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“Who is Sufficient for These Things?” (2 Corinthians 2:16b)

Pastor Gene Giguere, June 14, 2026

Introduction

1) Good morning, Church! In our study of spiritual maturity and the importance of ‘remaining’ (abiding) in the filling of the Holy Spirit, we began looking at the thorny subject of suffering – specifically, the *believer’s* suffering.

✠ We’ve been considering that all believers have a ‘cup’ to drink – a *poterion* – which has been sovereignly mixed for each of us by God Himself. Our ‘cup’ represents the perfect will of God for our individual lives – and no two cups are the same. Our duty is to drink that specific cup the Lord has prepared for us. And, as we’ve been seeing, each believer’s cup will contain some measure of suffering.

✠ Jesus promised: “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (**John 16:33**). So, here we have the *promise* of suffering, as well as the *provision* for suffering.

Then we considered a phenomenal, if little-understood, principle of life in the Spirit: being filled with the Spirit doesn’t make us immune to suffering; in fact, *it may actually present us to it!* That’s because suffering is an essential part of *growing* to maturity and of *glorifying* the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the believer’s ultimate purpose in this life.

Suffering for the glory of God is one of the greatest privileges we have as Jesus followers. Paul sees it as a gift on par with the ‘gift’ of believing in Jesus.

“It has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only (1) believe in him but (2) also suffer for his sake ...” (**Philippians 1:29**).

The word translated “granted” – **χαρίζομαι** – means “to give freely as a favor, to give graciously.”¹ At the root of the word is **χάρις**, the very word for *grace*. This is important; it tells us two things:

First, it is a gracious gift from God’s own hand that we might *believe in Jesus*.

Ephesians 2:8: “By grace (**χάρις**) you have been saved through faith. And this [salvation] is not your own doing; it is the gift (**δῶρον**) of God.”

And *second*, and likewise, it is a gracious gift from God’s own hand that we might “also *suffer for his sake ...*”

Now, if you want to see just how out-of-step believers of this day are with early Christians, just ask yourself this question: *how many believers do you know who receive suffering as a gift from God?*

- 2) We mentioned that there are two *broad categories* of suffering which believers experience in this life – and they are very different indeed. They have different *causes*, different *purposes* and different *results*. They are so different, in fact, that we’re taking them up separately.

Deserved suffering is the suffering we bring upon ourselves when we continually say ‘No’ to the Holy Spirit and embrace sin. This kind of suffering comes to believers as *divine discipline* when we continue to *grieve* the Holy Spirit or *quench* Him. The nth degree of divine discipline is the *sin unto physical death*, where the Lord takes the believer home early as a divine judgment (**1 John 5:16**, cf., **Acts 5:1–10**, **1 Corinthians 5:5**, **11:30**). We’ll study all of these things in detail when we get to them.

But what we began studying last time is *undeserved* suffering. This is the kind of suffering that often throws believers for a loop. They’re loving God, walking in the Spirit and then, all of a sudden, God seemingly pulls the rug out from under them; everything goes south. This is not punishment, nor is it a sign that God has turned His back on us. Far from it! In fact, *it’s a sign that God is working deeply and intimately within us*.

¹ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1078.

- 3) God visits *undeserved* suffering upon His people for two important reasons that I asked you to remember.

The *first* is that God might *accelerate our growth to spiritual maturity*.

The *second* is that we might *glorify the Lord Jesus Christ through our suffering* in this life, only to be rewarded forever in the Omega Ages.

God may be testing our faith in order to propel us to spiritual adulthood. Or He may be investing us with the greatest of all honors that we can receive in this life: the privilege of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ through our suffering as one of His true disciples.

Have you ever wondered, while watching a dear old saint languishing with cancer in his or her final months, ‘Why doesn’t God just take him home and stop his suffering?’ This is why. Because God still has a work for Him to do.

Testing as a Means to Maturity

- 1) Before we can glorify God in our suffering, or in any way at all for that matter, we must first advance to spiritual maturity. And suffering is one of God’s most effective means of getting us there.

Job was a very mature believer who was glorifying God in the midst of profound suffering – and as a result we’re talking about him 4000 years later.²

When mature Christians declare in the midst of intense suffering that ‘God is *still* good and worthy to be praised,’ it stuns unbelievers into considering the depth and genuineness of their faith in the invisible God. So, glorifying God is by far the greatest of all reasons to suffer as a child of God!

- 2) James deals with the *first* way God uses suffering: to advance us to maturity:

James 1:2-4, famously tells us to “count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith

² Scholars generally place Job's life during the Patriarchal period (roughly 2100 to 1800 B.C.), making him a contemporary of Abraham and Isaac. This puts Job approximately 3,800 to 4,000 years ago.

produces steadfastness. ⁴ And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete [mature], lacking in nothing.”

Now, James is telling us that, counterintuitive as it is, believers should face trials with an attitude of *joy*. Why? Because, assuming that we are not living in unrepentant sin and thus being disciplined, *God is using that trial to advance us*.

Now, be careful here! *Joy* is not the same thing as *happiness*. *Happiness* is based on circumstance – in fact, the very word ‘happiness’ derives from the old word *happenstance*. *Joy* however, transcends circumstances. It is one of the fruits which the Holy Spirit produces in us when we walk with Him.

On the night when He was betrayed, Jesus told His followers:

“By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:8-11).

The fullness of joy does not come from winning the lottery; it comes from a close walk with Jesus: obeying His commandments and remaining within the sphere of His love. Our joy is not based on the circumstances we find ourselves in in this life; it’s based on whether or not we’re walking in the filling of the Holy Spirit.

And this is very important because we need joy more than ever when we’re encountering a trial. Why? Because “the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

3) James tells us to “count it all joy ... when [we] meet trials of various kinds.”

The word translated “meet” or “face” in our translations is *περιπίπτω*, a word which literally means *to fall into something* – like the poor man who “fell among robbers” in **Luke 10:30** – or even *to smash into a thing!* So, the trials James is talking about are *not* trials we cause by rebelling against God; they’re *not* deserved sufferings. They’re trails that we ‘fall into’ or ‘smash into’ in the course of life.

Another primary meaning of *περιπίπτω* is to “move toward something and hit against it”!³ The idea being, *it hurts!* In the account of Paul’s shipwreck in **Acts 27:41**, it’s the word used when we read, “striking a reef, they ran the vessel aground.” The word “striking” here (as in ‘striking’ the reef and crashing the ship) is the same word James uses when he mentions ‘meeting’ or ‘facing’ various trials.

So, when we *smash into trials of various kinds*, James says, we should approach it with an attitude of joy. This, of course, is counterintuitive. Dr. Ronald Blue points out that “most people count it all joy when they *escape* trials. James said to count it all joy *in the midst* of trials.”⁴

Joy is God’s provision for us in times of suffering, but it’s a provision that is often rejected rather than embraced by believers who are being tested. And this is because most Christians simply do not understand God’s divine purposes in permitting His children to suffer – a misunderstanding we’re trying to remedy here.

- 4) The Holy Spirit is the *means* of the joy James asks us to have when we’re suffering (joy is a fruit of the Spirit, **Galatians 5:22**), but understanding God’s purposes for suffering is the *basis* of it.

And so, James writes:

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet [smash into, fall into] trials of various kinds, ³ for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”

✠ The word translated “know” here is *γινώσκω*, which means *to come to know something through experience* (as opposed to knowing something *instinctively*, as with *οἶδα*⁵). The point is, we don’t instinctively know that “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness”; we come to learn that through study or experience.

³ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 804.

⁴ Blue, J. Ronald, “James,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. by J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), II, 820–21.

⁵ *οἶδα* is used in 1 Peter 1:18-19: “Knowing [*οἶδα*, knowing instinctively] that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.”

✚ So, *why* can we be joyful? Because we have *come to understand* (present active participle of γινώσκω) that “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” “Steadfastness” translates ὑπομονή, which is the “capacity to hold out or bear up in the face of difficulty.”⁶ In other words, *patience, endurance, fortitude, or perseverance*.

So, when our faith is tested, it produces within us the ability to endure – to stay behind the plow even when the ground is difficult.

✚ And that’s not all! The endurance produced by our *tested faith*, when it’s had its full effect, will result in us being spiritually mature and fit to glorify God.

“And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (**James 1:4**.)”

The word “perfect” (τέλειος) refers to one who has “attain[ed] the end or purpose.”⁷ And God’s first purpose in every believer after salvation is to bring them to maturity. The word “complete” (όλόκληρος) refers to one who has met “all expectations” and is therefore “whole” or “complete.”⁸

What is James saying? *‘Endure suffering joyfully! It will produce within you the endurance you need to press forward to full maturity.’*

5) Now, before I leave this piece, let’s consider some of Peter’s words regarding Christian suffering to see how they rhyme with those of James.

1 Peter 1:3-9: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice [ἀγαλλιάω, *to be exceedingly joyful, to exult*], though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials ...”

⁶ Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 1039.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, p. 995.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, pp. 703–4.

‡ Many people miss this little phrase – “*if necessary*” (δεῖ) – tucked between the two commas in verse 6. It translates a little particle that carries a whollop! δεῖ indicates something that absolutely MUST take place; it is a divine necessity! But here it’s stated as a hypothetical (see the CEV, KJV, NAB, NIV, REB, and TEV translations).

He’s saying, ‘Look, while you’re rejoicing in God’s mercy, you *may* have to suffer for a little while. That depends upon the Lord’s sovereign will for your life. And if you do, understand that your trial has been ‘mixed’ specifically for you by God’s own sovereign hand. It is your ποτήριον (poterion); it is your *cup* to drink, so drink it with joy!’

It’s Peter who wrote, “If when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious [undeserved] thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called [suffering is a part of the believer’s calling], because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:20-21).

- Notice it: “If when you do good and suffer for it [*undeserved* suffering] you endure” it pleases God.
- Then He says, “For to *this* you have been called.” To *what* have we been called? To *what* does the impersonal pronoun “this” refer? The antecedent to “this” is found in the previous verse (2:20). Paraphrased, ‘You have been called to endure when you suffer while doing good.’
- He continues by saying that Jesus has left us “an example”. Again, an example of *what*? Read it again! It’s right there in the Text. “Christ also SUFFERED for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:21). So, the example Jesus left us was an example of *suffering and how to do it in a way that pleases the Father*.

6) Well, let’s do that. Let’s look at Jesus example regarding the cup that the Father’s sovereignty had mixed for *Him*:

‡ In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus, weary from spiritual battle, “fell on his face and prayed, saying, ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup (ποτήριον) pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will’” (Matthew 26:39).

There's the example! We may desire a different cup (ποτήριον), but we submit our selves out of love to the perfect will of the Father.

✠ Only moments later, when they came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew his sword to protect Him. Do you remember what Jesus told him? “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup (ποτήριον) that the Father has given me?” (John 18:11) This is precisely what we should say when we are tested.

Again, *there's* the example: our cup may not be a pleasant cup, but nonetheless, our duty as followers of Jesus is to drink the cup that has been prepared for us and to glorify God in so doing.

So, if you *do* have to suffer, Peter is saying, understand that your suffering is a divine necessity which is serving God's sovereign purpose in some way.⁹

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Let's continue in **1 Peter 1**:

1 Peter 1:6-8: “In this you rejoice [ἀγαλλιάω, *to be exceedingly joyful, to exult*], though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ so that [*purpose clause: here's the purpose for these trials*] the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.”

“Joy that is inexpressible!” Inexpressible joy! So wonderful, *so profound that it cannot be communicated!* And where is this joy being experienced? Right in the midst of ‘necessary,’ divinely appointed, undeserved suffering!

⁹ Kelly, J. N. D., *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude*, Black's NT Commentary (London: Continuum, 1969), p. 53.

¹⁰ Marshall, I. Howard, *1 Peter*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), *ad loc.*

¹¹ Best, Ernest, *1 Peter*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), *ad loc.*

¹² Davids, Peter H., *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), pp. 54–55.

How Mature Believers Think About Suffering

- 1) So, ‘τέλειος believers’ are believers who have achieved the goal of Christian adulthood. They no longer *cry* like spiritual infants when they don’t get their way or like their circumstances. They no longer *talk* like foolish children.

They say, with Paul, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (1 Corinthians 13:11). They are able to face suffering with joy *because they’ve discerned God’s purpose in it*.

In fact, they may understand God’s purposes so well that they long for the high privilege of being allowed to suffer for the glory of God.

- 2) The Apostle Paul came to this place in the course of time and He serves as an extraordinary example of how mature believers think about suffering – not as spiritual children who cry when it hurts, but as spiritual adults who see the hand of God in everything they encounter.

✠ In **Galatians 2:20**, Paul made an astonishing declaration: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” He is essentially saying, ‘I am dead to myself and alive only to Jesus.’ He had come to hate his life in Adam (**John 12:25**).

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Even though I’ve died – ‘I’ve been crucified with Christ’ – I am VERY MUCH ALIVE! The difference is, “the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

✠ Then, in **Philippians 1:20-21, 23b-24**, Paul wrote, from a prison cell in Rome,

“It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain ... My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. ²⁴ But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.”

Notice: Paul looked with a wistful eye toward the *sublime reward of simply being with Jesus*.

- ✠ And then, in perhaps the most significant and insightful passage in the New Testament on Christian suffering, Paul detailed his many trials.

Though his opponents *spoke* with lofty words, Paul had validated the truth of the message the Lord Himself had delivered to him by *suffering* for Jesus severely!

He writes that he has experienced “far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I am not weak?” **(2 Corinthians 11:23-29)**

And yet, through all that suffering there was work to be done and Paul knew that, ultimately, *Jesus always gives us the victory!*

“But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?” **(2 Corinthians 2:14-16)**

That’s what we do when we share the Gospel, you know: we spread the “aroma of Christ,” which is a fragrance of death to those who are perishing, and a fragrance of life to those who are being saved **(2 Corinthians 2:16)**.

But in all of this, Paul asks a question that we all need to ask ourselves: “Who is sufficient for these things?” **(2 Corinthians 2:16b)**

Good question! Who *is* sufficient for these things? Who can endure suffering like this and still be joyful? Who can share the Gospel knowing that our words will seal the doom of those who reject it?

Just after saying, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (**Philippians 1:20**), Paul talked about the Gospel as “a clear sign to [those who reject it] of their destruction,” – but a clear sign to believers of their salvation” (**Philippians 1:28b**).

And it’s immediately after saying this that Paul writes, “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake ...” (**Philippians 1:29**).

So, who *is* sufficient for these things? The answer is: *none of us are*.

We can say with Paul, “Who is weak, and I am not weak?” (**2 Corinthians 11:23-29**)

But we can also say with Paul, “[T]hanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (**1 Corinthians 15:57**).

The same one who asked, “Who is sufficient for these things,” also declared, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (**Philippians 4:13**).

This is the reason *remaining* in the filling of the Spirit is so important. It is He and He alone who can make us sufficient for these things and bring us to the expected end, the **τέλειος** of spiritual maturity.

Amen?