

1 Peter 2:18-25 — How Do I Face Undeserved Suffering?

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Sometimes life isn't fair. You come home and your spouse yells at you. You have no idea what you did wrong. In anger you say to yourself, "What did I do to deserve this?" Maybe you are a high school football player. You practice hard in and out of season. You are a decent player, but the coach rarely gives you time on the field. It seems to you that he plays his favorites. Life isn't fair. At work you have a great idea to increase productivity. You share it with your boss. He shares it with his boss and it gets implemented in the company. At the end of the year, your boss gets credit for the idea. He gets a raise while you are given no credit. Life isn't fair. Every day we deal with situations like this. What should we do about it?

Should we get angry and give people a piece of our minds? After all, they have it coming. Should we clam up and stew in a rage? Should we take matters into our own hands and get even? Should we file lawsuits? What should Christians do when life isn't fair? Today we will find the answer.

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors at CrossWinds. We are a multi-campus church with campuses in Spencer and Spirit Lake. On both campuses we are studying the book of 1 Peter. For the last few weeks we paused the study while I dealt with my mom's death from cancer. She is now in the presence of Jesus and we are back in town, so we are returning to Peter. We are in 1 Peter 2:18-25. Turn to that passage in your Bible. Let's read it together. I ask for you to stand out of reverence for God's Word and follow along

in your Bible as I read. If you need a Bible, 1 Peter 2 is found on page 1,015 of the pew Bible.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:18–25 (ESV)

In this section of 1 Peter we learn one of the important ways our Christian faith works its way out in everyday life is by our submission to those in authorities over us.

In our last message, Pastor Jordan talked about the importance of Christians submitting to the government authorities, even if we don't like them. This can be difficult because there are plenty of things I don't agree with when it comes to our government. A critical spirit comes naturally when we look at some of the choices made by our country's leadership. That is not the way Christians live. We are to have a reputation for submitting to and supporting our government, even when we don't agree with our government.

Can we vote for change when we have the chance? Of course! Can we take legal action if our government asks us to sin? Yes, we can. Hobby Lobby did this when the Obama health care plan forced it to pay for its employees' abortions. It won the lawsuit.

We may disagree with our leaders but as Christians we still submit to them, respect them and support them. This is the way Christians live their lives.

Today we move from submitting to government authorities to submission in the work environment — our bosses at work. Peter gave special emphasis to handling difficult bosses, cruel bosses and crooked bosses who don't treat us fairly and we face undeserved suffering because of it.

Respect my boss, even if he isn't fair.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. 1 Peter 2:18 (ESV)

Who are the servants?

I want to begin with the word *servants*. Some of you have a translation that uses the word *slaves*. For many of us the word slaves brings to mind the kind of slavery that transpired in America. It conjures up images of men, women and children torn apart, ripped from their homeland, stuffed like cattle into boats and brought to a foreign land where they are sold like animals. American slavery was primarily racial. It was lifelong. It involved human trafficking. It was unjust and cruel.

There is a big difference between slavery as it was practiced in America and slavery in the ancient world. The Bible describes the kind of slavery our country practiced as one of the most heinous forms of evil.

We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine... 1 Timothy 1:9–10 (NIV)

Slavery in the ancient world was not right but it was vastly different from American slavery. First, slavery in the ancient world was not based on race. People from different races would be slaves. Second, slavery was not a lifelong obligation. If you saved your money, you could buy yourself out of slavery.

There was no welfare system in the ancient world. When people were down on their luck, they sold themselves to be slaves of wealthy land owners as a way of providing for their immediate needs. The upside of this type of slavery was it prevented free-loading and living off the government. You don't work, you don't eat. Slavery was a huge part of the ancient economy. Scholars estimate that more than half the population of Rome were slaves.

The downside of ancient slavery is that slaves had few rights. They were considered property. Slaves could not vote. Slaves were literally owned like cattle. They could be bought and sold. Slaves could be whipped or beaten. If your owner wanted you working 16 hours days, you had no recourse. If he treated you poorly or fed you almost nothing, you were stuck with it.

In Rome there were two types of slaves. There were the uneducated field slaves. They are similar to the migrant workers from Mexico. They were not highly educated but they worked hard. These common slaves were an important part of society. The word Peter used for *servant* in our text is a special word. It referred to the professional class of slaves. These were the educated slaves who functioned as teachers, doctors, accountants and administrators for their owners. You can imagine the tension. You are a highly intelligent man or woman. You are a teacher or doctor but you are not getting paid well because

you are a slave for your boss. You might even be smarter than your boss. Your boss could be a mean, irritable and irresponsible man who is hurting you but there is little you can do about it. This is the environment Peter addressed. Many of us can relate to this. We know what it is like to work for a boss that is unreasonable. We know what it is like to be intelligent but need to submit to the foolish or cruel whims of a boss. As Christians, how do we handle this?

The Bible is clear. We respect and submit to our bosses' authority and leadership, no matter what his character. He may be a good and gentle boss. That makes it easy. If he is a difficult boss, we respect his leadership and submit to it anyway. Peter said employees respect and submit to their boss *even if he is unjust*. The word *unjust* literally means *crooked*. Even if your boss is a cheat and is dishonest, you work hard for him anyway.

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Colossians 3:22 (ESV)

As Christians, we submit to the leadership of our bosses in everything, even if they are crooked. We work hard, even when the boss isn't looking, because we know God sees everything.

The example that came to mind was Joseph and Potiphar in the book of Genesis. The Bible doesn't tell us about Potiphar's character but I suspect it wasn't the best. If your wife is trying to sleep with your employees, and you tolerate it, it probably means Potiphar's character wasn't much better. How did Joseph work for what could have been a crooked boss? He was faithful, honest and hard working.

Do I have to keep working for a crooked boss?

In the ancient world, if you were a slave or a servant, you didn't have the opportunity to escape a crooked boss. If you saved money, you could buy your freedom. Sometimes slaves could gain their freedom. Until then, they were stuck.

Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 1 Corinthians 7:21 (ESV)

As Americans, we are not slaves to our bosses. We can resign and escape a crooked boss. That is a benefit we have they didn't have in the ancient world. If you have the opportunity to leave a crooked boss, take advantage of it. In the meantime, work hard as a model employee.

Peter then talked about suffering, suffering under the hands of an unjust boss. We are going to talk about suffering in general. Peter taught us that sometimes we suffer because we bring it on ourselves. Sometimes we suffer and we don't deserve it.

Sometimes I suffer because I bring it on myself.

Peter came right out and reminded us that sometimes we suffer because we deserve to suffer.

For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? 1 Peter 2:20 (ESV)

Sometimes slaves were beaten because they deserved it. They were lazy or rebellious. Sometimes we face a hard times in life because we deserve it. We are passed over for a promotion because we are messing around on the Internet instead of doing our jobs. We need to own up to things that are our fault.

I bring suffering on myself when I reap what I sow.

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. Galatians 6:7 (ESV)

The classic example of suffering I bring on myself is the speeding ticket. Who do we blame? The cop. We blame the circumstances. We claim the cop framed us. We claim we were late for church so we had to speed. It wasn't our fault we were driving too fast. The truth is it is completely our fault for driving 20 mph over the speed limit. Don't blame shift. A speeding ticket is just reaping what we were sowing.

Sometimes we wonder why we have no friends. Why are some people popular while I feel like a loner? Usually loneliness is something we bring on ourselves through the simple process of sowing and reaping. If we have a bad attitude when we are around others, if we are cantankerous, if we are always self-interested instead of caring about others...guess what happens? Nobody wants to be our friend. If we are interested in people, if you are excited to see them, if you care about listening to them, if you give them hugs, what happens? Like a magnet people are drawn to us. It is simple process of sowing and reaping. If you are a great friend, everybody will want to be your friend.

Sometimes people tell me they struggle with their weight and there is nothing they can do about it. Sometimes there are genetic or physical problems. What cracks me up is many people complain about their weight while they are holding a McDonald's bag with two Big Macs and a super-size fries in the bag. There is something you can do about it. Have you heard about vegetables?

Sometimes poor health is nothing more than reaping what we are sowing when it comes to our diets.

When we bring suffering on ourselves through the process of sowing and reaping, what we need to do is repent and turn to Jesus. Just like we repent of our sin, we repent of the poor choices and turn to Jesus where we cling to his grace and ask for his strength to help us change.

I bring suffering on myself when God justly punishes sin.

The Bible talks about times when God brings suffering into lives because we deserve it. They are similar but different in their purpose.

God punishes sin. Sometimes God has enough when it comes to sin so he decides to punish it. Examples include Noah and the flood when God said every inclination of a person's heart before the flood was evil so God punished sin by hitting the reset switch on the world with a cosmic flood. Another example is Sodom and Gomorrah where the cities were filled with homosexual men who were interested in gang raping men who passed through town. God said, "Enough is enough." He rained fire and sulfur from heaven like a cosmic flame thrower and destroyed the towns. God doesn't always punish sin by completely destroying people. Sometimes he punishes sin by letting people suffer the consequences of their sin.

In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Romans 1:27 (NIV)

There is built-in punishment that goes with that sin. God says there is punishment built into the sin of homosexuality. When you sin, you will suffer.

Some of you are wondering if God will punish you because of your sin. If you know Jesus the clear answer is “No!” Jesus has already taken all the punishment for our sin. There is no justice necessary for our sin. Jesus paid for all of it. *BUT* that doesn’t mean God won’t bring suffering into our lives when we sin.

I bring suffering on myself when, like a good father, God needs to break my love of sin.

God disciplines his children. This is very important. God occasionally brings correction on his children out of love to steer them away from sin.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives. Hebrews 12:6 (ESV)

For those who don’t know Jesus, God brings just punishment for sin in this world, and ultimately in eternity, as a just response for sin. For those of us who are Christians, Jesus already paid for our sin. God may choose to bring suffering into our lives to correct us so we turn away from sin, just as a good father lovingly spanks his child because he wants his sons or daughters to turn away from things that will destroy them.

Imagine a child who has a fascination with a pot on the stove. He insists on reaching for the handle and pulling on it. As a loving parent, you will correct your child. A loving parent will do whatever is necessary to break his or her child of his will to protect him from the scalding hot water in the pot. In the same way, God may bring suffering in our lives when we give ourselves to sin, not to punish us, but as a loving father to correct us so sin doesn’t destroy us. God’s correction is for our good.

Sometimes I suffer and I didn't bring it on myself.

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. 1 Peter 2:19–20 (ESV)

The real problem is what should I do when I don't deserve to suffer but I find myself suffering at work or at home? How should I respond to undeserved suffering? Peter gave us great insight.

Enduring unjust suffering is a gracious thing in the eyes of God.

That doesn't sound helpful. For me, it sounded confusing until I researched it. The word *gracious* can also be translated *beneficial* or *favorable*. When we face undeserved suffering, and we endure it, God takes note of our suffering. He counts it to our benefit, to our favor. God knows when we face undeserved suffering. He is watching how we respond. God will reward us for enduring it in a way that honors Christ.

Where did Peter get this idea from? It comes right from Jesus in Luke 6. Jesus used the same Greek word in Luke 6 as Peter did in this passage, except in Luke 6 it is translated as the word *benefit*. They are tied together.

If you love those who love you, what **benefit** is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what **benefit** is that to you? For even sinners do the same... But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Luke 6:32–35 (ESV)

When we face undeserved suffering at work and in our home, don't take it upon yourself to right the wrong. Don't cop a bad attitude. Don't snipe the boss. Endure! Love the boss even if he acts like an enemy. Do good for the boss,

even if he doesn't deserve it. Keep a great attitude. Keep working hard for your boss. Remember that God is watching. He is noting how we respond to undeserved suffering and counting it to our benefit. He will reward us for it, possibly in this life, and if not in this life, then for sure in the next.

This means if we are at work and the boss doesn't treat us right, don't try to get even. I don't take the boss to court to get my rights. God is watching.

This means when the boss messes up our vacation by asking us to stay late or work over the holidays, we don't cop a bad attitude. We don't whine. We work hard. We endure and trust the unfair situation into God's hands, knowing God will pay us back in eternity for how we endure unjust suffering now. We will be rewarded in heaven.

This means if we are a salaried employees instead of hourly and our boss makes us work excessive hours because he knows he doesn't need to pay us more to get the job done, we endure it. We smile about it. We still speak well of our boss. We work hard and know God is watching. He will ultimately repay us.

This means when we are not getting paid what we are worth, we work like we are getting paid what we are worth because God is watching.

Outside of the work environment, this means that over the holidays when our spouses or family members yell at us or treat us in a way we don't deserve, we don't get up on our high horse and think we deserve better. You gently and patiently continue to love and serve others even when they act like an enemy. We know God is watching. He will repay us for facing unjust suffering with a loving kind attitude that honors him.

This means when the coach doesn't pick us for the starting lineup of the basketball team, even if we feel we deserve the position, we don't cop an attitude. We work hard remembering that God is watching.

Face undeserved suffering like Jesus, knowing we will be rewarded for patiently enduring.

Continuing to do good, to speak no evil of people and to work hard for a corrupt boss, while we face unjust suffering, is such a radical concept that Peter knew we needed an example of what this looks like. The example he gave us is Jesus.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:23 (ESV)

When we read this, we need to remember Jesus' crucifixion. Crucifixion was the most horrendous way to die. Josephus called it "the most wretched of deaths." Cicero said, "A decent Roman citizen shouldn't even speak of the cross because it is too barbarous for civilized men." Crucifixion was invented by the Persians but it was perfected by the Romans at the time of Christ to be the most horrendous death conceivable by man. A Roman citizen was never allowed to be crucified no matter what their crime. The Romans eventually outlawed it as a form of death for anyone. The Romans even invented a new word to describe the level of agony that could only be experienced on the cross. This word came over to English to describe the most horrible levels of pain experienced only on the cross, *excrucis* pain. In English we call it excruciating pain. When crucified, some people only lasted a few hours. Some dangled between life and death for up to nine days. While hanging on the cross, the worst of society were

encouraged to gather to mock the dying men or women, spit on them and throw rocks on the defenseless. Beneath the cross developed a pile of coagulated blood, sweat and excrement as the fluids essential for life slowly drained to the ground. Animals gathered to tear the warm flesh off those still alive. Birds perched on the body to eat the dying flesh. It was a barbaric form of death that defies the modern imagination.

In agony, those who were crucified would yell, cuss and try and retaliate in any way they could. Yet Jesus was different. Even though his crucifixion was the ultimate example of underserved suffering, Isaiah told us Jesus was different as he face his undeserved suffering. He didn't promise revenge upon his tormentors. He entrusted himself into his father's hands and endured his unjust suffering.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. Isaiah 53:7 (ESV)

Jesus suffered in silence.

Jesus was a stud. He was approximately 33 years of age. He was in the prime of his life. He was in great physical condition. He was a construction worker, so he was buff. He was also in good cardiovascular shape. He walked everywhere. When beaten and crucified, his body didn't easily die. His body had the strength to endure the exquisite amounts of pain.

Isaiah told us he was beaten to the point people didn't just struggle to recognize his identity but they struggled to recognize him as human. Luke told us they blindfolded him and beat his face. No doubt his eyes were swollen shut,

his nose was bleeding and blood ran from his mouth. While I don't know exactly how it happened, I picture the soldiers placing a bag over his head, beating his face to a pulp. When they took off the bag, he was unrecognizable.

In all of this undeserved suffering, he didn't try to retaliate. He didn't insist on his rights. He didn't try to get even. He entrusted himself to his heavenly father, knowing that God the Father sees everything and would reward him for enduring unjust suffering in a way that glorified him.

After being blindfolded and beaten, his clothes were removed and his hands were fastened to a post. Using a cat-o-nine-tails, which is a whip with multiple strands, they whipped across his exposed back, butt and legs. The whip had multiple strands. Some had large metal balls to bruise and tenderize the flesh. Some strands had large metal hooks which would sink into the flesh and be used to tear strips of flesh off his back, butt and legs.

All this and he was silent in the face of this unjust suffering. No retaliation. No swearing. No cussing. He simply entrusted himself to his heavenly father knowing that God the Father was watching and God the Son was earning his favor by the way he endured.

This boggles my mind. I know what comes out of my mouth when I hit my thumb with a hammer when pounding a nail. It would be even worse if somebody else hit my thumb with a hammer when pounding a nail. Think of what Jesus went through, and he never sinned. He never promised revenge or retaliated with his words or attitude but entrusted himself to his heavenly father; it is amazing.

When they hung Jesus on the cross, in the moment when he would normally be self-absorbed in agony, what was he doing? He was caring for his mother, entrusting her to the care of the apostle John. He was caring for the thief on the cross next to him and promising him Paradise that very day. He even said, "Father, forgive them because they do not know what they are doing."

As he hung on the cross the unbroken communion between the father and the son was, for the first time, temporarily broken. In that moment, God the Father poured out on his own son all of his wrath for all of the sin that we deserve. In that moment Jesus has the ultimate experience of undeserved suffering that makes all the physical agony like nothing in comparison. In the middle of that agony, Jesus didn't cuss. He didn't promise to get even with you or me as he suffered for our sin. He did nothing negative. He endured it and kept on enduring it until he finally said his dying words, "It is finished."

Through Christ's undeserved suffering, undeserving sinners like you and me were brought back into a relationship with God. It was Christ's undeserved suffering that God the Father used to bring us back into a relationship with himself. When we face undeserved suffering, God the Father can use it as part of bringing other people into a relationship with God when we suffer well like Jesus.

Was God the Father watching God the Son suffer? Did God the Father reward Jesus for how he suffered? Yes!

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and

every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:8–11 (ESV)

Theologians call this the super-exaltation. God the Father somehow highly exalted God the Son after his crucifixion and resurrection to a place of prominence and authority that he didn't hold before the cross. God the Father rewarded God the Son.

I am called to a life of undeserved suffering where I handle it like Jesus.

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21 (ESV)

We are called to a life filled with unjust suffering. Don't be surprised when we face it. Prepare our minds for it. When we face undeserved suffering we are to respond to it not by griping, whining, complaining, taking people to court, or trying to get even. We are called to face it like Jesus. We entrust ourselves to our heavenly father and continue to do good to those around us. That is the example Jesus left us to follow.

The word *example* literally means a pattern to follow. It is the words used to describe how a child learns his or her alphabet by tracing the letters of the teacher on a page. Jesus is our teacher. When it comes to facing unjust suffering, we are to strive to have our life trace the pattern set by his. Endure undeserved suffering while trusting God to be the just judge and continuing to do spiritual and practical good to those around us.

This is not a popular message. Most teachers tell us Jesus came so we can avoid suffering. That is not the message of the Bible. If we are going to be like Christ, we will face undeserved suffering. We are to try to handle it like him.

We don't try and get revenge. We do good to our enemies. We look out for our bosses' best interests, even if they are crooked. We entrust ourselves to our heavenly father, knowing he will reward us.

We all talk about wanting to be more like Jesus. My friends, the only way to be more like Jesus is to experience undeserved suffering like Jesus and to respond like he did.

Will you stand as I close in prayer?



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