

## **“HOW TO HAVE JOY IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING”**

### **HOLINESS**

**1 Peter 1:1-9**

**BISHOP CARL JONES, Sr.**

**February 20, 2015**

**Carl:** Come on, guys, don't get quiet now. (*Laughter.*) Okay. I want you to know that it's good to be here this morning. Let's just quiet ourselves, and ask if Don will take us before the throne of grace. (*Music.*)

Our Father and our God, Lord, it's with intense gratitude that we come before Your presence. Holy Spirit, teach us now. Guide us into all truth. Father God, we ask Your blessing on Bruce this morning. My Father God, wherever his travels might take him, we ask that You would give him new strength in his limbs. Give him new power in his body. Father God, prepare our hearts and our minds, that we may hear Your word. My Father God, I've studied, but I need Your strength. I've prepared, but I need Your power. Lord, I ask right now, my Father God, that You let me decrease, that You might increase in me. Father God, let these men, these brave men, who have come out this morning, my Father God, let them hear a word from You. Father God, coat our hearts with Your love. Thank You for Your grace. We bless You for Your mercy. Now, our Father God, may it all be done in Jesus' name, and for His sake we pray. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Carl:** Amen. First and foremost, I wanted to clear up one thing that Sig stepped out and said. I guess all black men are supposed to be from the Baptist church. (*Laughter and applause.*)

**Participant:** He said that, Ted.

**Carl:** I guess all black men are supposed to be from—is it the Jerusalem Baptist? Okay, all right. Well, I guess, but I do want all of you to know that, as of June 27, I was consecrated into the Lord's Fellowship of Churches, which is a nondenominational body of churches, and I was consecrated as a bishop for the state of Pennsylvania. And it's an awesome, awesome task, and it's a humble, humble position, and I'm humbled that God saw fit to bless me with such a position.

I promise you that I'm not going to be before you long. Bruce had asked me last week if I would come and talk about how to have joy in the midst of suffering.

But before we get there, I want to say this this morning. I think Bruce set me up, because it's the coldest day of the year. (*Laughter.*)

And I said, “You know what? Of all days!” When I watched the news last night, they said that it's going to be minus 30.

I said, “Good! Nobody will be there but me and Frank.” (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** Remember four years ago, when the Barn was 44 degrees when you taught?

**Carl:** Yes, that's right. That's exactly right. But we just bless God for being here.

There were two preachers who were standing on the side of the road. And he got home, originally from Little Rock, Arkansas. So the preachers were standing on the side of the road, and one asked the other one, “Can a chicken lay an egg on a busy highway?”

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And, after some intense contemplation, the other preacher looked at him, and he said, “I don’t know. Can he?”

He said, “Yeah, I believe he can.”

And he said, “Well, how can a chicken lay an egg on a busy highway?”

He said, “If he’s quick about it, and he lays it right on the line.” (*Laughter.*)

And so I want you to know that, this morning, I’m going to be quick about that. (*Laughter.*) And I’m going to lay it right on the line.

**Participant:** There you go.

**Carl:** Let’s turn, if you will, in our Bibles to 1 Peter, if you will. 1 Peter, the first chapter. How to have joy in the midst of suffering. Bruce has been talking to us about our suffering Servant Savior. And as he continues to teach us on holiness, we have to recognize that, brothers, we really haven’t suffered.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Carl:** We have a reason to have joy, but we really haven’t suffered.

Let’s read the text, beginning at verse 1. And I’ll be reading, in your hearing, from verse 1 to verse 9.

And it says, “From Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those temporarily residing abroad, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by being set apart by the Spirit, for obedience and for sprinkling with Jesus Christ’s blood. May grace and peace be yours in full measure. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy, He gave us new birth into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that is, into an inheritance, imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It is reserved in heaven for you, who by God’s power are protected by faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. This brings you great joy.” Everybody say, “great joy.”

**Men:** Great joy!

**Carl:** “Although you may have to suffer for a short time in various trials. Such trials show the proven character of your faith.” Say “my faith.”

**Men:** My faith.

**Carl:** “Which is much more valuable than gold, gold that is tested by fire, even though it is passing away, and will bring praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. You have not seen Him, but you love Him. You do not see Him now, but you believe in Him, and so you rejoice with indescribable and glorious joy, because you are obtaining the goal of your faith, total salvation.” Say “total salvation.”

**Men:** Total salvation.

**Carl:** So, you know, listen, brothers. No New Testament leader realized his fallibility more deeply than the apostle Peter. As a matter of fact, that fallibility reminds me of myself sometimes.

Listen. Look at Peter, if you will. At the moment of truth, Peter, the same one who stepped out of the boat and walked on water in Matthew the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter. He’s the same one who identified Jesus as the Christ in Matthew the 16<sup>th</sup> chapter. And he’s the same one who was up on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus in Matthew the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter.

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But he miserably failed his Lord, denying Him three times on the night of His arrest, to which Jesus had prophesied that he would do this.

That’s this same man, in the face of opposition and persecution, who got up off the ground to do indescribable and incredible things for Christ’s church. No pun intended. Now he’s writing to the Jewish and the Gentile Christians, who are enduring intense persecution for their faith, encouraging them to persevere in their suffering, remembering that their rewards await them.

Now keep in mind that this is not the same brash, impetuous, emotional Peter, who traveled with Jesus during His earthly ministry. This Peter is a matured Peter. He’s matured in his faith. He has triumphed over his test. He has submitted, even in his suffering. As a matter of fact, he has learned from his failures, and now walks in the joy of knowing that he has been sealed with the Holy Spirit of God.

Well, who is Peter writing to? Well, Peter, in verses 1 and 2, if you notice, he’s writing to God’s elect, to Jewish and Gentile Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, who have been chosen by God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, to the obedience of Jesus Christ, and to the sprinkling of His blood. As a matter of fact, “grace and peace,” he said, “be yours in abundance.”

Persecution had spread throughout all the churches in Asia Minor. So Peter seeks to encourage these brothers and sisters in the will of God, and the word of God. Ever since that time, suffering Christians have found this letter profoundly encouraging.

Now brothers, you’ve heard Bruce say, and you’re hearing me say this morning, that we really haven’t suffered in the United States, because, if you really think about it, there are people in the world who really want Bibles, and they can’t get them. Many of us, we have Bibles, and we don’t want them.

**Participant:** Uh-huh.

**Carl:** And when you think about it, and when you really, really think about it, we really don’t suffer anything. As a matter of fact, we really don’t have any reason to have faith anymore, because, if you think about it, you go to your refrigerator and you find food to eat. You go to your closet, and you can have the pick of your suits that you want to put on this morning. You go, and you have maybe two or three cars in the driveway.

So what reason do we have to have faith? Huh? Think about it. What reason do we really have to have faith? So, when you really have faith in God, it’s because it’s a want to, not just a have to. You’ve got to want to have faith.

Well, here we have these suffering Christians. So how does Peter encourage us, then? How does he encourage us, those of us who have been blessed with most everything that we could possibly really want? How does he encourage us? By focusing our attention on God’s grace, the overwhelming reality of what God has given us through Jesus Christ.

This is implicit in his salutation. He said, “Grace and peace be yours in abundance.” In other words, He’s not giving you a small amount. He’s giving it to you in abundance. God’s abundant grace will enable us to experience His abundant peace in the midst of our suffering.

Now a lot of us say that we’re suffering. If you will, I call our suffering that we go through, they are dramatic interactions that cause us to go through things we go through.

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“What dramatic interactions are you talking about? Yeah, my wife might get mad at me, and she does.” (*Laughter.*) That’s a dramatic interaction, because that’s not really suffering, brothers, when you really think about it. Okay, all right, I might get mad at my wife, or you might get mad at your son, or you might kick the dog. But that’s really not suffering. That’s not suffering when you really think about it. Those are things that should be pushing you to your knees. Those are things that should cause you to pray more. Those are things that should cause us to seek God’s face even more. Why? Because it’s all about Christ at the end of the day. It’s all about the Lord. Amen?

**Men:** Amen.

**Carl:** All right. Well, it’s implicit at the end of the letter. At the end of this letter you’ll find, as a matter of fact, if you go to verse 12, in the fifth chapter, you’ll find that he said, in effect, “Listen. This suffering was going to happen. You’ve got to understand that.”

What we need most of all, when we suffer, is neither an exhortation of a stoic *machismo*, nor mere sympathy. We need increased understanding of God’s grace, and a deeper trust in it.

So Peter opens his letter with a series of insights into God’s grace, and describes how grace encourages us in our suffering. We’re going to look at our sermonic highlight, which will be on verses 3-9.

In the first of these insights, Peter doesn’t deny the reality of our suffering, or the grief caused by that suffering. Look at verse 6. But he speaks of being lifted up by joy in the midst of suffering (verse 8.) Joy is the delight Christians experience in trusting that we are loved by God. I’m going to say that again. Joy is the delight that Christians experience in trusting that we are loved by God. Sometimes this joy is very dramatic, bringing tears. Like you know how it is, Ted, when you first fell in love with that young lady, that you loved her so much, and that love was reciprocated. That’s that dramatic love. And at other times, it is a more subtle love, providing stability and security, like when a child rests in a parent’s love.

Though we cannot see God, joy is ignited in our hearts by His Spirit, when we trust the love He has given us through Jesus Christ.

How do you know that? I’m going to ask if I can get brother Mike to read Romans the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter, verse 13. Can you turn there with us, please? Romans the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter, verse 13.

**Mike:** “Now may the God of peace fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

**Carl:** Now may the God of hope make you abound in peace by the Holy Spirit. We’ve got to recognize that we’ve got to trust the love that we have. We may not be able to put our joy into words inexpressible, but it is real, and heavier than the weight of our suffering. You see? It is real, and heavier than the weight of our suffering.

“What do you mean?”

Well, joy is twofold. For Christians, joy in the midst of suffering is both a privilege, and it’s also a responsibility—a privilege, because we don’t deserve it. But it’s a

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responsibility, because it demonstrates to others that Jesus is real, and it attracts them to join us in believing in Him.

First, it's a privilege, because we don't deserve it, but God showers us with it anyway. But then, it's a responsibility, because you have to demonstrate the love of God in your everyday walk.

Don't get me wrong. Look at some of the suffering you go through. Look at some of the things you go through on your jobs, or in your households. Again, I call them distracting interactions. But look at some of the things you go through. Have you ever stopped and thought about the fact that maybe God is trying to grow you in that area? We ought to talk about that, and we're going to a little bit more in just a minute.

You see, what has God given us in His love, that produces this kind of joy when we trust Him? What has He given us? Well, He has given us two tremendous gifts. Let's look closely at them.

First, it's our glorious inheritance. Let's look at verses 3-5. And I want to read that again for you, because I really want you to understand what he's saying here.

Let's look at verses 3-5, and this time I'm going to read it from the King James Version, if you don't mind.

In verses 3-5, it says, “Blessed be the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you.” It's reserved for us, brothers. “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Now when you look at that, the main point here is that we have entrusted ourselves to Jesus. Those of us who have entrusted ourselves to Jesus have been adopted as God's children—new birth,--and therefore made heirs—that's our inheritance—of God's kingdom. Frank, can you turn to Romans 8:17 for me?

Let's look at what Romans 8:17 says. It says these words. “And if children, then heirs, heirs with God and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together with Him.”

In other words, the suffering that you're going through is for Christ's sake. But also, it's for your sake, because he said that we are heirs and joint heirs to the Kingdom. If we are getting Kingdom benefits, that means that—watch this!—everything Jesus went through, you're going to go through.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** But we also get, as joint heirs, we also get everything that He has, which is resurrection into a new life. Are you with me? So, at that, we have to understand that we have an inheritance that's only from the Kingdom. We have Kingdom benefits, only from God.

In the Roman world, wealthy childless couples would adopt worthy young adults to be their children, so they could pass their wealth on to them. So think, why would God adopt us? Why would God adopt us? Hmm? Why would God adopt us? Anybody want to help me with that?

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**Participant:** Because He loves us.

**Carl:** Because He loves you. Amen! You’ve got to understand that the love of God surpasses all understanding. You can’t possibly fathom it. He isn’t childless. He isn’t going to die. And we are unworthy rebels who deserve God’s judgment. The only answer is because of His great mercy and His great love.

Well, what are you saying, Bishop Jones? I’m saying this. So great is God’s mercy and love that He gave His only begotten, His perfect and only Son Jesus, to die for your and my sins, so that He can adopt us. He adopts us so that we can experience the down payment, if you will, the down payment of His love now.

How many of you know that we serve a God who wants the best for us? Well, how do you know that? Here’s why we know that. Why would God allow you, if we’re all on our way to heaven, and we are, right?

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** And I don’t know about you, but I’m enjoying the trip. But here’s my point. If we’re all on our way to heaven, why would a loving and merciful God allow us to go through all sorts of hell down here, on this earth, only to come to heaven, and reap the benefits? No! Once you understand who you are, and Whose you are, we can have a little bit of heaven right here on earth, when we understand who we are in Jesus. Amen.

**Men:** Amen.

**Carl:** See, we’ve got to understand! We’ve got to understand that God means for us to have it all. And you can have it all, when you understand that your suffering is not unto death. Your suffering is unto life.

**Participant:** Amen. Praise God!

**Carl:** Listen. Such love surpasses our understanding, and should blow our minds every time we think of it. Inheritance rights were secure because they were protected by the power of Rome. Peter goes out of his way to emphasize that our inheritance is absolutely secure, because it’s protected by God’s power (verse 5.) It can never perish, spoil nor fade (verse 4.) Unlike all other inheritances, God’s kingdom is eternal. No enemy can take your inheritance away from you, because God is infinitely stronger than any enemy you’ll ever come against. There is no suffering, there is no temptation given unto man whereby God has not given us a way of escape. You always have a way of escape from anything you’re going through.

Some suffering we put ourselves in. Amen?

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** Some suffering we put ourselves in, when we decide to go out there and do things that we shouldn’t be doing. Amen! And some suffering comes up on us only to give God the glory. So you’ve got to understand that we are going to suffer sometimes. But when you do suffer, and I don’t want to minimize this, because I have two brothers that just went through such suffering. Amen? But what we’ve got to understand is that it’s all for God’s glory.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Carl:** Yes sir? Don? (*Sig hands Don the mike.*)

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**Sig:** Our transcriber needs to do it. (*Don takes hold of the mike, impressed by it's size and portability.*)

**Don:** Yes, that's right. Oh, boy! Wow! (*Laughter.*) I was going to say that those opening verses in 1 Peter are foundational.

**Carl:** mm-hmm!

**Don:** Because, if you forget that we have an inheritance that will never fade, spoil or perish, and thinking not only of our sufferings, but of the persecuted believers around the world, who every day go through torture,--

**Carl:** Amen.

**Don:** How do they get by?

**Carl:** Amen!

**Don:** They get by by remembering verses like these.

**Carl:** Amen.

**Don:** We have an inheritance.

**Carl:** Amen!

**Don:** That will never spoil, fade or perish.

**Carl:** Amen.

**Don:** Kept in heaven for us.

**Carl:** Amen!

**Don:** Amen!

**Carl:** Amen! And that's why we have to recognize, brothers, that, when I'm reading the word of God, I say, "Wow! What a mighty God we serve!" The very Word that He had inspired and written for them, the Jewish and Gentile Christians at that time, is still helping you and me today! That's what Don just said.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** It's helping you and me today to understand that we can call upon these Scriptures, and know that we've got a foundation in God that cannot be erased, that cannot be moved, that cannot move us. That's good news!

You see, even better, none of our sins can disqualify us from our inheritance, because it is based entirely on the perfect and finished work of Christ for us, and not at all on our very imperfect work for God. Nothing could be more secure than the foundational inheritance that we have.

This is not wishful thinking. There is a solid basis for believing. Peter says that our inheritance is through, or, if you will, on the basis of, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's verse 3. Our future destiny is rooted in the events that have already happened. Jesus has been raised bodily from the dead, an event to which Peter was an eyewitness, along with hundreds of others. This is why many world class historians argue that Jesus' resurrection is the best attested event in ancient history. And Jesus promises that those who belong to Him will share in His resurrection.

Additionally, as Peter argues, in the first chapter, verses 10-12, the Old Testament prophets promised this inheritance. And this prophetic track record is impeccable.

Now that's for another class. We're not going to talk about that one today. But we have to understand that they prophesied where we would be, even right now. Can you

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see why Peter says that when we focus, by faith, on this living hope, that we will have joy that outweighs the pain of our suffering?

Look at verse 8. That’s what he says. We can have joy in the painful present, to the extent that we anticipate our positive future.

Oh, and incidentally, just in case, for Sig’s sake, in the Baptist Church, you’d say “Amen” right there. (*Laughter.*)

Brothers, listen! (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** Anglicans would say, “Praise ye the Lord.”

**Carl:** All right. And Anglicans would say, “Praise ye the Lord!” (*Laughter.*)

**Sig:** Us white Anglicans would say it.

**Carl:** All right. But listen, brothers. I don’t like Pittsburgh winters at all.

**Men:** Here, here! Amen!

**Carl:** I don’t like Pittsburgh winters at all, and this one has been one of the coldest! (*Laughter.*) Uh! It is cold! Is it cold outside? (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** It’s minus eleven.

**Carl:** Man, it is cold outside!

**Participant:** What happened to global warming?

**Carl:** (*Laughing.*) Here, here! Watch this. So, in order not to be negative or grouchy about what’s going on outside, instead of looking at the glass half empty, which is suffering, our action is to look at the glass half full, which is joy. Let me see if I can fix that for you.

I watch the sunsets. In other words, I keep track of the one-and-a-half minutes every day that increase the day’s length.

**Participant:** There you go.

**Carl:** In various ways, I practice the discipline of anticipation, anticipating the arrival of spring. Amen?

**Men:** Amen!

**Carl:** That will surely come! And as I do this, though winter remains painful, and although I have to suffer through -11, and -15, and -21, (*laughter*), through the overcast skies and the doldrums of winter,--have you all noticed that the sun goes down in November and doesn’t come back until spring? (*Laughter.*)

**Participant:** Pirate baseball is on soon. (*Laughter.*)

**Carl:** Have you noticed that? And so, my heart is strengthened in the midst of winter because my joy increases by one-and-a-half minutes each and every day.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** It’s all according to how you look at it. It’s all according to how you look at what you’re going through.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** Suffering is only suffering when you don’t understand Whose you are.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** Suffering is only suffering when you don’t understand who God is in your life, because when you know who God is in your life, you don’t have a problem going



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through what you’re going through. When my brother said that he had colon cancer,— Ted, when my brother said, “I’ve got colon cancer, and the doctor said I could die.”

I said, “Have you talked to God?” Has he talked to God, and has He told you something He didn’t tell me? Because here is where I am, brothers. The Bible says that death and life is in the power of your tongue. So when you go to the doctor, and the doctor says, “Well, you’ve got this—“ Have you ever noticed that every time you go, and you tell somebody, and tell the doctor about what you’re going through, that they always know somebody else who had something similar?

Well, you know, you tell your neighbor, “Well, I’ve got colon cancer.”

“Well, I know somebody’s sister, cousin, dog, cat.” (*Laughter.*) You know, they’re always negative.

**Participant:** Yes.

**Carl:** What you’ve got to understand is this, and I’m going to tell you what I told my brother. He said, “Well, the doctor said that I have colon cancer.”

I said, “No, you *had* colon cancer.”

**Participant:** Hallelujah! Praise God!

**Carl:** He said, “Wait, wait, wait, wait! What do you mean?”

I said, “No, you don’t *have* colon cancer. You *had* colon cancer. You’ve got to start to speak life to yourself, because when you speak life over now, if it’s unto death, to God be the glory!

**Participant:** Amen!

**Carl:** But if it’s not unto death, you’re going to be a testimony!

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** So you’ve got to speak life to yourselves,. Brothers! Sometimes, you’ve got to encourage yourself, when nobody else will.

**Participant:** Hallelujah!

**Carl:** When you’re going through hell and high water, you’ve got to be able to encourage yourself, and tell somebody else of the hope that lies within you. He tells us in 2 Timothy, the third chapter, verse 12. He said, (*paraphrase*), “Listen. If you’re going to live godly, you’re going to suffer.” So if I know I’m going to suffer, I know going into that I’m going to suffer a little bit. But guess what? I know, in the sweet by and by, I still get rewards.

**Men:** Amen!

**Carl:** Amen goes there.

**Participant:** Hey, Carl?

**Carl:** Yes, sir?

**Participant:** Would you characterize death as a form of suffering, since we all face it? Maybe it’s for the glory of God, or not. Or maybe we’re dying because the wages of sin is death. But isn’t that a form of suffering?

**Carl:** Sig asked a question. Do we consider death as a form of suffering? Not for those who are Christians, because, if you’re a Christian, I rejoice in the fact. Watch this. “I was born in sin, and shaped in iniquity.” But I’m passing “from death to life.”

**Participant:** Hallelujah!

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**Carl:** Death is not my final destination. For the unbeliever, for the person who has not accepted Jesus Christ, death is their final destination, unless they accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior on their deathbed. Are you with me?

**Men:** Yes.

**Carl:** But, if I’ve accepted Jesus Christ, I’ve gone from death to life. That’s the reason why he said, “O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” Why? Because I don’t have anything to worry about. I’m on my way to heaven. As I said earlier, I’m enjoying the trip, because you know what? I know where I’m going. I know Who I belong to. I hope that answered your question.

**Participant:** Bishop?

**Carl:** Yes?

**Participant:** Thank you. Philip Yancey, in his book, *What’s So Amazing About Grace?*, recounts this encounter he had with a Chinese priest or bishop. And the Chinese pastor was saying, “You Americans just don’t understand. Any time someone is sick, you pray for their getting well. You know, take away this illness. Heal that broken bone. You don’t pray for the grace of God to carry them through their illness.”

**Participant:** mm-hmm.

**Participant:** “You focus on the wrong thing.” I thought that was very, very profound.

**Carl:** Amen! You see, when we affirm our adoption, and anticipate our inheritance,—thanks, Tom—the Holy Spirit ignites joy in our hearts, that sustains us and lifts us above the weight of our current suffering. Do I, as a Christian, affirm my own identity, my own destiny? I am a child of God. God is my Father. Heaven is my home. Every day is one day nearer.

So watch this. Say this with me. You’ve got to say this with me this morning. Okay? “The joy of the Lord.”

**Men:** “The joy of the Lord.”

**Carl:** “Is my strength.”

**Men:** “Is my strength.”

**Carl:** See, Nehemiah gave us that way back in Nehemiah the eighth chapter. I believe it’s verse 12. He said, “The joy of the LORD is my strength.” In other words, all the suffering he was going through, when he was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, he’s letting us know that the joy of the Lord is still my strength. Brothers, no matter what I’m under, no matter how much I’m going through, I’ve still got God!

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** And if I’ve got God, that’s enough! You and God are a majority when you’re going through it, brothers.

**Participant:** Hallelujah! Yeah!

**Carl:** You and God are enough!

**Participant:** Praise God!

**Carl:** So, no matter what I go through, I have joy because I know what the end is going to be. Well, thence our joy, our glorious inheritance!

Well, the second part of that gift, the second part of those two gifts, is this. Faith refined is always refined in our suffering. Our faith, your faith and mine, is always

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refined in our suffering. Man, I’ve only got five minutes. I hope I can get through this one.

**Participant:** Ten! You have ten!

**Participant:** lots of time.

**Carl:** “In this you greatly rejoice, though now, for a little while, while you may have to suffer grief in all the trials, these have come so that your faith,”—mm-hmm!—“will be of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though it’s refined by fire, that it may be proved genuine, and may result in the praise, the glory and the honor, when Jesus is revealed.”

Look at verses 6 and 7. Verses 6 and 7 speak to another aspect of God’s grace that enables us to have joy in the midst of suffering. Peter likens our suffering to a fire used by a goldsmith to purify gold. A goldsmith uses gold ore that is a mixture of pure gold and dross. By repeatedly putting the ore into the fire, the dross is gradually burned away, and the gold is gradually purified. And he can see his reflection, until he can see his reflection more and more clearly in that gold.

Well, God is like a goldsmith, my brothers. Not that He causes specific suffering in our lives, but that He is working skillfully and mysteriously through them to refine our faith, so that the character of Jesus is increasingly reflected through your lives each and every day. You’ve got to understand that we’re to be the reflection of Jesus, because Bruce is teaching us right now that Christ is our Example.

**Participant:** Yep.

**Carl:** So if Christ is our Example, shouldn’t we look like Him? Hmm? Shouldn’t we be like Him?

**Participant:** Yes.

**Carl:** Did I read Romans 8:17? I did, didn’t I?

**Men:** Yes.

**Carl:** Okay. And it is so that God may attract others to Jesus through us, as they see the integrity, as they see the character, as they see the conduct, as they see the love that comes through faith in Him.

So we can rejoice in the midst of our suffering, not only because we will soon receive our inheritance, but also because God is accomplishing something so wonderful, brothers, through all of us. Through this fire, He reveals the dross of our faith, the false things we depend on for our security, their identity and insignificance. And through this fire, God burns away the dross, and deepens our trust in Him for all these needs, because, you see, we have a longing for things that are material a lot of times, instead of longing for the Master.

For example, I may think that I depend on God alone for my material security. But I may in fact be primarily dependent on my career, and my income. What reveals this dross, and moves me to depend more deeply on God’s love? Often, it is the fire of a job loss, or reduced income, or unexpected bills that will cause that.

Or, I may think that I depend on God alone, Brother Ted, for my self worth. But I may in fact be primarily dependent on certain people’s approval, and their praise. What reveals this dross, and moves me to depend more deeply on God’s love? Often, it is the

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fire of these people’s criticism, and even their rejection. Brothers, when people reject you, praise God! Hallelujah!

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** When people let you down, hallelujah! When they talk about you like a dog, say, “Hallelujah!”

**Men:** Hallelujah!

**Carl:** Because, you know why? Because God is working something out in you.

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Carl:** He’s working something out in you!

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** Listen! Or I may think that I depend on God alone for my significance. But I may in fact be primarily dependent on getting people to respond to my attempts to influence them spiritually. So many times we want to affirm ourselves, because we want to know that we’ve done something for the Kingdom. We have to see something tangible. We have to see some effect. That’s the reason why, when we witness to somebody, we try to see if tears are going to well up in their eyes, or whether they’re going to start to do something. No, it’s not about you!

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** It’s not about me! What does the Word say? He said, “Apollos planted, another man watered, but God gives the increase.” So you might never see the fruits of what you planted

**Participant:** That’s right.

**Carl:** But guess what? Know that you’ve done your part. See, God knows the true state of your faith. And God, in His wisdom, is working through fire, through the fire of suffering, to purify you more and more. He has staked His reputation on us. Why? I don’t understand it. But He has staked His reputation on you and me. He has staked His reputation. You know why? Because God—

I know that some of you are way above the Mason Dixon Line of forty. But my point is, how many of you have ever watched “The Lion King” with your kids? Do you remember when he took his son up on the mountain? And do you remember what he said to his son? He said, “You’re more than what you have become.”

Many of you looking at me right now are more than what you have become. You have to understand that God is working “an exceedingly far more eternal weight in glory” through you. So when you go through suffering, as it is, praise God! And have joy while you’re doing it.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** Because you’re more than what you’ve become. You see, as I said earlier, He has staked His reputation on us. And He will work as a wise goldsmith to refine our faith.

We should not be taken aback when unexpected and upsetting and discouraging things happen to us. What do they mean?

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“What do you mean by that, Bishop?” Why, simply that God, in His wisdom, means to make something of us, to which we have not attained yet. And He is dealing with us accordingly.

Perhaps He means to strengthen us in patience. Maybe He’s stretching you, Tom, in good humor. Maybe, Sig, He’s stretching you in compassion. Maybe, Dean, He’s stretching you in humility. Maybe, He’s stretching you, brother Mike, in meekness, by giving us some extra practice in exercising these graces under specially difficult conditions. Perhaps He has the lessons in self denial and self distrust, to teach us. Perhaps He wishes to break us of complacency, or unreality, or undetected forms of pride and conceit, because, as quiet as it’s kept, a lot of us have pride somewhere. Perhaps His purpose is to draw us closer to Himself, in conscious communion with Him. For it is often the case that fellowship with God is most vivid and sweet, and Christian joy is greatest, when the cross is heaviest.

**Participant:** There you go.

**Carl:** Or perhaps God is preparing us for forms of service, of which, at present, we have no inkling. Have you embraced God’s purpose for your life? Are you still trying to get God to fulfill your purpose? Brothers, I’ve just got to tell you that we need to stop asking God to bless what we are doing, and we need to do what God is blessing.

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** We need to understand that we are so busy trying to get our agenda across. What about His agenda? If you haven’t embraced His purpose for your life, His fire will seem cruel. And this will only add to the pain of your suffering. But if we embrace His purpose, and if I give myself into His fashioning hands, His Spirit will ignite joy in my heart that outweighs the pain of the fire.

The next time somebody says something to you, say, (this is a Baptist song.) The next time somebody says something to you, just say to them,  
“I know I might not be what I’m supposed to be.  
But I’m certainly not what I used to be.  
Please be patient with me.  
God is not through with me yet.”

**Participant:** Yes.

**Carl:** “For when God gets through with me, I shall come forth as pure gold.”

**Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** You see, next time somebody talks to you about what you’re not doing, or how you’re not patient enough, or how you’re not loving enough, tell him, “Please, be patient with me. God is not through with me yet. For when God gets through with me, I shall come forth as pure gold.”

**Participant:** There you go.

**Carl:** All I can tell you, brothers, is this. God said, in His word, that we can have joy in the midst of our suffering.

**Men:** Amen!

**Carl:** Any questions? Yes, sir?

**Participant:** Thank you, Carl. You said that God stakes His reputation on us.

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**Carl:** Mm-hmm.

**Participant:** I find that a little concerning.

**Carl:** Why?

**Participant:** Well, because God vindicates His own reputation.

**Carl:** Mm-hmm.

**Participant:** And we do bring disrespect on God. There's no question about that.

**Carl:** Mm-hmm.

**Participant:** But in the end, God does not stake His reputation on us. He stakes His reputation on His own power and ability to vindicate it.

**Carl:** Well, okay. Let me add to that. Let me just add to that. God stakes His reputation on us, in the fact that, because God, in Genesis the first chapter, verse 26, when God, God and God got together and made man, and He said, “Let Us make man in Our own image, and let them have dominion.” When He said, “Let them have dominion,” He stopped it right there, unless we pray. When we pray, then we get God's power. When we have God's power, God's power is on the inside of us. But how does He get to the outside of us, unless we witness?

**Second Participant:** Amen.

**Carl:** Unless we love? Unless we show compassion? Because, if my brother needs help, and I don't help him, then I'm no better than the priest or the Levite that walked by him. I've got to be like the good Samaritan. It don't matter what color he is. It don't matter what ethnicity he is. It don't matter what culture he came from. It matters about the power that lives in me.

**Participant:** Mm-hmm.

**Carl:** Because, when he sees the Christ in me, he's going to say, “Wait a minute! Who is the God that you serve?” Because the priest walked by. The Levite walked by. But God's power resides in me.

**Participant:** Yes. Very good. Amen.

**Carl:** Anybody else? Amen! I want to thank you, brothers. Men, I really appreciate it. Can we all stand and have prayer?

Our Father and our God, Lord, we thank You for this gracious opportunity to come before Your presence. We bless You now for Your word. We thank You for the questions that came forth. We thank You for the statements, and we thank You for the suggestions. We thank You for the explanations. And now, my Father God, we thank You for Your power. Let us recognize, my Father God, the joy of the Lord, which is our strength. My Father God, may it be powerful. Even when we're weak then we're strong. Please, my Father God, do this in Jesus' name, and for Your sake. In Jesus' name, and for His sake, we pray, and ask all these blessings and favors. And all the Brave Men said, “Amen!” God bless you, brothers.

**Men:** Thank you. (*Applause.*)