

**Women's Bible Study Fall 2017**  
**Supporting the Suffering: 1 Peter 5**  
**December 6, 2017**  
**Gretchen Steer**



When we announced last spring that we were doing a ten week series on suffering, I'm sure some of you winced. Actually, some of us teachers winced too, until we had a chance to talk through it and realize that not only could we cover two books of the Bible – Job and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, but it was not going to be unalloyed misery week after week. I won't say that #whenlifestinks has been a bundle of laughs, but I have learned some profound things from listening to my fellow teachers.

So let's start today by taking a quick backwards look at Job and 1<sup>st</sup> Peter.

First we learned that Job was a righteous man with a solid faith in God. But there are those who oppose God who seek to destroy faith, and in God's permissive will he permitted the Accuser to bring havoc into Job's life. Yet God is in control of everything, even those who seek destruction.

After the loss of his children, his wealth, and his physical health, Job was a broken man but not a faithless one. Like us when our life stinks, we cannot know the specific reason for our sorrows, but what we can control is our response to them.

At that point Job's friends showed up to comfort him, and became a textbook case of what not to say to those who are hurting. His friends believed that Job must have sinned to deserve this punishment. Because you and I will inevitably come in contact with hurting people, this was a tremendously practical lesson from Jann on what not to say.

Then we looked at how Job had a very human response to suffering, yet managed to do so in an honorable way. Though he wished he'd never been born, that his suffering would end, and that he would have a rescuer, Job never cursed God and never broke faith despite his despair – another important lesson for us when we are hurting. We also looked at some of the scriptural reasons for suffering. We live in a fallen world. We experience the painful consequences of our own sin. We suffer to identify with Christ. And sometimes we suffer so that God's glory will be revealed in the outcome.

But at the end of Job God showed up quite powerfully to answer Job's questions. God's majesty and glory silenced Job and taught him that even when we cannot understand the reason, we can rest in God's sovereign control over the world and our lives. And we can rest in the truth that God deals with those who defy him, like the Accuser.

From Job, one of the oldest books in the Bible, we then moved to the New Testament book of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. Peter was writing to Christians under Nero's reign of terror, people who lived every day in fear for their lives. In chapter 1 Peter assured us that our trials have come so that our faith, of greater worth than gold, may result in praise, glory and honor when Christ Jesus is revealed. There's that idea again that our honorable suffering glorifies God.

In chapter 2 we learned that suffering at the hands of the government does not remove the need to show respect to authorities; to conduct ourselves within the law; and to remember Jesus' example. Peter helps us remember that Christians in the first century were living a counter cultural life and were in great danger because their lives were a reproach to Rome. This is similar to many Christians around the world today living in repressive regimes.

Chapter 3 brought us to the crux of Peter's message: Christ died for us, so let's live in a way that shows it. That clear thought should affect our willingness to submit to one another, to learn from our trials and to look to Christ as an example.

Last week in chapter 4 Angie taught us that when life stinks we are to exemplify Christ, extend God's grace, expect suffering, and exalt the Lord through that experience. You see how the same themes recur? We haven't explained suffering per se, but we have through scripture looked at a successful road map for making sense of it and ultimately glorifying God through it.

So instead of wallowing in misery week after week, I think we've learned some useful strategies for dealing with suffering, some helpful ways to relate to others who are suffering, and I hope we've gained a sense of perspective about suffering. And that brings us to chapter 5, which isn't so much about suffering as it is about the relationships between believers that should flow out of our understanding of how we are to live in this fallen world.

So please turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter chapter 5, and we'll look first at his instruction to  
**I. Follow the Shepherd**

I've seen plenty of shepherds with flocks of sheep in England and I've observed that when the shepherd wants to take them from A to B, he often walks in front of the sheep to lead them. Apparently cattle are driven from behind and sheep are led from the front. Now we all know that sheep are notoriously dumb, so the shepherd usually also has a collie at the back making sure they stay pointed in the right direction, but it's a lovely biblical picture of how we are to follow Christ. He leads, we follow. So with that picture in mind of Jesus at the front of the flock, let's look at what Peter has to say about the

### **1. Role of undershepherds (1-3)**

Undershepherd isn't a word we use a lot, but it's quite clear. The undershepherd reports to the shepherd, taking care of the flock in his absence. Please turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 5 verse 1:

**“To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ’s sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed. Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them – not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be, not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1-3)**

When he was younger, Peter was not exactly known for humility. He boasted that even if everyone forsook Jesus, he would not, and yet he fled at the first sign of armed conflict. Later he denied knowing Jesus three different times. That tremendous failing and betrayal haunted him. When Jesus reinstated Peter after his resurrection I don't think Peter remained the same cocky individual as he was when Jesus first met him. You can see this hard won humility in Peter's words in verse 1, describing himself as a “fellow elder”. By this point Peter was much more than that – he was one of the giants of the early church, a man to whom everyone looked up. Yet he identifies with his readers, the local elders of local churches. He says that together they will all share in the glory to be revealed. He does not elevate himself.

But in the meantime, these elders and Peter had a job – to shepherd the flock of God under their care, and watch over them.

In verse 2 there are some of the loveliest words about ministry in all of scripture. Peter says we are to serve, “...**not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be.**” After forty years of ministry the one experience that never fails to gladden my heart is to discover a likeminded commitment to service among other believers.

But to anyone who has ever grown weary in well doing, or who has tried to treat the ministry as just another job that can be managed by good business principles alone, these verses remind us that God's desire is for us to serve like shepherds: not because you **must**, but because you are **willing**, as God wants you to be. And during the rare times when I have resented the ministry I have asked God to make me willing. He always answers that prayer – sometimes with rest, sometimes by sending another person to come alongside, but always affirmatively. That is how Jesus served us – not because he had to, but because he was willing, even at the cost of his life.

Peter then elaborates. Besides a willing spirit, effective spiritual leadership requires pure motives in two areas. Elders and pastors must not be in it for financial reward, because they are trusted by others to use God's money honorably. As Peter says, “**Not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve**”. If a minister or church leader misuses that trust for personal enrichment, it has horrible consequences in the church. The cause of Christ is publicly damaged. People will not give to an

organization they don't trust. Without giving, the work of God is hindered. So it's important that a leader's motive is not money.

But just as serious is the second motive. Sometimes people like to lead simply because they lust after power. Power is a seductive motivator, and it has no place in the delicate balance of submitting to one another in the body of Christ. As Peter says, **“Not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”** I recently had to fill out a questionnaire for someone being considered for missionary service. The questions were fascinating – Does this person have superior attitudes towards people of other races? Do you believe they are motivated by a desire for power? We could just as well ask those questions of pastors and elders. Someone who is motivated by power is not Christ like, and Peter's argument is that undershepherds who are in charge of Jesus' flock have to be as much like him as possible. They must be willing, and they should not be motivated by personal gain or personal power.

Then Peter goes on to the

## **2. Reward of undershepherds**

Look at verse 4:

**“And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.” (1 Peter 5:4)**

That is both something to look forward to and a blunt statement of what you will not get in this life. In spiritual leadership, money and power are not going to be our reward if that is our only motivation. What undershepherds can look for, however, is the crown of glory that will never fade away. In other words, Jesus is always aware of what we do for him. He perceives the cost, the sacrifice, the weariness. He knows when we are struggling to serve him. To offset that he gives joy, answered prayer, fulfillment. And at the end, when Jesus returns, he rewards us with some of his own glory – a crown that can never perish.

You may have tuned out of the first four verses thinking that you are not a pastor or an elder. But in fact these words apply to every one who is in spiritual leadership, whether that is with your children at home, the small group you lead, or the neighbor you are trying to bring to Christ. So next Peter writes words we all need to hear about the

## **3. Reality of getting along**

Look at verse 5 of chapter 5:

**“In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’” (1 Peter 5:5)**

There's some debate about whom “the younger” refers to. And guess what, it just means “the younger”! Probably people, specifically men, who were

chronologically younger than the elders. Because no one emerges from childhood fully spiritually mature, and so all of us look to those older and wiser in the faith so we can learn from them.

But most importantly, we are to “clothe ourselves with humility” toward one another. We are to put on that attitude like the clothes we put on every day. Just as clothes cover our nakedness and make us socially acceptable in public, so the clothes of humility cover over our raw, embarrassing tendency to sin against one another. The clothing of humility makes us put others before ourselves.

What is humility? The dictionary says it's a modest or low view of our own importance, but perhaps we could define it as “a willingness to put others before ourselves.” Jesus did that, despite the fact that he was God. The carol we sang at the beginning of Bible study says *“Veiled in flesh the Godhead see – hail the incarnate deity! Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel.”* (Hark the Herald Angels Sing).

To veil himself in flesh is a bit similar to us clothing ourselves in humility. Our unholy eyes couldn't behold Jesus as God, but when he took on flesh and dwelt with us, we saw him face to face, and he was able to take our sin punishment on himself. When we clothe ourselves with humility and submit to one another, we are echoing Jesus submitting to the restrictions and demands of the flesh – not just to be humble, but to obey his Father.

Before we leave these first five verses, I want to think about our

#### **4. Relationship to the suffering**

Because we have looked at suffering so extensively in the past weeks, we ought to be able to apply its principles to this passage. First, we can see that if elders and pastors are fulfilling their calling as undershepherds, then they will be alert to the sorrows and needs of their flock. That's what humility does – allows us to put others first and see their needs before our own.

If we are the ones suffering, we need to receive practical help, prayer, empathy and understanding. But suffering doesn't exempt us from helping others, even as we are being helped. A friend of ours in England has just received a diagnosis of metastatic cancer. That would be bad enough, but it follows a near death from kidney disease, a transplant, chronic loss of health and the death of two of their four children to AIDS. This is a family who has experienced way beyond what we think is bearable suffering in this life. Yet they continue to trust Christ and praise God. In the meantime through her work she has helped people all over the world. Her suffering has not prevented her from ministering to others. On the contrary it has made her more effective.

This is what it means to clothe ourselves with humility towards one another – we put their needs above ours, and we also do not value ourselves so highly that we cannot accept the help when we need when we are suffering.

You see, that's a hidden pitfall of leadership. Much of the time it is truly harder to receive than to give. Yet Jesus accepted sustenance from his mother Mary. He accepted a little boy's lunch with thanks. He accepted help carrying the cross from Simon of Cyrene. And he asked his friends to watch with him in the Garden. Even the Creator of the universe, in human flesh, had human needs that others were able to meet. So no one is beyond receiving that help that comes from clothing ourselves with humility and submitting to one another. This is what distinguishes the body of Christ from the secular world. We are for one another, and when one suffers, we all do what we can.

So that's Peter's first point: Follow the Shepherd, and the Shepherd will lead us where we need to go.

But next he warns:

## **II. Resist the Accuser**

Satan or the devil is the name given to the formerly heavenly being who presently has a limited reign in this world. God has permitted Satan to range within boundaries in this world, though his final destruction is coming. He is sometimes called the Accuser because he accuses us of our sin and condemnation.

Here's what John Piper has to say about the devil: "...he is a fool. He brought Jesus to the cross through Judas. That was his suicide. That was his undoing because at the cross he was disarmed... That is the one thing Satan can use to destroy a person forever: the accusation that they have sin that is unforgiven. But in Christ there is no unforgiven sin." (Piper, *The Case for Satan*, DesiringGod.org, August 21, 2015).

So Satan was permanently disarmed at the cross by Jesus' victory over death. Yet he is still to be respected and feared for his potential destruction, just as you'd respect a cobra if it was roaming freely through your house.

In these verses Peter finds a wonderful way of warning and comforting us at the same time as he tells us to resist the accuser. First he points out that

### **1. God protects you**

Look at verse 6:

**"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:6-7)**

Peter hasn't actually mentioned the devil yet, but he's heading for that in verse 8. First, he reassures us that God protects us in a very specific way. We experience his protection most clearly when we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. You see, we bring many of our sorrows on ourselves when we refuse to give the lordship of our life to him. Oh yes, we can convince ourselves that we love Jesus, but he'd better not tell us what to do. And then our own self direction leads us into sin. Or we encounter suffering of a sort that we cannot bear alone. But the solution to all that is to Follow the Shepherd. When we humble ourselves under God's mighty hand we accept his direction. We stay within the boundaries he has lovingly set for us. We become more like his Son. And eventually he will lift us up into a place of peace.

Now many of us have cherished verse 7: **(Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you)**, but if we fail to join it to verse 6 we are only getting part of the picture. The reason we can cast our anxiety on him is that, having humbled ourselves under his mighty hand, we don't have to worry about the outcome. We're no longer in charge.

Once many years ago friends invited us to a lovely event at the Minnesota Zoo called the Beastly Ball. It was black tie, and everything in the Zoo was set up to give the guests a fascinating evening with beautiful decorations and great food. Now at that time I was responsible for putting on many events – not ones that fancy, but events that took a great deal of time and preparation. I was in charge of them at Bible study. I was in charge of them at my job at school. I was in charge of them at home when we had dinner parties. I was almost never not in charge. So for me to arrive at a gorgeous event for which I had done nothing except to put on a nice dress and comb my hair was AMAZING. I couldn't believe how much I enjoyed not having to worry about whether the food would be done on time or whether the event would raise enough money or whatever. Because I wasn't in charge. I hadn't even had to pay admission! Don't you see, that's what God does for us when we humble ourselves under his hand and allow him to direct our lives? Then when we are fraught with anxiety and cares we can remind ourselves that we don't have to worry because he's already proved that he is in charge. Yes, it's humbling to not be self directed all the time. But it is so very liberating.

But that's not all. Peter warns us to pay attention even though we are under God's protection.

I've got two little granddaughters who are around one year old. Pippa and Jennie are both learning to walk. They can crawl, climb and generally get into astounding mischief because they don't know that it's harmful to stick your finger in an electrical outlet, or eat the soap that goes in the dishwasher. Their parents have to pay attention all the time to keep them safe. It is a 24 hour a day job, and even though we understand God is ultimately responsible for their protection, their parents also know that watchful behavior needed.

Well, like parents of toddlers, we cannot relax our vigilance. Even though God keeps us and protects us he also expects us not to stupidly go where we are likely to get into trouble. So Peter tells us:

**“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.” (1 Peter 5:6-8)**

We don't have to worry about physical lions in Rochester, Minnesota. We tend to worry about other dangers. But Peter's readers would have had an immediate and visceral picture of a lion in their minds upon reading this. Nero used lions and other large predators in the arena to kill and torture Christians for sport. Many would have witnessed “death by lion”, and so it was a good metaphor for the devil. Just as a lion prowls this way and that, waiting to make that fatal rush towards their prey, so the devil prowls around us waiting for our attention to be elsewhere.

So if a lion doesn't put you enough on alert, substitute whatever image will make you sit up and pay attention. Think of the filth streaming through our computers that is corrupting men and women and destroying marriages. The devil uses whatever works to get to us, with the purpose of devouring us. Our part is to be sober minded and alert. To take the threats seriously that destroy faith and relationships. But God has promised to protect us, and he will, both now and in the future.

But also,

## **2. God strengthens us**

One way that God strengthens us is, oddly, by suffering. When we resist evil, when we resist being broken by our suffering, we emerge stronger. Look at verse 9:

**“Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.” (1 Peter 5:9)**

Peter has said told us before to expect this: **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4:12)** Expect it! Be warned! And realize that there are people in the world with far worse suffering than we know. Instead, be alert, and wait for God to protect and strengthen us when we humble ourselves under his mighty hand.

Finally, Peter says also to

## **III. Look to the Future**

Look at verses 10 and 11:

**“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.” (1 Peter 5:10-11)**

Let's face it, when we are suffering, it is very difficult to imagine that things will ever be better. When I have a migraine all I can think about is getting into a position that will minimize the physical pain. It's the same in bereavement. We can think of little else but our suffering.

Yet Peter gives us this enormous promise, that after we have suffered for a little while, God will do four things for us.  
He will restore us, make us strong, make us firm, and make us steadfast.

A couple of weeks ago John and I helped split and stack wood with our friend Max. And I was pretty proud of our tidy, fresh woodpile, with the new logs stacked on the bottom so they can dry out and be burned in a year or two.

But then my sister sent me some pictures of other people's woodpiles. Apparently Norwegians have made wood stacking into a national pastime. I expect to see them championing the winning Olympic Wood Stacking team some day. And because I am Norwegian I wonder if perhaps this sort of untapped creativity is lying dormant in me, despite not having shown its face for six decades.

Take a look at what the average Norwegian can do with his woodpile. Someone made a giant boar out of his. I'm not sure I can attain to that, but the next picture really convinced me that my Norwegian blood must have gotten diluted along the way, because I could never come up with this:

You will of course all recognize these two people as King Harald V and his wife Queen Sonja of Norway, made out of wood. If you don't, it's not because these people aren't excellent wood artists! So I gave up on my wood stacking ambitions and just marveled at what other Norwegians can do.

But that is Peter's point in verse 10-11. God has the power, the creativity and the intention to create something out of our suffering which we cannot even imagine when we are in the midst of it. "After a little while" could mean in heaven, or, like Job, it could mean later in this life. After all, Job reached the depths a person can hit when all was taken from him, including his health. But God restored him, strengthened him, and made Job firm and steadfast. Job went on to have more children and wealth and position than he'd had before his tragedy. If someone had promised him this end to his story when he sat in the ashes scraping his loathsome and painful boils with a piece of pottery, I doubt whether Job would have believed it. But God knew what the end of the story was, and he promises us that what follows after our honorable suffering is beyond what we can ask or think.

There's a bit more to Peter's letter. In verses 12 through 14 he sends greetings from the church or churches at large, along with greetings from Mark. Yes, that's the same John Mark who ran away naked in the Garden when Jesus was taken, and who abandoned Paul in the middle of his missionary trip. But that same Mark was later restored to dear friendship with Paul and is referred to by Peter as "my son".

Mark, probably because of his association with Peter, went on to write the gospel of Mark, which contains much of Peter's eyewitness testimony.

And then he ends with these wonderful words **“Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.” (1 Peter 5: 14).** Love and peace – that's a great way to end.

One of the great sources of love and peace in my life has been the team who leads this Bible study – Jennifer Ouren, our administrator, Juli Fischer, Angie Pankratz, Jann Wright, Svea Merry and the recently retired Lorie Dahlstrom. We are peaceful because, by the grace of God, we have affection and respect for one another. The extremely high regard I have for all of them has caused me to begin the process of transferring leadership of Women's Bible Study to the team, and specifically to Svea Merry. So while you won't see as much of me in the upfront or administrative roles, I will continue to teach as much or more as I've done for the past few years – except I'll enjoy it more, because I have less responsibility for all the other stuff! So pray for our team as we transition, and let me assure you that I'll continue to teach this Bible study for a long time to come.

Part of the joy of this study is the amazing group of small group leaders we have. Some, like Jamie Urch and Jo Erickson, have been leaders for, literally, decades. Others just started this year. But in every case, they are integral to making the groups happen and flourish. Every week they show up prepared. They pray for you, care for you and long that you experience being rooted in love and growing in God, which is our desire for Women's Bible Study. So right now I'd like to call up Svea Merry, who has a few words for our small group leaders.

**WBS is a ministry of Autumn Ridge Church – Rochester, MN 55902**  
**Questions: [ouren.jennifer@autumnridgechurch.org](mailto:ouren.jennifer@autumnridgechurch.org)**  
**[www.autumnridgechurch.org](http://www.autumnridgechurch.org)**