

**THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO SUFFERING**  
**PHILIPPIANS 1:12-20**  
**BY ANDY MANNING**

The title of this sermon is “The Christian Response to Suffering.”

There’s something I know about you. You are headed for trouble. You are headed for hard times. That’s just life. You are headed for suffering, pain, adversity, and trouble of some kind. It could be sickness; it could be disease; it could be a major injury; it could be relational problems – a wayward child, separation, divorce, adultery; it could be financial problems – layoffs, unemployment; it could be a natural disaster – lightning striking your house and burning it to the ground; it could be a tornado, or a hurricane, or a flood. It could be something legal – someone could accuse you of wrongdoing, or someone could sue you. There’s just an infinite number of things that can go wrong in this world. And you will face hard times in the years to come.

And the natural response to suffering is to seek relief. Try to find a way to ease the pain; to cure the disease; to solve the problem; to find comfort; to survive.

That’s the natural response to suffering, and that’s the way the people of this world, non-Christians respond to suffering.

But Christians respond to suffering much differently.

It’s not that we don’t seek relief; we do seek relief; we do seek comfort; we do seek a cure;

but that’s not our primary focus; that’s not our primary goal; finding relief is secondary. There’s something else that we focus on first and foremost.

We’re going to see an example of the Christian response to suffering in the life of the apostle Paul.

Turn to **Philippians 1:12-20** (CSB).

12 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually advanced the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard, and to everyone else, that my imprisonment is because I am in Christ.

Paul is in prison in Rome.

How did that happen?

After Paul's third missionary journey, he sensed God calling him to return to Jerusalem. So he traveled from Corinth to Jerusalem.

Not long after arriving, he was accused of being an enemy of Judaism, and so he was arrested.

But to make sure that he was given a fair trial, Paul appealed to Caesar (he wanted Caesar to hear his case).

So Paul was transported to Rome, where he was put under house arrest. So he had his own house, but he was under arrest. He was chained to a Roman guard day and night. But he was allowed to write letters, and receive visitors.

And so Paul is reassuring the Philippians believers, who were worried about him, that his imprisonment in Rome has led to the advancement of the gospel. God has used it for the good of the gospel.

And then he says that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard that his imprisonment is because he is in Christ.

What does that mean? In other words, everyone found out eventually that Paul was not a criminal; he hadn't broken a law; he was in jail because of his preaching about Jesus Christ.

Notice the term “imperial guard.” These were the elite Roman soldiers who were stationed in Rome and who guarded Caesar’s palace. These were also the men who were charged with guarding Paul. That’s an important group.

How has Paul’s imprisonment served to advance the gospel?

**First**, he was able to preach the gospel to the imperial guard; to the most important, the most elite soldiers in the Roman army.

The **second** reason is found in the next verse.

14 Most of the brothers have gained confidence in the Lord from my imprisonment and dare even more to speak the word fearlessly.

The **second** way that Paul’s imprisonment was serving to advance the gospel was that Paul’s courage was causing the other Christians in Rome to witness for Christ fearlessly.

So what is Paul doing here?

He is showing the Philippian Christians how God works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

He is showing them that God takes the bad, and he uses it for His glory and our good.

15 To be sure, some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of good will. 16 These preach out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel; 17 the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, thinking that they will cause me trouble in my imprisonment. 18 What does it matter? Only that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is proclaimed, and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice 19

because I know this will lead to my salvation through your prayers and help from the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

So some Christians were preaching the gospel with good motives, but some were preaching with bad motives.

Apparently there were some Christians in Rome who did not like Paul, and they were speaking against him. But either way, they were preaching the gospel, and so Paul was still able to rejoice.

20 My eager expectation and hope is that I will not be ashamed about anything, but that now as always, with all courage, Christ will be highly honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

Now notice what Paul is saying here. Paul is saying that

his eager expectation and hope – his deepest desire, his top priority, his main focus

– was that he would not be ashamed about anything – that he would not fail Christ

– but that with all courage and boldness – speaking up for Christ without hesitation, without holding back

– Christ would be highly honored in his body, whether by life or by death.

The word “highly honored” is the Greek word *magalyno*. It means to enlarge, or to magnify, to make great, or to show to be great.

So to honor Christ is to make Him look great by displaying His character through our lives.

So Paul is saying that his primary focus while he is in prison is not to get out of prison, it is not to escape a martyr’s death – even though I’m sure he

would appreciate those things. But his eager expectation and hope, his deepest desire, his top priority, his main focus, is on honoring Christ – making Christ look great by displaying God’s character through His life.

That’s the Christian response to suffering.

**The Christian response to suffering is not seeking relief for self, but bringing honor to Christ.**

**It is not avoiding pain, but advancing the gospel.**

**It is not seeking comfort, but showing Christ.**

Again, it’s not wrong to seek relief and comfort and pain avoidance. But that’s not our priority; that’s not our main focus; that’s not our deepest desire. Our primary focus is on honoring Christ.

**1 Corinthians 10:31** says, “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.”

To glorify God is the same thing as honoring Him. It is to make Him look great by displaying His character through our lives.

The Bible says that we are to do everything for the glory of God – even activities as simple as eating and drinking.

And many Christians get this. They understand this. But when they suffer, they forget about this.

Or they think that they can take a break from glorifying God. Under normal circumstances, they focus on glorifying God. But in times of suffering, their focus is on finding relief. And God understands, right? No!

Paul is showing us in Philippians 1 that our main focus in suffering does not change. Even when we are suffering, our primary focus in suffering should be honoring Christ.

Now let's talk about how to do this practically. I can think of four actions you can take to honor Christ in your suffering.

#### **4 Ways to Honor Christ in Your Suffering**

##### **1. Rejoice in the Lord always.**

We're going to come back to this soon, because three times in the book of Philippians we are commanded to rejoice in the Lord.

In **Philippians 3:1** Paul writes, "Rejoice in the Lord."

And then in **Philippians 4:4** he says it twice. "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"

What does it mean to rejoice? **It means to celebrate. We are to walk through life with a celebratory, joyful, happy, enthusiastic attitude and countenance.**

What are we to rejoice about? We are to rejoice in the Lord. In other words, we are to celebrate Christ – who He is, what He's done, and all the blessings that we have as Christians.

When are we to rejoice? "Always." Always! In the good times, and when we are suffering.

Why? Because rejoicing in the Lord, especially in times of suffering, shows the watching world that all you need to be happy is Christ. That Christ is enough. That even if you are suffering, and everything else in your life is not right, you are full of joy because you are right with God. That's why rejoicing in the Lord always honors Christ. It shows how great He is.

The world is searching for happiness. It's our mission to show them that the key to happiness is Jesus. And the best way to do that is to show them that if you have Christ, you can be full of joy, even in times of suffering.

Now that's easier said than done. If you've ever tried to rejoice in the Lord always, then you know it's not easy. How do you do it? Let me give you some tips to help you rejoice in the Lord always.

**First, take time every day to give thanks.**

**1 Thessalonians 5:18** says, "Give thanks in everything, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."

When you give thanks, you will be reminded that even though you are suffering, you still have it better than you deserve. Even though you are going through a hard time, you are still surrounded by blessings from God.

**Second, take time every day to praise God.** You can do this in song, or in prayer. But praise God for His attributes. He is almighty. He is in control. He is all-knowing. He is everywhere. He sees and hears everything. He is all-loving. He is good.

When you praise God, you will be reminded that God is bigger than your problem, and that He is in control, and that He loves you, even though He is letting you suffer for a while.

This is what Paul and Silas did in Acts 16. When they were in Philippi they were arrested, stripped naked, and beaten with rods. Then they were put in prison with their feet in the stocks.

But what did Paul and Silas do? They were probably too uncomfortable to sleep, so at midnight in prison they were praying and singing hymns to God. And so God caused an earthquake that busted open the prison doors and broke off all their chains (Acts 16:25-27)!

### **Third, take time every day to pray.**

**Philippians 4:6** says, “Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

What are you praying for? Pray first and foremost for the strength and wisdom to honor Christ in your suffering. But also pray for the ability to rejoice always. And also pray for relief.

### **Fourth, take time for regular Christian fellowship.**

**Hebrews 10:24** says, “And let us watch out for one another to provoke love and good works, 25 not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

One of the best things you can do when you are going through a hard time is to gather with church family.

Let them encourage you. Ask for prayer. Ask for advice. Ask for a listening ear. This will cheer you up and help you to rejoice.

### **Fifth, take time every day to read the word.** Stay in the word. That’s so important.

**Colossians 3:16** says, “Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you.”

The word will give you the strength to rejoice more than anything else.

It will remind you of God’s attributes – He is loving, almighty, and in total control.

It will remind you of God’s promises – He has a plan and is working everything out for your good.

The word will remind you that suffering is the normal Christian experience – that all God’s servants suffer.

It will remind you that in just a little while you will go to heaven, where there is no suffering, no sin, and no sadness.

Do those five things and you will have the strength you need to rejoice in the Lord always.

## **2. Keep serving God.**

When you are suffering it’s easy to focus all of your energy and attention on yourself and to stop serving God and people.

It’s natural to try to take a break from serving God and others.

But God doesn’t want you to do that. Suffering is not an excuse to take a break from serving God. We never stop serving God.

That’s what Paul did. When Paul went to prison, He didn’t stop serving the Lord. In prison he kept sharing the gospel. He wrote several of the books that are in the Bible, including the book of Philippians. This book was written when Paul was suffering.

When you keep serving in suffering, you are honoring Christ because you are displaying His strength. You are showing the world that you can do all things through Christ, who gives you strength.

You are also showing God’s great love. The world doesn’t expect you to serve others when you are going through a hard time. You get a pass. And so when you keep serving God and others while you are suffering, it shows how much you love God, and how much you love people. And you can tell people the source of your great love.

Serve God when you are sick; when you are in the hospital; when you are in the courtroom; when you are in jail; when you are at the funeral home; serve God in your suffering.

### **3. Stay holy.**

Remember, the natural thing to do when you are suffering is to seek relief and comfort. And the easiest way to do that is by running to sin – drugs and alcohol, sexual sin, stealing, dishonesty, cheating, etc.

But don't do that. Stay holy in your suffering.

**1 Peter 1:15-16** says, “14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires of your former ignorance. 15 But as the one who called you is holy, you also are to be holy in all your conduct; 16 for it is written, Be holy, because I am holy.”

When you stay holy in your suffering you are showing the world that all you need for comfort and relief is Jesus. He gives you all the peace, and the joy, and the strength that you need to endure anything.

### **4. Be kind.**

The more it hurts, the harder it is to be kind.

When we are in pain, it's easy to lose our temper, to be short with people, to be harsh, to be sarcastic, to insult people, to cut in line, to hang up on people, to not return phone calls or emails. It's easy to be rude; to be a jerk.

And it's easy to justify it, because we're going through a hard time.

But if we're going to honor Christ in our suffering, then we need to be kind, even in our suffering.

**Ephesians 4:31-32** says, “31 Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice. 32 And be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another, just as God also forgave you in Christ.”

We’re not commanded to be kind and compassionate just when life is great; we’re called to live like that all the time. Even in our suffering we need to be kind to others with our words actions.

And this will honor Christ because it will show His strength working through us.

It is natural, even understandable when people act like jerks when they are suffering. And that’s why it will get people’s attention when someone is kind, and nice, and sweet, and considerate, and gentle, even when they are going through a really hard time. People will marvel at you. And you can tell them that your strength and your love comes from Christ.

## **CONCLUSION**

And so what’s the Christian response to suffering?

**It is not seeking relief for yourself, but brining honor to Christ.**

It’s okay to seek relief; it’s good to do that. It’s good to try to find comfort, and healing, and security. But that’s not primary. That’s not the priority. That’s not the main thing for the Christian.

For the Christian, the main thing is honor Christ – to show how Christ great Christ is by displaying His character through your life. And to do that while you are suffering.