

## INTRODUCTION

To most people who have never heard the gospel before the concept of God may be foreign to them. It makes the matter worse if they mix it up with other ideas of god in their mind. Once a Sunday school teacher asked his students about the true meaning of Easter. A little kid raised her hand. “I know,” she said, “Easter is the time when Jesus died on the cross and was buried in a tomb.” “Good job!” The teacher responded. “But He didn’t stay in the tomb, right? Tell us what happened to Jesus.” The child replied: “That’s easy. He rose from the dead on the third day.” Before the teacher could praise the little girl, she continued: “And each year, if He sees His shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter!” She thought Easter is another name for the Groundhog Day. To you, what kind of God Jesus is? Some people may think that Jesus is a version of Santa Claus or one of the Chinese deities, who can grant any wish if we just ask Him. After all, most people hope to have a rich, happy and long life. But God never promised us a trouble-free world. If that is the kind of God we believe then when difficulties come our faith will crumble. We question: “How can a loving God allow me to suffer?” To us living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century western world suffering is something we try to avoid. We take vitamins and supplements, exercise and buy life insurance. How nice it would be to indulge in both the treasures of this life and the eternal joy of heaven! No wonder the message Peter shared in his first letter is an unwelcomed gospel to us. However, to the original readers of Peter’s letters suffering for Christ was something they faced every day. To acknowledge another person other than Caesar the Roman Emperor as god was to look for trouble. Although we may never risk our lives because of our faith suffering is still part of the reality. That is why the unwelcomed gospel Peter proclaimed is the only gospel from God. It is because Jesus calls us to imitate after His example of suffering. What can we learn from Jesus’ suffering? Let us focus on three words.

## EXPLANATION

### 1. Endure 忍耐

The first word is endure. Peter said in **verse 19**: For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. The phrase “bear up” means to support something from underneath. The idea is that a person is willing to withstand hardship when he/she suffers unjustly. Peter said that we can show such endurance if we are “conscious of God.” In other words, we are convinced that God is still in control even when we suffer. God sees such faith as commendable. The same word commendable is repeated in the **next verse**: ...But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. This word “endure” is not the same Greek word as “bear” in verse 19. The Greek word “endure” means to remain under. Therefore, it is about continuous endurance for a period of time. Peter did not say that God enjoys to see us suffer. But God considers us commendable when we endure the pain in unjust suffering. No one displays a perfect example of endurance except our Lord. **Verse 21** is the theme verse of this passage: To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. When we endure in our suffering we are learning from Jesus’ example. The word picture behind the term “example” is

like a trace sheet. When we first learned to write as little children we followed the dotted lines on a trace sheet. Jesus called us to follow His example of suffering just like a small kid follows the examples on a trace sheet. Jesus endured suffering by submitting Himself to the Heavenly Father. He testified in [John 6:38](#) – “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.” Jesus understood that suffering was part of the process to fulfill the Father’s will. When we go back to the first Peter passage we see that submission and endurance go hand in hand. The word “submit” appears in [verse 18](#): Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. Here “slaves” refer to the bond-servants. In the New Testament times slaves received training to become skillful workers in house duties, crafts or trading. Also, they were paid for their work. Therefore, if they saved up enough money they could eventually pay a ransom and go freely. Other than the lack of freedom in many ways those slaves were actually quite similar to employees nowadays. Don’t people often complain that they work like slaves for their bosses? So this verse applies to our modern world too.

Peter asked his readers who worked as slaves to show submission even when they suffered under their masters’ hands. In the context submission is in fact a recurring theme. A few verses back Peter asked his readers to submit to the civil authority. Then in chapter 3 Peter urged wives to submit to their husbands. Submission is a hard lesson for us, because we do not like others to tell us what to do. In the Bible, however, submission is a way to obey the proper orders God has ordained for human relationship. Therefore, you have to pay tax, though reluctantly. You submit to your manager at work even though you have more work experience than him/her. Submission does not imply inferiority. Wives have to submit to their husbands because God puts the man in a leadership role. I can testify that my wife is smarter than me in many ways. But at least I did a smart thing by marrying her. There is one important boundary in our submission. We should not submit to a leader if he/she tells us to do something against God’s will. For example, if the government proposes something that is unrighteous or if your boss asks you to commit illegal activities then you should take a stand. I understand that there are often challenging situations. For example, what if your unbelieving husband does not allow you to go to church? You need wisdom from God to deal with it. I encourage you to show good testimonies at home to prove that being a Christian will only make you a better wife and mom.

## 2. Subdue 克制

Jesus calls us to imitate after His example of suffering. Jesus demonstrated endurance in His suffering. Furthermore, Jesus subdued the urge to take revenge in His suffering. Peter said in [verse 23](#): 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. Jesus did not fight back when He was arrested by the religious authority. At that time Peter tried to protect his Master with a sword. Jesus stopped Peter and said in [Matthew 26:53-54](#) – 53 “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?” Jesus could have dispatched some angels to rescue Him. But He subdued the desire to find an easy way out because He knew that He had to go to the cross. When Jesus was interrogated by Pilate the governor He did not defend Himself either. Listen to the record in [Matthew 27:14](#) - But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge - to the great amazement of the governor. Jesus

subdued the impulse to take things in His own hands even when He was humiliated, beaten and pierced to the cross. **Matthew 27:30-31** read: 30 They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. 31 After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. It is our human nature to repay evil with evil. A fabricated story was told about two friends who became enemies because of some conflict. They hated each other to their guts. Later an angel appeared to one guy. The angel was willing to fulfill any wish the man might ask for. “But there is one condition,” said the angel. “Whatever you get your friend will receive a double portion.” The man thought for a moment, then he said: “If that’s the case, please make one of my eyes blind.” That says a lot about how wicked our hearts can be. Not so with our Lord! Many of you may have watched the movie “The Passion of the Christ.” The term “passion” is derived from the Greek word that means suffering. I remember one shocking scene. A Roman soldier was hitting Jesus’ back with a whip. Jesus fell on the floor because He became too weak after such torture. But then He mustered enough strength, tried to hold onto the pedestal to stay up. The soldier was dumbfounded. But his amazement quickly turned into rage as he hit Jesus even harder. Why didn’t Jesus just lay on the ground and allow the soldiers to drag Him to the cross? My interpretation is that Jesus willingly suffered the penalty that we deserve to the full extent. Brothers and sisters: this is the example we are called to follow in our suffering. Jesus subdued any intent to get revenge. Rather, He left the final verdict to the Heavenly Father. Paul gave us the same command in **Romans 12:19** - Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord. There are times when you suffer mistreatment for no reason. Your coworker may make up something bad about you to the supervisor behind your back. Your classmates may call you names because they saw you pray over your lunch. Your unbelieving family members may laugh at you for being too honest in filing tax. We can subdue the thought to talk back or even to retaliate because we firmly believe that God would exercise fair judgment. But His judgment may not necessarily come immediately. The Bible does not tell us what happened to the religious leaders or the Roman soldiers who harmed Jesus. Similarly, we may not know how God will deal with the people who hurt us. Regardless of the outcome, we put our faith in God, trusting Him that one day He will right all the wrongs.

### 3. Produce 結果

Jesus calls us to imitate after His example of suffering. Jesus silently endured the suffering He faced, and He subdued the urge to make even. Jesus willingly suffered for us because He knew it would produce favorable outcomes. Peter told us in **verse 24**: He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. Jesus suffered for our sins in order to produce righteousness in those who believe in Him. Peter was quoting from **Isaiah 53**, or the so-called the “Song of the Shepherd” that prophesies about Jesus’ suffering. **Verses 4 and 5** of the passage say: 4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. Let us focus on the possessive pronoun “our” in these two verses. Jesus suffered for our infirmities, our sorrows, our transgressions and our iniquities. The prophet also told us the benefits that Jesus’ suffering produced in us – we have peace with God and we are healed of our wickedness.

Sometimes we may have a wrong understanding about Jesus' suffering. We think that since Jesus is God pain was a piece of cake to Him. Isn't He invincible? But the Bible clearly describes that Jesus became a real person like you and me when He came into our world. The pain Jesus received was real hurt, the agony that He suffered was real grief and the blood He shed was the same substance flowing inside our body. However, Jesus did not cope with His suffering reluctantly. He did so with joy. Listen to [Hebrews 12:2](#) - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. The pain and shame Jesus endured brought Him joy because His suffering produced our salvation. In the Bible we see examples of Christ's followers reacted with joy at their suffering. In Acts 5 a few apostles were beaten by the Jewish authority because they spread the gospel. [5:41 to 42](#) tell us the reaction of these early church leaders: 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. 42 Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Rejoiced at their suffering? Were they out of their mind? They rejoiced because they suffered what the Lord suffered for the sake of the gospel. The religious leaders might try to silence the apostles by inflicting pain to them. But suffering would not slow them down. The testimonies of these and many faithful Christians motivate other believers to proclaim the gospel with boldness. You see, God can use our suffering to produce beautiful results if we refuse to let pain and shame be the only final conclusions. God has His purpose in our lives and He intends to produce something positive out of the negative. Instead of asking the "why" question we can ask our Lord how He wants to use our suffering for His glory. Perhaps God plans to increase our faith through suffering. God may also want us to witness our true faith to the non-believers around us. However, when comforting people who suffer we should never force any standard spiritual answer to them. We should not tell them to tough it up because it is God's will for them to suffer. Any answer that seems Biblical may not make sense to the people who are hurting. Quoting the golden truth of "God makes all things work for the good of those who love Him" may only be rubbing salt to a wound. Rather than trivializing the pain, we accept it. We show sympathy with a gentle embrace without saying anything. We cry with those who suffer and silently pray that God will give them strength. We leave room for God to minister His grace and allow Him to produce good fruit in the victims.

## CONCLUSION

Jesus calls us to imitate after His example of suffering. This unwelcomed gospel of suffering is the only gospel Jesus has for us. It is the only path to glory. Many of you may have heard of the name Joni Eareckson Tada. She is a painting artist who sits on a wheelchair most of her life – 50 years to be exact. When Joni was 17 she broke her neck in a diving accident. She has been paralyzed ever since. Joni could have harbored bitterness in her heart. But God saved her and gave her a new life. In her own suffering Joni can identify with the suffering Christ on the cross. Hence, she knows how to show compassion to people who are hurting. God uses Joni's disability as a means to encourage others, especially disabled people, all over the world. You may undergo a different kind of suffering now. Not matter it is physical pain, separation or humiliation Jesus had gone through it all. Jesus not only understands your suffering, He is also willing to walk with you. However, our Lord does not want you to go through suffering in vain. He wants to use your experience, just like how He uses Joni, for His glory.