

THE GOD OF RESTORATION 1 PETER 5:10-11

There is a saying that is common in Christian gatherings around the world. When someone blurts out “God is good!” others respond by saying “All the time!” Then the speaker will say, “All the time...” and others respond, “God is good!”

That is a true statement. It is theologically correct. But even though we know that God is good all the time; even though we know that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God (Rom. 8:39) and that He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:5), it doesn't mean we always *feel* His goodness or *feel* His love or *feel* His presence.

In the last few weeks there have been several in our congregation who have experienced devastating loss and debilitating grief. For some of these people it is not an isolated incident, but more like the latest in a cascade of unbearable hurt and relentless suffering.

If you were to say to these people, “God is good,” they *might* respond by saying “all the time.” But you have to wonder if they really believe it right now. You have to wonder if they are wrestling with the *truth* about God's goodness, and God's love, and God's protection, and God's provision.

I wouldn't be surprised if some of you are wondering the same thing. You've been praying, but there don't seem to be any answers. You've been serving, but you're tired and you've lost your enthusiasm. You've been trusting, but you don't see anything happening. Maybe your circumstances are pressing in on you so hard they are choking you. Maybe you feel your heart getting hard and you don't know what to do. Maybe you feel like you're in a spiritual rut and you can't seem to climb out.

Let's be honest: some of you are discouraged—so discouraged that you feel like giving up. Some of you feel like you're on the brink of becoming disillusioned with God, and the church, and the faith.

Do you remember the story of Job? It is a story that raises some of the most profound questions of life—questions about God and Satan and what goes on in the heavenly realms, questions about divine justice and human suffering, questions about God's sovereignty, man's freedom, and God's relationship with man. Yet, while it raises these questions it answers very few of them—at least to our satisfaction. And throughout the book the tension generated by these unanswered questions is so thick you can almost cut it with a knife.

Most of you know the story. Job was a righteous man, described, by God Himself as the most righteous man on the face of the earth—a man who feared God and shunned evil, a man who loved his family, a man who enjoyed a position of honor among the people of the land.

And yet, unknown to Job, a conversation took place in heaven that would profoundly affect his life. The angels presented themselves before the throne of God, and Satan was allowed to be there as well. And God asked Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job” (1:8), and then He proceeded to describe what a wonderful man he was.

And Satan responded with a challenge. He said, “Does Job fear God for nothing? The only reason he's blameless and upright, the only reason he fears you is because you've been good to him—you've sheltered him from bad things, you've given him a nice family and great wealth and a good reputation. But take those things away and he won't love you anymore. In fact, he'll turn his back on you and even curse you” (1:9-11).

So God gave Satan permission to do whatever he wanted to Job, apart from touching his body. And in the span of just a few hours, Satan took away all his wealth, destroyed all of his servants, and killed all of his children. And when Job's response was, "*The Lord gives and Lord takes away, blessed be the name of the Lord*" (1:21), Satan said to God, "Well, that's because Job didn't *really* love his kids; he didn't *really* care about his servants. He's a selfish man, and as long as he isn't personally harmed, he'll give lip service to you. But if you'll let me do something to his body, you'll see that he won't hesitate to curse you to your face" (2:4-5).

And God gave permission and Satan afflicted Job with a horrible disease that made his skin break out in huge, festering boils, which destroyed his vision and made his teeth rot, and which caused him so much pain that he couldn't sleep at night.

And all of this happens in just the first two chapters of the book. The remaining forty chapters describe Job's emotional and spiritual turmoil as he tries to cope with the pain and figure out why all this is happening to him. It describes his encounters with "friends" who are convinced *they* know why. It's obviously because Job has been sinning on the sly, they say, and God is punishing him. And they are determined to convince him that he'd better repent if he has any hope of improving his lot.

But Job says, "That's not true." Through a series of heated quarrels he steadfastly maintains his innocence. And he keeps telling them, "If only God would show up, he would tell you!" And he keeps crying out, "Lord, explain! Lord, defend me! Lord, do *something!*"

As we read the book we, too, keep thinking to ourselves, "When is God going to clear up the confusion and explain to Job and his friends why all this has happened? When is he going to make things right and restore Job?" And we keep reading...and waiting...and God is silent.

And we can't help but wonder along with Job, "Is God interested? Does He care? And if the answers are 'yes', then where is He?"

There have been a great many people in the world—godly people—who have suffered terribly. And they've said, "Lord, what is going on? Why is this happening? This seems to contradict your kindness and compassion. It seems contrary to your power and your promise to protect. This seems so unnecessary! So unfair! Are you going to do something? Are you going to rescue me?" And they cup their ears, waiting for an answer, and hear nothing.

How do you deal with that? How do you cope with experiences and circumstances that seem to contradict God's compassion...or God's power?

I'd like to give you some instruction and encouragement from God's Word that is found at the end of Peter's first letter. In chapter 5 Peter is giving some final comments just prior to saying farewell, and he makes one final reference to this difficult subject of suffering. And though his words are few, they contain perhaps the richest promise of the believer's hope found anywhere in the Bible.

Verses 10-11. *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.*

If you have read or studied 1 Peter you know that suffering is one of the main themes of this letter. He's talked about some of the positive things that suffering will do in your life. It will refine your faith; it will attract others to Jesus; it can take away the desire to sin. He's told us that we have reason to rejoice when we suffer, and that blessing is ours if we suffer for Christ's sake.

But until now he's never really told us how we can find relief from suffering. He's never really addressed the issues of restoration and healing and justice—the things in which people who are suffering are most interested. And so let's look carefully at what he says. Because he's going to tell us some things about God and His ultimate plans and purposes that will help us immensely. Let's look at it phrase by phrase.

Verse 10a. *“The God of all grace...”*

I want you to know that this is not just a title for God. This is a statement about the character of God, and it is intended to be very personal and practical. It describes who He is and how He relates to us...all the time.

This is the God who bestows kindness, favor, and blessing upon people who have done nothing to deserve it. This is a God who not only takes notice of us, but who actually moves toward us—not to punish or to harm, but to wrap His loving arms around us. This is the God who invites us to call Him *Daddy*, who looks after us, provides for us, and is present with us at all times. That, my friends, is the greatest need of any human being.

I saw an interview on *60 Minutes* with Oscar de LeHoya, once considered the golden boy of boxing. At the time he was undefeated, holding titles from several weight divisions, a multi-millionaire. And as I watched this interview I could see why he was so popular. He didn't talk or behave like a typical boxer. He was likable, eloquent, handsome, and as humble as any athlete I've ever seen.

And yet with all of his success he admitted that there was a huge void in his life, and he spoke openly about it. He said that he never felt like he had the approval or acceptance of his father. His father, who taught and trained him to box, had never once complimented him on his skill or performance. He had never, ever encouraged him. On the contrary, he was always pointing out his weaknesses and flaws, criticizing him. To make matters worse, his father didn't even bother to go to his matches.

As I was watching this interview I was struck by the sorrow that Oscar de LeHoya felt over his father's lack of attention or affection or approval. And when they asked him at the end of the interview what it was that he wanted most in life I wrote down what he said. *“The crowning achievement in my life, far more important than any fight, any victory, any medal, will be to have my father hug me and say, ‘You’ve done well. Nice job.’”*

How important is a father's affirmation and approval? How important is a father's presence?

Maybe you look at your circumstances or maybe you look at your failures and you cannot imagine your heavenly Father accepting you, approving of you, being proud of you, and loving you. But if you've put your faith in Jesus Christ *He does*. He's *the God of all grace*. And you became the recipient of that grace when you trusted Jesus. And that means you have His unconditional love, His undivided attention, His unqualified approval. Not love or attention or approval that you've earned or that you deserve, but given to you simply because...*He's the God of all grace*. And that's what we'll be singing and shouting about and celebrating for all eternity.

We are indebted to God's grace. Without it we would be dead, we would be doomed, we would be damned. With it, we have everything we need. His grace is sufficient for every circumstance. It is greater than any sin. It transcends every hurt or every trial. And it lasts for all eternity.

Look at what Peter says in **verse 10a-b**. *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ...*

Wonder of wonders. We have been selected by God to experience His glory. Not to merely catch a glimpse of it, like Moses did when he was in the cave on the mountain and God passed by the opening; not to merely witness it, like Peter, James and John did on the Mount of Transfiguration. But to experience it. To be enveloped by it. To take up our residence in it, forever and ever.

And Peter is intentionally making a contrast in this verse between this *glory*, which is a reference to heaven, and our earthly existence, which includes suffering. And, as he has done so many times before, he wants us to know that what we're experiencing now—painful and difficult though it might be—is so *incredibly* brief compared to our heavenly existence.

How long is this earthly life? Let's just say, for the sake of comparison, that eternity could be measured (which it can't, but let's just say it could) and that it was 10X the distance between the earth and the sun. And then you measured the span of time we live on this earth and put it on that line. It would be no more than an inch.

Now, let's think of the amount of time that we actually experience painful trials or the amount of time we have to endure some kind of suffering in relationship to eternity. A quarter of an inch, maybe?

Paul said in Romans 8, "*For I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*" (v.18). And then he expanded on it in 2 Corinthians 4 when he was describing his own hardships. He said, "*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So,*" he says, "*Here's how we cope: we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen*" (vv.17-18). That's another way of saying, "we make a conscious effort to think about this life in relationship to eternity."

We've been called to this eternal glory in Christ. That's our real life. That's the realm of our real existence. For us who know the Lord Jesus Christ and have received Him by faith, this world is not our home; we're just passing through. We are *citizens of heaven*. And it is tremendously helpful to live each day with that on the forefront of our minds.

We live for a very short time on this little planet called earth. And some of what we experience here may be painful and unpleasant and downright difficult. But temporary suffering, just like eternal glory, is part of our calling. Peter would say, "*...the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while...*"

You say, "But why? Can't we just get on with the glory without the suffering?"

God, in His infinite wisdom and sovereignty, uses even evil circumstances, even the most unjust and unfair attacks from men and satanic forces, to groom us for glory. And while they mean it for evil, God uses it for good.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3, "*We are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory*" (3:18). Yes, there may be suffering on the road to glory, but it is only to make us shine brighter with His glory. And yes, we may have to endure hellish experiences, but it is only to bring us closer to heaven.

Oh, how I need God's perspective. How could I complain and feel sorry for myself if I know that God is using painful circumstances as an opportunity to make me more like His Son. Especially because Peter goes on to explain what God will do for those who are hurting and broken. **Verse 10.** *And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.*

“He himself will restore you.” The Greek word translated “restore” was often used in a medical context, like when a doctor set a broken bone, or repaired a damaged vessel. The word means “to mend,” “to put in order,” “to make complete.”

God is an expert in taking the broken pieces of our lives—our painful circumstances, our shattered hopes and dreams, our deepest hurts—and putting them back together again.

And notice the words, *God Himself* will do this. Peter wants us to know that God does not delegate this matter of our repair and restoration to someone else. God does not merely oversee our case and let an intern do the surgery. No, *He* performs the operation with His own hands. And that the operation will be successful, because He is the Great Physician. And be assured, God *will* mend us, He *will* heal us, He *will* restore us and make us stronger than we were before. That’s what the next promise tells us. *“He will make you strong, firm, and steadfast.”*

All three of these terms have reference to being securely or solidly fixed in place so that a person or thing is immovable and indestructible. This, I believe, is a reference to our final, glorified state. Our state of being when Jesus Himself descends from heaven at His Second Coming and God completes His work of salvation in us—we are completely transformed into the likeness of Christ. That state of perfection. That state when the image of God will be fully restored in us and we will not be lacking in anything. A state in which we shall perfectly experience and display the fruit of the Holy Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. A state in which we shall reflect His glory, and a state in which we will shall worthily worship the Lord wholeheartedly for all eternity.

So take courage. We have something to really look forward to—something really big. Something that will make the hard things we are going through now seem incredibly small.

What is it that we need when we experience suffering, and there is no apparent reason for it and no available answers?

Remember Job and his friends? After all the opinions had been given and the arguments had been made and the judgments had been pronounced, God finally broke the silence. And it’s very interesting to me what He did. He never directly addressed Job’s sufferings. He gave no explanation that would let Job in on why he suffered. He didn’t answer his questions. He didn’t apologize or even sympathize. He simply made His presence known. And then He gave Job a personal, guided tour of creation.

“See that over there? I made that. See this? I made that, too. And I made that...and that...and that...and that...”

Some of us read it and say, “That’s not enough! Job has a right to an explanation! He’s been a victim! He’s been treated unjustly! How could God seemingly ignore his questions?”

Ah, but for Job it was enough. Simply being in the presence of God was all the satisfaction and justice he needed.

And I guarantee that, for you, it will be enough as well.

I wonder, as we sit in heaven, basking in His brilliant, blinding glory, do you suppose anyone will try and get the Lord aside and say, “You know, God, I’ve been meaning to talk to you. Do you remember a couple of million years ago when I lived on that dirty little tennis ball called earth, and I was having a rough time of it? Lord I was wondering, why’d you let me get picked on? Why did you allow that painful situation? Why didn’t you prevent that

tragic circumstance? I didn't deserve all that?"

I don't think so. But I do know what everyone of us will be thinking and saying. "Lord, your grace is incredible! Your glory and your beauty take my breath away! Lord, I can't believe I'm here, in your presence! I don't deserve any of this. Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Verse 11 *To him be the power forever and ever. Amen.*

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MAIN IDEA: OUR LIGHT AND MOMENTARY TROUBLES ARE ACHIEVING FOR US AN ETERNAL GLORY THAT FAR OUTWEIGHS THEM ALL

THE GRACE OF GOD

THE CALL OF GOD
ETERNAL GLORY IN CHRIST

TEMPORARY SUFFERING

THE PLAN OF GOD
TO RESTORE YOU

TO MAKE YOU STRONG

TO MAKE YOU FIRM

TO MAKE YOU STEADFAST

THE GLORY OF GOD