

# Steadfast in Suffering - Part 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] Before I go into the second talk, let me just talk to you a bit about some books that you might want to look at.

So there's a book table somewhere. But anyway, there's a few books. I mean, today I'm really only looking at the book of 1 Peter, but there are lots of questions about suffering that I will not be able to address or even touch on.

If you want something that's a bit more scholarly, you can look at Carson's *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Sufferings and Evil*. Professor Don Carson is excellent in his understanding of the Bible.

So he sets up six pillars of which you can look at how to understand suffering in this world. Dave Furman's *Kiss the Wave, Embracing God in Your Trials* is something quite readable.

So if you're looking for something that is easier to read, have a look at that. And *Kiss the Wave* is the title of my talk afterwards. He's the title of my book. What it means to embrace your suffering and pain.

[ 1 : 20 ] And Dave Furman himself has a chronic pain problem that he goes through, and he's someone who's actually writing from the experience of extreme physical pain every day.

Okay, so that's the book. Of course, something a bit more, what's the word, C.S. Lewis, he is not a theologian, but he is a thinker.

And he's written a lot of books. Of course, the famous *Chronicles of Narnia*, but he's also written a book called *The Problem of Pain*. And then later on, after his wife passed away, he wrote the book called *Grief Observed*, where he said that before, when he wrote his first book, *The Problem of Pain*, it's theoretical up there, not so much personal sufferings he has gone through.

But the death of his wife, Joy, impacted him greatly, and he wrote *Grief Observed* more from a personal reflection after the death of his wife. Okay?

And if you're not really a reader, read biographies. Okay? Stories of people's lives, people who have gone through various forms of suffering.

[ 2 : 37 ] So like Johnny Erickson Tada, she's written lots of books. Her story is a ministry in itself. Elizabeth Elliot, *Through Gates of Splendor*.

I'll talk a bit about her afterwards. And then maybe books like Corrie ten Boom's *The Hiding Place*, the lady who hid a lot of Jews during the time of Hitler, and things like that.

So read, because it will minister to your soul. Okay? Now, we now look at Chapter 2 a bit more.

Okay. Okay. Recently, another thing caught my eye in the newspaper.

It is not fair, says an angry PT3 student who studied hard while his friends had the entire leaked paper instead.

[ 3 : 40 ] That was a recent headline just a couple of weeks back. Once again, our public exam papers have been leaked. Let me read to you an excerpt of an email sent by an affected student to a local newspaper.

That morning, I was stressing myself out, so I asked my friend for help. But instead of helping me, she told me to do this math module that she got from her friend.

I thought it was a mock paper or something, but I was surprised to find out that it was the same question used in the PT3 math paper afterwards.

I was shocked. Really shocked. The module and exam paper were exactly, all in caps, yeah, exactly the same, with the front cover and everything.

All of the students who didn't read the leaked paper were furious because the others were obviously cheating. The students who did not receive the leaked module wanted to make a report and, if possible, trigger a retake of the paper.

[ 4 : 50 ] But the students who cheated threatened us. Even the teachers refused to take action, but instead got mad at us and told us to leave the issue alone despite the unfairness.

We've all encountered unfair situations, haven't we? Our sense of justice tells us to fight back, make a complaint, tell our side of the story, do what it takes to correct the wrong, reverse the situation.

After all, it's not right. It's not fair. Justice should be restored. Fairness should always be upheld. We feel indignant, vexed, outraged.

The injustice gnaws into our inner core. Do any of you remember the legal comedy TV series called *Ellie McBeal*? It will show your age, okay.

Ellie was a highly strung, quirky lawyer in the series. But I like her because she came up with a lot of great quotable quotes. In one episode, one of her colleagues, Georgia, challenged her.

[ 6 : 03 ] Ellie, what makes your problems so much bigger than everybody else's? And Ellie's reply? Because they are mine. And that is so, isn't it?

When injustice hits right at us personally, it becomes a big deal. It's otherwise quite easy to just philosophize injustice, shake our head a bit.

Well, it's someone else's suffering. Yeah? We now turn to a passage which is the Christological heart of the epistle of 1 Peter.

Suffering in the light of the example of Jesus. Jesus who bore the pain of the most unjust suffering ever. The suffering that led him to the cross. The innocent for the guilty.

One man for the sins of the entire world. Past, present and future. Now the immediate context of the passage we will be focusing on talks of submission to those placed in authority over us.

[ 7 : 14 ] The government, our bosses and so forth. Peter says that submission would be the appropriate expression of our Christian obedience in such context.

We submit for the Lord's sake, verse 13. Because it is God's will that we do good, verse 15. We submit to show due respect, verse 17.

And we submit because we are conscious of God, verse 19. And this is so even if we are wrongly accused, verse 12. Or our masters are harsh, verse 18.

Or we are subjected to wrongs or sufferings at their hands. In verse 19, the defining adjective is introduced. Unjust.

Unjust sufferings. Now sufferings can take many, many forms and manner. It can be physical. It can be mental. It can be emotional. It can be deserved, undeserved.

[ 8 : 18 ] From natural disasters, in circumstances, and so forth. And sufferings can be experienced in varying levels and degrees, of course.

But unjust sufferings, when experienced, just gnaw at our immemorial being. Sometimes our soul agonises and cries out, it is not fair.

How, therefore, are we, as God's elect exiles, to live out our lives when we face pain and sufferings in our day-to-day lives?

The passage that we are looking at in 1 Peter 2, verses 18-25, highlights three considerations. Verse 18-20.

For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God.

[ 9 : 25 ] But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God.

To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. We are commanded to endure our pains and sufferings.

Simple as that. But so, so hard to obey. My dad came over to Malaysia from China when he was about 18 years old.

He brought his mother and siblings over with him. His father, my grandfather, had already come over to Malaysia a couple of years back. My grandfather died before I was born, so I never met him. But the only inheritance that my dad received from my grandfather was the debts which my grandfather owed. My dad worked hard at a job at some distant relative's hardware shop.

[ 10 : 40 ] Somewhat taken advantage of. He provided not only for us, his family, but also for his younger siblings and supported them through their studies as with ours.

For many years, my dad had a Chinese word stuck to the wall next to his study table. The word was yan. So in Cantonese, it means endure.

Okay? And the dictionary explains that the word endure means to suffer the pain and difficulties patiently. To, though feeling the pain, but continuing on even so.

Endure. My dad endured, or suck it up in today's language, for many years, until he was finally in a position to resign and start his own business.

Verse 20, The endurance to which God calls us to in verse 20 is not a choiceless submission to suffering.

[12:07] It is instead a conscious decision to do good and endure the suffering. It is not, you know, the kind of endurance where you can't escape anyway, so you just have to endure it, you know.

Rather, the endurance to which you are called is to be consciously, it's like a conscious decision in the face of sufferings.

You choose, you consciously choose to do good and endure the suffering and pain, mindful and desirous to commend the Lord Jesus Christ to those who have been put in authority over you, to those who are making life difficult for you.

It is an enduring and a bearing up out of strength, not weakness. It's not a wimpy submission.

It is something you choose to do. Tough, right?

[13:37] Verse 21, To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate.

When he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Peter reminds the Gentile believers that just as Christ has suffered for them, so too are they called to follow in his steps.

This is a calling, to do what is good and even to suffer for it, following the footsteps of Christ. So we endure our hardships, not only because it is commendable before God, but also because we have a role model, an example in Jesus in the way he suffered for us.

Suffering and death are not at the age of Christian experience, but they are at its very, very core. It defines what it means to live as a Christian.

[15:05] Jesus said in Mark 8 verse 34, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.

We must go through much hardships to enter the kingdom of God. This is our high calling. Christ suffered, leaving us an example, a model to be copied.

Christ suffered undeserved, unjust suffering. He committed no sin, yet he died on a cross in our place. That is the model and pattern for our Christian life.

You know, like how we used to use tracing paper to copy our picture. Likewise, we put our life paper over Jesus' life and trace it, follow his path, trace in his foot marks.

We are called to submit ourselves to the suffering and endure it, just as Christ did. That is our calling, our vocation, our business.

[16:18] Isaiah 53 is the backdrop of verses 22 to 23 and one of the most Christological passages in the Bible. Let me just read to you from Isaiah 53, verses 3 to 9.

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him. By his wounds, we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[17:31] He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living.

For the transgression of my people, he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death. Though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Jesus suffered the pain and shame of the cross, although without sin. Insults were hurled at him.

His response? Verse 23, He did not retaliate, did not make any threats. He did not try to get back at his oppressors.

[ 18 : 38 ] He did not complain. He held his silence. Why? Jesus entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

Jesus, you can say, was under the authority of the Sanhedrin, the Romans, and ultimately God his Father. He looked beyond and kept his eyes fixed onto God.

Father, not my will, but yours be done. He went all the way to the cross to do good and endure the suffering.

God is pleased and glorified. And we are called to imitate Christ in our sufferings, to bless through our sufferings instead of retaliating.

It is tough. How is your weakness in your workplace? When your boss has unfair expectations of you, do you gripe?

[ 19 : 46 ] When your colleague gets the credit for the work you did, how did you respond? What about at home?

If your husband rarely helps with the household chores, do you complain and argue? If your housemate again left a pile of dishes in the sink, how do you react?

What is the right response? What is the good response to which we are called? Jesus shows us that we are to respond with grace.

That is the pattern. That is God's way. To walk in Jesus' footsteps is the calling and ministry in the workplace and in your home.

It's humbling. It's humbling. It's painful. But it is the pattern. Step in Jesus' path. We are called to get right back in and love the way to get right back in the room.

[ 20 : 58 ] Love the unfair boss. Love the sneaky colleague. Love the blind husband. Love the lazy housemate.

love the bad. Love the bad. We are called to respond generously with grace, notwithstanding our situations. Have you read the book Through Gates of Splendour by Elizabeth Elliot?

Yeah. You will know that it is an account of Elizabeth and her husband, together with some others who were missionaries in Ecuador. The group were in particular trying to reach and bring the gospel to the Oka Indians in Ecuador.

In January 1956, just when they thought that they were actually making a breakthrough with the tribe, the Ocas turned on them.

Five men, including Jim Elliot, were killed by the Ocas. They were speared. How would you respond if you were the wife of Jim Elliot?

[ 22 : 13 ] Pack up and go home? I think that's probably what I would have done. Well, Elizabeth Elliot, with her three-year-old daughter in tow, went right back in to live among the very tribe that killed her husband.

She stayed and continued the work that her husband had started, to seek ways to share the gospel with the Ocas.

By God's grace, the gospel did break through eventually, and even to the very ones who speared Jim Elliot and his friends. Clearly, Elizabeth Elliot took her calling seriously.

She followed in the footsteps of her saviour. In the face of unjust sufferings, she went right back in and loved the Ocas.

But it's too much to bear, you say. It is the footsteps to be shadowed.

[ 23 : 28 ] But it's not fair. Well, the cross wasn't fair. Don't I deserve better? Christ even more so.

God achieves his purpose through the endurance of undeserved suffering. This is the heart of the gospel living, the heart of gospel life.

It is not easy. It is a battle. But to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

Verse 21. For most of us, it would seem humanly impossible. And yes, it is only by the power of the cross that we can do what Peter is asking us to do here.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness. By his wounds, you have been healed.

[ 24 : 45 ] Verse 24. There is a shift here from the exemplary to the redemptive. We can't do what Christ did on the cross.

We can't save. That is substitutionary atonement. He bore our sins and by his wounds we have been healed. That is the work of transformation of the cross, but also empowerment. We are now strangers in this world called to die to our sins and to live for righteousness and follow our Saviour. We've been saved to do good. We have been healed by the power of the cross. And now in the cross, we can live for righteousness. And we can now entrust ourselves to the shepherd of our souls. There is reorientation and empowerment under the shepherd's care. So we can more than just endure our sufferings now. We embrace it. We embrace it. Like Christ, we can entrust ourselves to him who judges justly.

[ 25 : 55 ] The sufferings now are hard, but they are not purposeless. And the judgment to come will be far worse than what hardship you go through now.

So be ready. I would so love to be able to give all of us a formula to remove our sufferings. But God works through our sufferings rather than simply take them away.

Chapter 1, verse 7. Charles Burgeon, a man whose life was characterized by trials, one state of his sufferings, I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the rock of ages.

Now, although I've spent quite a few years in Australia, surfing is something I have never managed to do. Body boarding was the closest I got to.

But I'm told that understanding when to duck dive into the wave is key to surfing, to catch the wave. Now, friends, unexpected and unwanted trials will crash upon our lives.

[ 27 : 29 ] And it will leave us gasping for air sometimes. But as we learn to kiss the wave, to embrace the pain and suffering that life brings, we can have confidence that the wave will throw us against the rock of ages.

And this rock of ages is a place of safety and security, not danger. Isaiah 26, verse 4.

Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord himself, is the rock eternal. Let your confidence in God on no occasion fail.

Let no calamity, no adversity, no persecution, no poverty, no pain, no suffering, no trial prevent you from resting your entire confidence in him.

God is the eternal rock in whom we can find protection and defence for everlasting ages. And God works through our sufferings rather than simply taking them away.

[ 28 : 40 ] So kiss the wave that throws you against the rock of ages. Johnny Erickson Tada was a teenager when she broke her neck following a diving accident.

She has now spent some 40 years in a wheelchair. Let me read to you what she shared. I can't wait to jump up and dance, kick and do aerobics, do a jig, do the square dance and rock and roll in heaven.

It is going to be such a party. But I hope that when I get to heaven, I can take this wheelchair. Now I know that it's not theologically correct, she says.

But if I could, I wouldn't take my nice, easy-to-handle travel wheelchair. I'll take the big, old, clunky, dirty, dusty wheelchair that I have at home with its grinding gears and bulky bigness.

But I won't sit in the wheelchair. No, I'll stand on grateful, glorified legs right next to the Lord Jesus. I'll take his hands and feel the nail prints in his palms.

[ 30 : 01 ] And I'll say to my Saviour, Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me and for so many others. He will know that I am indeed sincerely grateful because he will recognize me from the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.

In that I carried my cross on earth, dying to the sin that he has died for on his cross, becoming like him in his death.

He will recognize me. He will know me. And I will say to him, Lord Jesus, do you see that wheelchair over there? Before you send it to hell, and you won't find that in the Bible either, she says.

Before you send it to hell, there's something I want to tell you about it. Lord, I lived in that thing more than three and a half decades. You were right when you say in this world we would have trouble. But believe me, the weaker I was in that thing, the harder I leaned on you. And the harder I leaned on you, the stronger I discovered you to be.

[ 31 : 19 ] Lord Jesus, bless you and thank you for the grace that was more than sufficient, so much so that I could boast in my affliction, delight in the infirmity, glory in the limitation.

I knew then that more of your power would rest on me. And then she ends by saying, When I broke my neck, all that dry, mechanical, technical, methodical approach to life stopped.

I learned that my paralysis was not some jigsaw puzzle. I had to figure out. It was not a quick job to get me back on track.

It was the beginning of a long and difficult, but delightful journey escorting me deeper and deeper into the recesses of God's heart.

It is one thing to say I should follow Christ and submit to unjust suffering. It is another thing to say I can submit to unjust suffering.

[ 32 : 33 ] But it is yet something else to say that I will submit to unjust suffering.

I will follow Christ. I will embrace the trials. When the waves of hardship, pain and suffering crashes relentlessly on us, it is the hardest thing in the world to accept that there is nothing much one can do.

But God is asking, Do you trust me? Each loss and pain is an opportunity to gain deeper fellowship with the Lord as we leave all behind to follow Jesus.

As we abide in his love and grace, we discover that the cost is more than worth it all. As a follower of Christ and empowered by the work of the cross, will you endure unjust suffering for the glory of God and entrust yourself through it all to the shepherd and overseer of your soul.

When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll, whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul.

[ 34 : 16 ] Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blessed assurance control that Christ has regarded my helpless estate and hath shed his own blood for my soul.

My sin, O the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin, not in part, but the whole, is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul.

It is well, with my soul. It is well, with my soul. It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Dear sisters, may we all learn to kiss the wave that throws us against the rock of ages. Amen.

Amen. Again, I invite you to pause and self-reflect.

How has God's word spoken to you? In what ways, with fresh insights, can you now approach the suffering and hardships you are experiencing? Will you embrace your sufferings as Christ did?

[ 35 : 38 ] Then, again, spend some time in prayer. By yourself, if you wish to, or again, in twos or threes.

And then Sharon will close in prayer for everyone. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

ManyLABs Have God's word for now.