

## You Were Called to This

“The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” You know those words. It’s probably one of the most well-known passages of the Bible. You may have it in paintings at home or it’s painted in your memory knowing parts by heart. It’s a favorite for many and we turn to it for comfort and encouragement. The Lord is my shepherd I shall not want. What these words are saying is: “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be lacking.” This is the promise we have as the Lord being our Good Shepherd: I will lack nothing. I will have everything that I need with him because he is my Good Shepherd and yours. No matter what the situation might be, this remains true especially with what Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:19-25: **“For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. <sup>20</sup> But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. <sup>21</sup> To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”<sup>23</sup> When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. <sup>24</sup> “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” <sup>25</sup> For “you were like sheep going astray,”<sup>[f]</sup> but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.”**

I don’t want to hear this. It makes me uncomfortable because this is not how I so often operate. If you are honest, I don’t think you want to hear it either. Patient suffering. Enduring. Not retaliating when we’ve been wronged. Suffering is a good thing. But you were called to this.

The apostle Peter is writing to a group of Christians who are all too familiar with suffering. Because they were Christians and they followed Jesus they were persecuted. Life was not easy. When he gets to this section Peter has an even more specific group in mind. In verse 18 he says, **“Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.”** Slaves—the word holds a lot of baggage today. But in Peter’s day, slavery was a common reality in the Roman Empire. Peter is addressing slaves who had no choice and often were treated quite poorly. Instead of telling them to run or try and get away from this, he tells them submit. He tells them to follow the example of Jesus!

Whew...good thing that’s not me...right? Well, Jesus tells us, “Love your neighbor as yourself...Love each other as I have loved you!” The second half of this reading

shows us that love. It's Sacrificial. Selfless. Love that is taken for granted and taken advantage of. Undeserving—that's how Jesus loved you. Then you think about the fact that my neighbor is not just those people I like and get along with; it's especially our enemies, those who make our lives difficult and frustrating. We are called to love them. Serve them. Put him and her before yourself. So, yes, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, this is what you are called to do!

Now we might hear these words and start thinking: I know someone who really needs to hear this! I know someone too: that's you. That's me. Few things upset us more than when we suffer and it's quite clearly not fair. It's especially difficult when we suffer for doing the right, God-pleasing thing. So easily we wonder, "What's the point?" There's that powerful desire to get revenge, to get back at them, and to make it even in some way. We want justice. We want things to be made right. And when it isn't we open our mouths to complain, spread rumors, say anything, thinking it will make us feel better. Instead of willingly suffering, we want to make sure they know not to mess with someone like me. It's a point of pride they know how long someone like you can hold onto a grudge. And then we hold onto that grudge and can be so petty about things.

We have every right to do this, don't we? After all, she hurt you. He hurt someone you love who you now have to watch suffer. It's not fair; you were just trying to do the right thing. I shouldn't have to deal with this, should I? I've already dealt with so much, haven't I? God doesn't seem to be doing anything; someone has to pay. What if I keep on being taken advantage of? What about my rights, my freedoms? Someone has to make this right. They did that; I should be able to do this!

Ah, but that's how this world and people in this world operate. You've been called out of that. In fact, you've already died to it so that it shouldn't be of interest to you and almost a foreign concept. That's not you anymore. That was drowned in those baptismal waters and died with Jesus on the cross. Yes, we struggle with it. But that's not you. You are only lying to yourself when you say, "But it feels good to get even." That way only leads to more pain and eventually death. You've been called to this: **"because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."**<sup>22</sup> **"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."**<sup>23</sup> **When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.**<sup>24</sup> **"He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed."**<sup>25</sup> For **"you were like sheep going astray,"**<sup>[1]</sup> **but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (21-25).**

I haven't suffered like you. You haven't suffered like me. But it's not a competition. The suffering is real. It hurts. It's hard. At the same time Peter says it is grace—that is God's undeserved love, his gift—when we suffer for doing good and endure under the cross. It may seem like it to so many others but no one is getting by with anything. We aren't saying it's okay to be treated like that. That's on their head and one day they will answer for it. But it's not your job to make sure that happens. This is what you are called to do: we follow Jesus' example and trust the one who judges justly. No one is getting by with anything. We are taking it off our hands and placing it into God's hands trusting he will make it right.

You, on the other hand, were called to this: when you were baptized the cross was placed on your head and heart marking you as God's child and as a follower of Jesus that's what we are called to do: carry the cross. We are called to suffer. There is no need for us to go seeking out this suffering. You don't need to make it more difficult than it already is. But when we do suffer and endure, this is God's gift as he keeps us in the faith that relies solely on him and his goodwill. If we act like everyone else, why would they want anything to do with what we have to share; that is, the Good News of what Jesus has done? How you react to suffering shares some of the strongest messages to the world around us. When we follow Jesus' example, you are showing these aren't just words that say you believe; this is who you are as God's child.

Admittedly, this all sounds like it is too much. It sounds unfair. Then when we know how often we have already failed, we still wonder, "What's the point?" Thanks be to God Jesus is more than just an example who does it and says, "Copy me." Instead, he says, "I did it all for you. Follow me" He took your place. He committed no sin, yet there he is sentenced to death on a cross. They tried their best to accuse him, but there was no deceit or lies in his mouth. He doesn't open his mouth to defend himself. He doesn't need to; he knows where he stands with God. When they beat him, he turns the other cheek. Instead of retaliating, he prays, "Father, forgive them." You hear no warning threat from his lips that they don't know who they are messing with or threats to watch out what's going to happen to them. Instead, we hear him tell a thief who not too long before had been making fun of him, "Today you will be with me in paradise." Jesus had done nothing wrong. But God forsakes his own not sparing his Son any suffering for your sin he bears in his body on that cross. He has to; he's the just judge who cannot ignore sin but must punish for it! But by Jesus' wounds, you are healed. Your shameful sin that leaves you feeling dirty. Sin—done to you and done by you—leaves serious damage. Sin leaves us scarred. Broken. By his wounds, we are healed. By his

precious blood that pours from him, he washed your shame away. By his wounds, you are made whole. By his wounds, I'm not broken. You have been healed.

Yes, we were sheep going astray, wandering aimlessly looking for direction and purpose. And there's your Good Shepherd who came so that we may have life and have it to the full. He lays down his life for the sheep and picks it back up again. He knows his sheep; he calls you by name. And because he lives, you shall not be lacking. He is the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul. Nothing is getting past him. He knows how you suffer; he's endured it too. So, there he is leading you on paths of righteousness. When we stray, he calls us back. When we fall, he picks us up again and forgives. When we are struggling and stumbling, he comes to give your weary soul rest and peace. Surrounded by enemies—the devil with his empty promises and bold-face lies, this sinful world with all its temptations, your own sinful nature that clings to you until the grave—your Good Shepherd prepares a table for you: take and eat. Here is his body wounded to heal you. Take and drink. Here is his blood poured out for you. He insists you receive it for forgiveness and strengthening of faith. He gives it to us as he leads us through this dark valley of death. But we need not fear any evil. He is the overseer of your soul. He's leading, guarding, and protecting you. And one day, we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

We aren't there yet. And so, he calls us together into a church—God's House here—where he guards and protects you. He gathers us together so you do not suffer alone. You have brothers and sisters to support one another, to love, to encourage, especially under the pain of unjust suffering. One day we will be out of this and there be no more suffering. We aren't there yet. So, we trust the one who judges justly that because he gave us Jesus, he will give us every good thing. We trust the one who made us right with God, will one day make everything else right too. The single most important relationship you have in your life is with Jesus, your Good Shepherd. He always does what he promises. He's with you always to lead through this life to bring you to live with him forever. May your Good Shepherd continue to lead you and guide you all the days of your life. Amen.