

## FIRST PETER: PRAISE TO GOD

When you see a great bridge, like the golden gate bridge, remember that an engineer must take into account three loads or stresses while designing the bridge. There is the dead load, the live load and the wind load. The dead load is the weight of the bridge itself. The live load is the weight of the daily traffic that the bridge must carry. The wind load is the pressure of the storms that beat on the bridge. The bridge must be able to withstand all of those pressures. In our lives, we must carry the dead load of self, the live load of daily living and the wind load of emergencies.

One of the main purposes of the book of 1 Peter is to help us to carry those loads during times of suffering and trials. If you were here last week, you may remember that Peter wrote his book to people who were suffering under great persecution in the Roman Empire. Nero had burned Rome, and he blamed the Christians for it. The result was that Christians had to endure a great, “fiery” persecution.” Some of them were used as torches in Nero’s gardens. Others were sewed up in animal skins and devoured by wild dogs. The trial and suffering was great.

What do you do when you go through times of extended trials, times when it appears that the weight on the bridge is going to break you? The most important thing is to continue to focus your attention on God. A few weeks ago, I broke off one of my front teeth and had to go in for a root canal and crown. If I were to concentrate on the sound of the drilling, the filing and all that goes along with that delightful process, I would have a hard time with it. Instead, I listened to sermons on my IPod, and it was a “piece of cake.” Peter tells us to not think about the drilling and filing going on in our lives. Instead, concentrate on the blessings of God and His work in your life.

## THINK ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU

### **1. GOD HAS GIVEN YOU A NEW START**

Have you ever looked at your life and wished that you could have a new start? When someone comes to God by faith in Jesus Christ, God does something even better than that. “Becoming a Christian is not making a new start in life; it is receiving a new life to start with.” That makes a lot of sense. If I only had a new start, I would probably end up making many of the same kind of mistakes I made the first time around. I not only need a new start, I need a new life to start it with. That is exactly what God offers to those who turn their lives over to Him. He calls it being “Born Again.”

*1 Peter 1:3, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

*1 Peter 1:23, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God."*

What is the new birth? The new birth is a spiritual birth. When God created man in the very beginning, he created him with a spiritual nature so that he would be able to communicate and have fellowship with himself. When the first couple sinned in the Garden of Eden, that spiritual capacity was lost. That is why Jesus told the Pharisee named Nicodemus that he must be born again. When someone turns from their sin and turns to Jesus Christ, God gives them a spiritual birth, a birth that comes from above.

*John 1:12-13, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."*

Picture in your mind a spiritual cell phone that is used to talk with God. The problem is that everyone of us is born with dead batteries. When someone comes to Christ, God gives Him a new spiritual battery, and that gives the born again person a brand new kind of life.

How do you know you have been born again spiritually? How do you know you have been born physically?

"I have a birth certificate that proves I was born." Those can be faked.

"I have pictures of me as a baby." How do we know the pictures are really of you?

"I have a paper with my baby footprint on it." Very cute, but your foot is a lot bigger now. How can we be sure it's your footprint?

There is really only one answer. "My response to physical things proves I have been born." I walk; I talk; I get hungry and eat; I get thirsty and drink water. My responses to life prove I have been born physically.

The proof that you have been born again is seen in the fact that you begin responding to spiritual things. People who are born spiritually are able to see the spiritual dimension of life. Do you get hungry and thirsty for spiritual things? Is there something within you that makes you want to be with other Christians and talk about spiritual things?

## **2. GOD HAS GIVEN YOU A SURE INHERITANCE**

*1 Peter 1:4, "and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."*

When God gives you new birth and salvation, He doesn't give it to you so that you can lose it. Peter says that "we are kept by the power of God." The word "kept" is a Greek term that literally means "guarded" or "protected". It is the picture of soldiers standing guard around the city. Night and day, God himself, stands guard over our salvation. What God gives, God guards. What God starts, God finishes.

*2 Timothy 1:12, "For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed to him until that day."*

As we walk the road to heaven, the question is not "Am I able to hold out?" The question is "Is God able to hang on to you?"

### **3. GOD HAS GIVEN YOU HOPE IN TRIALS**

*1 Peter 1:6-9, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls."*

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a Lutheran pastor in Germany just before and during the Nazi regime. On April 5, 1943, Bonhoeffer was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo for his resistance. For several years he had spoken out against the Nazis, and eventually it caught up with him. Two years later, only a few weeks from the end of World War II, he found himself in Buchenwald Concentration Camp, facing the death sentence. On Sunday, April 8, he led a service for other prisoners. Shortly after the final prayer, the door opened and two civilians entered. "Prisoner Bonhoeffer, come with us," they said. Everyone knew what that meant—the gallows. An English prisoner who survived the war describes the moment: "He took me aside [and said], 'This is the end; but for me it is the beginning of life.'" Bonhoeffer died with joy in his heart.

What is joy? We know that joy and happiness are two different things. Happiness depends on circumstances, but joy comes from God. One man said, "Joy comes from 'satisfaction with God.'" When we are satisfied with God, we will have joy even in the hardest moments of life.

The Bible gives us many perspectives that help us understand trials.

## a) Our Trials are Brief

Peter tells his readers that their trials would only last "a little while." Of course, that "little while" seems to last forever when we are in the furnace. When your marriage crumbles or your children are in trouble or you lose your job and can't pay your bills, the trial seems to go on forever. In what sense can Peter say that our trials are only for a "little while"? The answer is, everything in this life is brief when compared to eternity. It's all a matter of perspective. If I say I know a man who can hold his breath a long time, I mean he can hold it for two or three minutes. That's a long time for breath-holding. Our trials may last for weeks or months or years, but seen against the endless ages of eternity, even the worst trials are brief by comparison.

*Romans 8:18, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."*

## b) Our Trials are Necessary

Peter said: "You may have had to suffer." Literally, the Greek reads, "If necessary for a little while."

*Trials are necessary because they purify our lives.*

*1 Peter 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine."*

Note the contrast between faith and pure gold. Did you know that it takes four tons of gold ore to produce one ounce of pure gold? During the refining process, the gold ore is heated in a giant furnace until it liquefies. Then the waste material is skimmed off, leaving only the pure gold at the bottom. In ancient times goldsmiths knew they had pure gold when they could look at the gold and see their reflection. That's what God intends through our trials. He puts us in the furnace to burn off all the impurities such as greed, impatience, anger, and selfishness. That's a lifetime process, but in the end, the image of Jesus is formed in us. That's why Martin Luther called adversity "the very best book in my library."

*Trials are necessary because they prove the reality of God and the reality of our faith*

The phrase "proved genuine" means to test something in order to prove that it will not fail. When Chevrolet tests Ford pickup trucks, they do it to prove that Ford trucks won't pass the test. But when Chevrolet tests its own trucks, they do it to prove that their trucks

will pass the test. God sometimes allows us to be tried to demonstrate that our faith is genuine. No one could deny that Dietrich Bonhoeffer had a faith that was genuine. When people in the watching world see our godly response to trials, they know our faith is real, and they are drawn one step closer to Jesus.

## **HOW TO RESPOND TO GOD'S BLESSINGS**

### **1. BE PREPARED TO SERVE**

*1 Peter 1:13, 'Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.'*

Peter tells his readers to prepare their minds for action. Prepare literally means "gird up." In ancient times if a person wanted to move quickly and easily, often he would pull the corners of his robe up through his belt or sash to tie those corners in place. Just as a person would prepare himself physically for action, we are to prepare ourselves for spiritual action.

A sailor who found himself shipwrecked on a South Sea Island was seized by the natives and carried on their shoulders to their village and seated on their throne. Little by little, he learned it was their custom each year to make some man king for a year. He liked this tradition a lot -- until he began to wonder what had happened to all the former kings. Soon he discovered that when the king's one-year kingship ended, he was banished to a nearby barren island, where he would then starve to death. The sailor didn't like this idea at all, but he was smart. He put his carpenters to work making boats, his farmers worked transplanting fruit trees to the island of exile, and other farmers were told to grow crops there. When his kingship was over, he went not to a barren island, but to one of abundance. This story is a parable of life. It teaches us that WE need to live TODAY in view of TOMORROW. If you want to be used of God in the future, do your best to prepare yourself for tomorrow by what you do today. Rise up out of your comfort zone and learn what you will need in service to God. Read the Bible daily. Go to Bible studies. Memorize Scripture. Learn how to disciple others.

*2 Timothy 2:15, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."*

### **2. BE HOLY IN ALL THAT YOU DO**

Holiness is not following a set of rules. Holiness is conforming to the character of God.

*1 Peter 1:14-15, "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

When Peter says that we should not conform to the evil desires we had when we lived in ignorance, he's talking about our lives before salvation when we lived like everyone else who doesn't know the Lord. Peter says, with a new life there should be a new lifestyle. We should separate ourselves from sin so that we can shine for the Lord in a dark world. When I was 14 years old, I was working for a car lot in the summer. My primary job was to polish and wax the cars. Before I could wax them, I had to clean them because if you try to wax a car that has dirt on it, you are going to grind those dirt particles down into the paint. So the car had to be washed well before it could be waxed. In the same way, we must remove the dirt from our lives before we can move forward for God.

*1 Peter 2:1-2, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,"*

God says, "I have a wonderful plan for your life. I want to polish you up and use you as a witness of what I can do in someone's life, but there are some things you're going to have to get rid of before I can do that.

Holiness is not a mask you put on every Sunday morning. It is learning how to do everything in life in a godly way. It includes the way you relate to your family, your friends as well as your enemies. It means doing everything you do for God's glory. Peter is saying that we should live like the lord every day and in everything that we do. Ruth Graham had a sign over her kitchen sink that said divine service performed here three times a day. As a child of God, everything you do should be a holy thing set apart for God's Glory. That means when you go to work, when you clean your house, when you go hiking-everything should honor the lord as a holy thing.

### **3. LIVE A LIFE OF PRAISE**

God is not just someone that we go to in order to get something that we need. He is our king, and we're to praise him. How many of you have ever found a key lying around somewhere in your house, but you did not know what it went to? The key looks good, and you are afraid to throw it away. So, you begin searching for the right lock, but in every case, the key does not fit. Finally, you give up trying and throw the key away. Life is like a key that fits only one lock. It fits a lock of praise and worship to God. That is why so many people go through life searching for the right lock, but never find it.

*Romans 1:25, "They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised."*

The lie is the thought that life can be found in something that is created, a job, a relationship, a title, a level of income or anything else in this world. The truth is we were made for one primary purpose and that is to praise God. When you fit the key of your life into the lock of praise to God, that lock opens up a store chest of blessings that cannot be found in anything else that you might try.

**Fellowship Bible Church**

Pastor: Don Griffin

There is no doubt that we live in trying times. Like the bridge I mentioned in the beginning, we will be tested on many levels. One of the keys to living a victorious life is to fill your mind with thoughts of what God has done for you. He has brought you into his family through the new birth. He has promised his presence and help through your trials, he has reserved a place in heaven for you when you die. That is good news that we can live with.