

“The Bad Won’t Last Forever” February 19, 2023

Believe it or not - we’re on our second to final week of our series Upon This Rock - where we’ve been unpacking verse by verse **1 Peter 5:6-11**. Today we’re looking at **v.10**, so I would invite you to turn there.

And like we’ve said before, our goal in this series is to offer us hope when it comes to following Jesus. What’s it look like to build our lives on what is the rock of Jesus? What promises can we ground our lives on?

So, before we get into the verse this morning and all the hope it offers us - what I wanna do is spend a good amount of time setting that text up for us. But I promise I will get to that verse, ok?

There’s a man named Jerry Sittser, and up until recently, he was a long time professor of theology at Whitworth University in Washington state. He taught there for a little over 30 years, and he retired back in 2020. At the age of 41 years old, only a couple years into being a professor, he experienced unspeakable tragedy - he lost in a car accident his wife, his mother, and his daughter all at once. Just like that. I can’t even begin to imagine.

And a number of years later in reflecting on this massive event of pain and suffering in his life, he said this:

Jerry Sittser

Loss creates a barren present (*not a gift, but the present time*), as if one were sailing on a vast sea of nothingness. Those who suffer loss live suspended between a past for which they long and a future for which they hope. They want to return to the harbor of the familiar past and recover what was lost... Or they want to sail on and discover a meaningful future that promises to bring them life again... Instead, they find themselves living in a barren present that is empty of meaning.

Now being here in this church, doing life with you all for some seven years now - I know a good number of you and your stories and the hard things you have or are going through right now - but I don’t know all of them.

- Maybe you have experienced this “barren” season of life as the quote put it, where life just took you through so much hardship and you’re still feeling the pain of it all, or maybe you’re experiencing it right now. And it’s nowhere near that story I just described but it’s still painful:
 - Maybe there’s a loss of a relationship you recently experienced - whether that’s through a death in the family, or a relationship that’s now fractured - that’s weighing heavy on you right now, you feel the sadness creeping in, and you don’t know what to do with it
 - Maybe it’s the responsibilities and the pressures you have in your life - whether it’s parenting, or your work, or school - that you feel like you’re constantly messing it up - and it leaves you paralyzed with anxiety, you have tunnel vision, and you’re unable to see things outside of what’s going on around you
 - Maybe you received a recent diagnosis from your doctor, or perhaps it’s even the very thought of that happening, that leaves you shaken to the core and you feel like you can’t talk to anyone about it

I don’t know what happened in your past, and I can’t even begin to predict what will happen in your future. But what I do know is that not a one of us is exempt from suffering.

Or as Jesus bluntly put it in John 16:33 when he says:

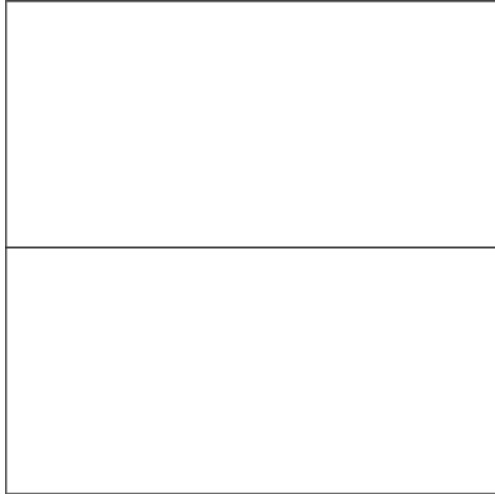
John 16:33

In this world you will have trouble.

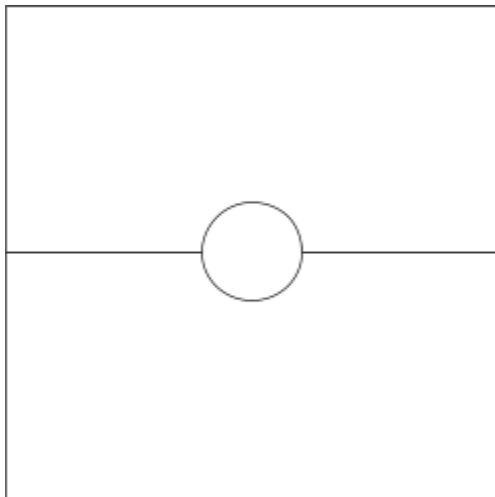
That's a promise Jesus is making about our lives and the reality we find ourselves in. And if I can be honest, that's not necessarily a promise I like. The world is broken - and your life will experience suffering. The world is fractured by sin - just look at the news cycle for evidence of this - and you will see that we are surrounded by suffering. Just look at Jesus and his life - and you will see that if the perfect Son of God underwent such suffering, then we will too.

So this poses the question - **when suffering does enter into our lives - what do we do with it exactly?**

Think of it like this - I got some graphics for us because I know y'all dig some graphics:



Think of your life as a straight line. So far so good.



And along the timeline of your life you experience suffering, hardship of some kind; so, for the sake of the graphic there's this dot on your timeline of your life that you didn't see coming. That dot represents whatever suffering you're experiencing in that moment. When the dot in the timeline of our life is suffering, that barren present, what does life in the dot look like? How do people react? Because the reality goes deeper than just, "in this world you will have trouble." Not only will suffering happen, but what happens after the suffering matters tremendously. As one author puts it:

John Ortberg

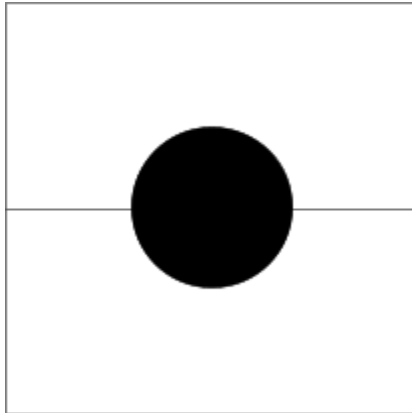
Suffering always changes us, but it does not necessarily change us for the better.

In our time and place, our culture really doesn't give us any real way to answer that. Your best bet, they would say, is to find your own meaning in life all the while knowing that whatever reality you construct, it's all an illusion anyway. It's actually not real. So if you find meaning in a relationship. Great. Whatever works for you. But it doesn't really matter. If you find meaning and purpose in your line of work, hey awesome. But again that's a reality you've constructed for yourself. The meaning you give it is not real. Everything's gonna eventually die out, and you and everything you care about will be forgotten.

Reactions to Suffering Going Badly

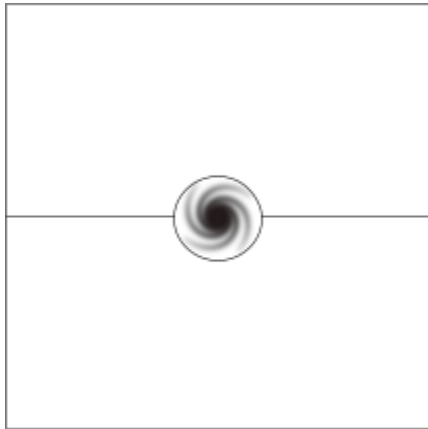
Now take that idea - that there is no bigger meaning, and you have to construct your own reality. What happens when you undergo suffering and you're given no higher, spiritual resources to go to? In a world of no higher meaning - what do you do?

Or to put it back to the graphic - how do you interpret the dot that shows up in your life?



If you have no hope of a purpose or a future, some respond by **filtering out anything that is actually good or positive in your life**, and now all that's left is the suffering. All that is left in your life is what has gone bad and wrong. There's no recognition of the gifts of God's grace that are in your life; your mind has filtered all of those out, and what's left is darkness. That dot of suffering becomes a black dot - with no light or hope in it at all.

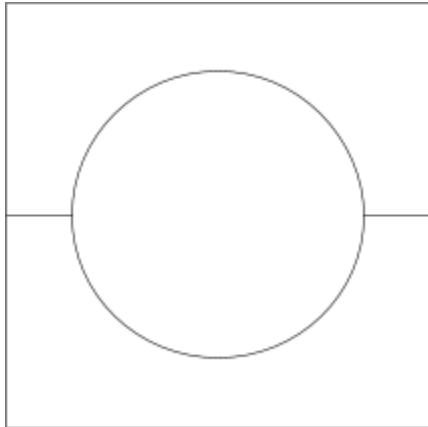
For example, say you had a falling out with a friend. They betray your trust or they leave, you feel like they rejected you; or, maybe just outside of anyone's control, they move and they're just gone. If you're filtering, you can take this and respond with, "You know, it makes sense that they left because I'm probably unloveable. I don't think I actually have any real friends. I'm truly alone with nothing and no one." That one dot in your life, even if it started small, becomes the filter by which you interpret everything else and in turn grows and grows; blocking out any light in your life, and that darkness can consume you and rob you of joy.



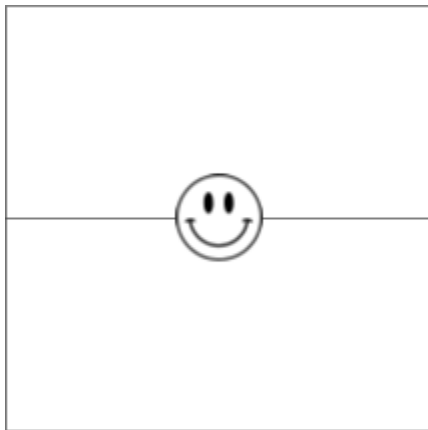
Or if you have no hope of a purpose or a future, some respond by **catastrophizing**. That dot becomes a spiral. It's easy to see whatever is bad now and extrapolate that out and say that either, "It will always be this way" or, "It will only get worse." And you mentally spiral into all of these assumptions about you and your life.

- I got some negative feedback on my job, now I'm going to get fired and I'll probably never get another job again.
- I failed my kid, I disciplined them too lightly, too harshly; and that spirals to, I'm just like my dad. I'm just like my mom.
- You fall back into that old sin pattern again, and you just resign yourself that it's always going to be this way.

When you catastrophize your suffering, there becomes no hope for change. The dot that is your suffering sends your mind spiraling to a point where you can't hope in anything, God's promises included. Even when things change and good things come along, it's impossible to be thankful or have joy because you immediately expect that it's going to go badly, no matter what.



For some, what can tend to happen is that you **naturally zoom in on the dot**. We zoom in on the time of suffering and it feels like it is going to last forever. And we're stuck there. Stuck in the suffering - whatever it is. Or maybe it's suffering that happened to you in your past and you can't move along from it. It starts to feel like there is no line in your life - it's just the dot, and life is always going to be forever entrenched in this and defined by this. And you can't possibly work through it.



Here's another way the dot can be interpreted that I think can happen a lot in Christian circles and it's this. Let's say pain and suffering enter in, the dot pops up in your life, and the response is to....**just put a happy face on there**. Right? And we can baptize our pain with Christian lingo....or worse yet, not talk about it at all.

But when that happens, what you're actually doing is denying the darkness in the world. It's to deny the darkness going on in our lives as though the pain doesn't exist. And when that happens it's easy to stagnate in your Christian life and not grow into maturity - because part of growing as a follower of Jesus is to acknowledge the hurt and the reality of the brokenness. Not to avoid it, but to go through it.

And like I said, in the church world it's easy for this to happen. You or someone else shares something truly hard in Group, and not even a beat passes and someone pipes up with, "Well it's all in God's plan." Or "Yo, **Romans 8:28** - all things work together for the good."

Yes...no doubt....all true things you're saying. But that's only half of the solution. People also need to grieve.

- Usually people need to hear in the moment of their suffering - sometimes, most of the time, they just need someone to give them a hug or offer a shoulder to cry on. When we are quick to offer pat Christian answers, we might actually be denying the reality of the painful situation and, in turn, we might actually be showing a lack of care to the person suffering.
- I mean, I think about how many times the Scriptures talk about pain and suffering and the biblical authors just sit with it. No happy solution offered.
 - I think about how so many Psalms are about suffering - and they kinda just end like that.
 - I think about how there's a book of the Bible literally called Lamentations. As in a book with five chapters of mostly how terrible things are.
 - I think about how the name Israel, given to Jacob in Genesis that later becomes the name of an entire nation literally means, "Wrestles with God."
 - To deny the pain and work through and put on a Christian face is to risk yourself denying both the reality of life and the reality of what Scripture so often is inviting us to wrestle with.

- And in the process, if we don't take the time to process and lament our own suffering but are quick to move on, that pain and darkness can grow and fester in the dark. If I'm not actually working through my stuff when hardship happens and am simply trying as fast as I can to go about my life - I'm putting myself at risk of unhealthy coping mechanisms and allowing secret sin to grow underneath the smiley face of that dot.
 - And if I can be honest with you all - this one is the one I tend to do the most. I don't necessarily put on a happy face, but I do find myself often working to avoid the pain rather than actually taking the time to work through the pain.
 - And I've been so thankful to those of you who have reached out to me and other pastors in this heavy season of ministry to ask, "How can I help? What do you need? How can I pray for you?"
 - I'm thankful for a church member and dear friend of mine who sat me down last week and asked, "Hey, what are you doing to process through this season right now?"
 - I'm so thankful to be a part of this. Y'all know who you are.

All of these ways to interpret the dot don't take the full scope of Scripture in mind. Because the reality of our situation is that the pain is real and crushing, so we need to accept that AND we have a real hope in Jesus that we are called to accept as well. That is the bedrock reality, even in suffering.

- Not only does Jesus offer us a hope for the future, but he's a present helper who's had prior experience with whatever you're going through. For those who put their faith in Jesus, not only does He offer us His Spirit to help us with whatever we're going through in the present; but, as **Isaiah 53:3** puts it, he is "a man of sorrows, well acquainted with grief." Another translation says that he's "familiar with pain." We follow a Savior who has suffered. He has promised a perfect hope for the future, but he knows what it feels like. His heart beat. His wounds bled. He knows, and he's promised to be with you and promised you a future. That's the reality. That's the hope.

It is the reality that there's hope in Jesus, but it's also a reality that - if I can be honest with you - is really hard to see in suffering.

So what can we do now to either respond to suffering if you're in it now, or be prepared because Jesus told us it was coming?

- What we've got to do is learn how to rehearse **our hope**. You have to rehearse your hope you have in Jesus to have any chance at believing it when suffering comes your way.

Which, if I can be real with you for a sec, "rehearsing your hope" does also sound like Christianese, but hear me out. How do we actually prepare ourselves for suffering?

What does that actually mean?

Well...all that setup to say....let's look at **1 Peter 5:10**. I told you we'd get there. :)

Now what's fascinating is when you read the commentaries on the book of **1 Peter**, many are going to say that the whole book of 1 Peter is actually all about suffering. He's writing to Christians scattered all over the Roman Empire and Asia who are all being persecuted for their faith. And here in **1 Peter 5:10** he's getting as overt as possible when it comes to how to handle suffering and rehearse our hopes.

So look at 1 Peter 5:10 with me and I'm gonna break it down a bit:

...the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ...

He's first reminding them to look up from their present circumstances, to notice what God has done in their lives already. Don't stare at the dot happening in your life right now, look up to who God is and what He's already done for you. He's called you. Past tense. It's the Greek word *kaleo*, it's this word picture that you were over here in your sin, and God in a gentle voice called you to come follow him. And by His Spirit you were drawn into the Kingdom of God.

And so Peter is reminding them, first off to rehearse your hope you are to:

1 - Celebrate God's faithfulness

He brought *you* from death and into life, out of darkness and into light. And your present circumstance, your present suffering doesn't change what God has done for you and it doesn't change who you are.

Here's another way it's described in Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2:4-6

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, **5** even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— **6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

One thing I especially love in that passage I want to highlight is **v.6** - Christ has raised us up with Him. It's this idea that, when you celebrate God's faithfulness and the reality of who you are in Christ, He raises you up to see reality for what it is. And when that happens, you're able to zoom out from the suffering and be given perspective. You're able to see your present pain from such a vantage point that the dot in your life doesn't consume you. Who you are in Christ is ultimate and nothing can change that because God keeps His word. He keeps His promises to you, forever. And he's never ever going back on His Word so you can hold fast to those promises He's said over you.

I think about how one thing our family has been doing lately for family devotionals is - we have a one verse a day calendar that we have in the middle of the dinner table. So each time at dinner, me or Lucy will read a verse and ask the kids - what does this tell us about God or people? And granted, most of the time we have to provide context or explain what a word means, but the thing that's struck me nearly every time is how God keeps His Word. How when God makes a promise - whether it's to be with you in your hurting, or to give you hope, or to fight on your behalf - even though he said that 1000s of years ago - it's still true for us today.

And while that's simple enough and we're trying to drill that into our kids...the truth is I need to hear that too - God is faithful. He will keep His Word. Always. You can celebrate that, and when you do it prepares your soul for suffering. It anchors you and trains you for the days and the seasons when suffering inevitably blindsides you.

The second thing I wanna point out, how to rehearse our hope, is to:

2 - Recognize God's current activity

the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ **will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you**

God has promised that he *will* restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. It's interesting Peter uses a list of words here, all action words. It is hard to translate the Greek participle here, but most commentators agree that the

sense in this verse is that God - even in the midst of suffering - actually begins the process to restore, confirm, strengthen, & establish us.

And what's wild is - Peter could've used just one of those words and it would have been great. He could have said "God will establish you" and it'd be like - alright cool. Great. But instead he uses these four nearly synonymous words to reinforce this idea that - just so we're crystal clear here - that even in, and perhaps especially in, our suffering - God is doing something in our souls that we may not see in the moment. In the hands of a loving God, He is using those seemingly chaotic, pointless, brutally agonizing moments to strengthen you, to grow you, to help you look more like Jesus when you trust Him in the pain and give your pain over to Him.

And hear me, I'm not trying to diminish your suffering by offering a silver lining. Pain is real. Suffering is brutal. AND we believe in someone who rose from the dead which means suffering and death never ever get the final word for you. Ever. The world would want you to believe that this life is all there is and suffering pain and death are just how the world works.

But we believe in a higher rock that not only offers us hope in our suffering but in fact transforms us in our suffering. And in the scope of eternity, suffering is not wasted but is used in the hands of God to shape us to be more like Jesus who also suffered. It's like Jesus says in **John 16:33**, I read the first half earlier but here's the whole of it:

In this world you will have trouble **but** take heart for I have overcome the world.

Today, take heart. Jesus has overcome, and he is working in, around, and through you.

If you're here this morning and you're in a season of suffering for whatever reason, perhaps the dot in your life feels like this massive black hole that's robbing you of joy right now, take heart. Jesus has overcome the world. Hold fast to Jesus just as He holds fast to you.

If you're here this morning and you feel this pull within you to resign or catastrophize and say, "Maybe this is it. Maybe this is all there is in life, is this pain. I feel like a failure. A screw up." Jesus tells you to take heart. He has overcome the world. Press into the hope that Jesus offers through His Spirit because He will strengthen, and confirm you, and establish and restore you.

Or maybe you're here and you've just gotten numb to it all. Maybe you put on a happy face, or maybe you distract yourself from the pain. Remember that Jesus Himself wept, that He Himself has felt pain and lamented and grieved. So you don't need to put on this stoic persona, you can go to Him and have the freedom to feel undone and broken by grief - because when you do He will work in you by His Spirit to restore you. Take heart.

Final thing I want us to look at, how we rehearse our hopes -

3 - Remember that today is not the end.

Look back at **1 Peter 5, verse 10** begins with, "and after you have suffered **a little while...**" Whatever the darkness has been in your life, whatever the suffering is today, whatever the trouble will be down the road for you, if you are in Christ, trusting in Him and following in the way of Jesus, that is not the end for you.

Today is not the end for you, your darkest day is not the end for you, because we know the end. Jesus has promised that he has gone to prepare a place for you to be with Him forever. Jesus has promised that everything sad will be untrue. He will wipe every tear from your eyes and every broken will be made whole.

I think back to that line and the dot illustration. And for followers of Jesus, we believe in the reality that says there is a life beyond this life. That the line of your life actually stretches out into eternity, forever and ever. And the world will tell you “no this is it. This is all there is,” but God promises us that these years we have on this planet, however many they are, are all but a blip in the grand scheme of things. So hold fast. Today is not the end. The bad will not last forever.

And if I may borrow a little bit from last week’s sermon - the beauty of being a part of and belonging to the church is that we don’t suffer alone. We have people who have gone before us who have suffered themselves and endured and have spurred us on to keep rehearsing our hope in Jesus.

I’ll give you one story that comes to mind that gives me so much hope and courage.

Some of you who have been around awhile know about one of our members Ms. Barabara. Barbara was in her late 60s when she began coming around our church about 8 years ago. She was in a small group with her and her husband Mitch - all with people considerably younger than them.

And a few years ago Ms Barbara started to have some health complications and had to be admitted to the hospital for all the pain she was experiencing. And because of Covid at the time, she couldn’t see any visitors. So here’s Ms. Barabara alone in her hospital bed, experiencing all this physical pain, and she told one of our pastors later how she couldn’t bear the loneliness, so she started to pray. And in her prayer, she asked Jesus to be with her. And as she’s relaying this to one of our pastors, she started to cry and smile, and she said, “And he showed up. He was with me in the hospital room.”

Well, eventually, Covid restrictions began to lift and she began to recover, her LifeGroup showed up to visit her a lot. Sometimes showing up outside her hospital room saying hi through the window. Comforting her. Reminding her of the hope she has in Jesus.

Some of you all know a little over a year ago, we baptized Ms Barbara right here in this room. And she had trouble getting in and out of the baptism pool due to the pain in her leg so we had a few people lifting her in and out all the while her LifeGroup was surrounding her.

And a few months ago, some health complications came back and she was placed on hospice care.

And a few days before her passing, her LifeGroup gathered together and spent an evening singing worship songs over her in her bed. Praying over her. Her family and church family read Scripture over her as she had her eyes closed with a smile on her face.

And because of the hope she has in Jesus, just a few days later, when she closed her eyes for the last time, in this life...she would open them again to behold the face of Jesus. The God of all comfort. She is now with Him, free from suffering and pain, forever.

If you are in Christ, nothing bad lasts forever.

That same hope Barbara clung to is available to you now. So will you not go to Him now and receive the hope that she and so many others before her have clung to? Wherever you are in your suffering, you can go to Him now - He is ready to ready and willing and eager to receive you and whatever it is you’re going through, He can handle it because He loves you and wants to be with you.

Pray. Communion.