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## FIERY TRIALS

How's your pain threshold today? Anybody asking for more pain ? – or for more meds to cover up pain ? What trials and tribulations or persecutions and sufferings do you most fear ? – physical suffering ? emotional ? mental ?

No one really likes suffering, do they – and we often go to great lengths to avoid it, or to explain away the reasons and rewards – because often there just isn't a pill you can take or procedure to endure for what you're going through...

Peter gives new perspective on the new reality of suffering in the Christian life. God has a purpose for suffering – “purposeful suffering.” 1 Peter 4:12 says, “beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.”

Remember that within a couple of years of Peter's writing this letter, the Roman emperor Nero turned Christians into human torches. It was difficult being a Christian in Peter's day in the Roman Empire.

And Peter says “fiery” or “painful” trials are to be expected. Personal suffering and persecution test us in the sense of purifying our faith. This is an echo of what Peter talked about in chapter 1, likening faith to the process of refining gold by the purifying crucible of fire.

He reminds us that Christ suffered, and so those who follow Him should expect to suffer too – because God has a purpose for it. That is an important consolation – because when we realize God has a purpose, we know that He will also see us through those trials in order to accomplish His purpose.

Just as our salvation has a past, present, and future, so does God's purpose in suffering. Just as Christ suffered in the past to save us, we too will suffer in the present, since we are His followers. And in the future, God's purpose will be made clear as we are forever joined in the completeness of union with Him.

That's what the apostle Peter has been telling us along in his first letter. The Christian life is all about being transformed. Believers are joined to Christ just like living stones are lined up with the cornerstone. He is building us for His purposes.

Christ suffered and we too should expect to suffer. Because we are in union with Christ, we are being transformed to become more and more like Him – so ALL that we experience in this life is part of God's divine design and He has a purpose for every His providence of our lives.

Pastor and author Colin Smith puts it this way: “God's Word helps us shape realistic expectations for living by faith in this fallen world. False expectations lead to bitter disappointed. Painful trials in the Christian life are not surprising or unusual. They are normal.”

The Bible spells it all out. There's no hidden fine print. It doesn't make grandiose promises about an idyllic Christian life. Jesus promised that His followers too would take up His cross and follow Him and that we will experience the mistreatment that He did.

The Bible also tells us over and over that we should rejoice in sufferings now, because we will in the end when it all brings glory to God. As Hebrews 12 says, Jesus endured the cross for the joy that it would bring. Even so, we can rejoice in our sufferings because it's a prelude to the glory that is coming.

That's good news – something we need when we're going through trials.