hard time—a rebellious child, dad lost his job, whatever—they are in a kind of fiery trial. Something is revealed through that process. Their faith is revealed and their faith is refined. Their response to the trial says so much. This doesn’t mean they are super-Christians or don’t have any worry or fear. Rather, genuine faith’s impulse is to turn to God for help. They engage the church and Christian friends to pray for them. They don’t fall off the wagon. Instead, a faith is revealed by the trial that had not been seen before. In a sense, they didn’t know they had it in them. Nobody else did either. But wow is it beautiful to see!

At the same time, trials can go the other way. Life gets hot. Bandwagon Christians look for a different bandwagon. *This isn’t what I signed up for. God doesn’t love me. There isn’t anything to this, etc.* What has happened? The genuineness of faith—its absence—has been revealed. Trials are great revealers.

### **Trials are Purifiers**

I read that in modern gold refining, they heat the gold to 3000 degrees Fahrenheit. Let’s say you could talk to the gold as the heat is going up. What would you hear? *This is hot! This hurts! Get me out of here! Why is this happening? Why do I get this and silver gets off easy? Please stop this! The guy in charge of this doesn’t love me.*

But the goldsmith knows that the only way purification happens is by heat and he knows that the value of that gold is drawn out and purified. Its karat content increases. Its worth is revealed and multiplied.

Peter says that your faith is more valuable than any gold. Gold perishes in the end, but saving faith is eternal. When the heat is turned up on us, we say, *This hurts! Stop! There’s some mistake! Why? Why not someone else? Why me?*

God’s answer is, *You may not realize it but your faith is far more valuable than your comfort. I am going to reveal it and refine it. This will be a short-term pain for a long-term gain.* I don’t think this means we intentionally bring trouble to ourselves. Let God be sovereign over this. We also shouldn’t play God to other Christians. Life in this fallen world has enough fiery trials, doesn’t it?

## Questions to Ask When the Heat is Up

- Am I looking at this from a temporal or eternal perspective?
- Do I realize trials are necessary at times and are for my good?
- Is my perspective shaped by confidence in God's sovereign and good plan for my life?
- Do I want to grow spiritually more than I want to live comfortably?
- Is faith refinement a personal goal? Do I aspire to a high "karat" content?

Look at the end result, *"So that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 1:7)

## Purified Faith's Goal: Honor to us and HONOR to Jesus

This was an "aha moment" for me in my preparation. I assumed that the praise, glory, and honor were for Jesus. That's a common theme in the New Testament. However, the text doesn't say who it goes to, just when. The revelation of Jesus Christ describes Jesus' return and eternal kingdom. Our tested faith brings praise to Jesus *when* Jesus returns. Yes. But the text allows for another truth found more clearly elsewhere. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, *"For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison."* Our faithfulness in trials results in glory and honor for us as well. Jesus will reward his people for our endurance in suffering for his sake (Revelation 22:12; Matthew 5:11-12, 10:42). A wonderful promise, but how can both happen?

Let's return to the illustration Peter uses. Gold. Often gold was refined for use in art. Jewelry was one example. The craftsman would refine the gold and create a ring or a headpiece or a necklace. Chicago museums have lots of ancient artwork made of gold. People pay to see it. They stand and admire it. The gold art is itself honored, but who gets the real honor? The maker of the art.

The connection is seen in how we refer to great works of art. It's not just the Messiah, it's Handel's Messiah. It's not just the 5<sup>th</sup> symphony, it's Beethoven's fifth. The work of art is praised but the highest honor is given to the maker of the art.

This is what Peter means. Trials are God's way of revealing and refining saving faith in us. The trial itself becomes a kind of canvas—our endurance by faith, our obedience in tough places, our refusal to give up on Jesus—they become paintings of faith hung in the gallery of God. Are we praised? Yes, and rewarded by Jesus.

But the ultimate glory and honor goes to the one who gave us the faith in the first place. The one who skillfully created it, revealed it, and purified it which results in glory and honor to Jesus himself. Paintings and painters. Symphonies and composers. Sinners and Savior... *"may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."*

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