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Friend Request #3 When You Need a Friend

- you don't have to be a Christian long before you learn that being a follower of Jesus definitely includes periods of suffering...
 - one of the stranger heresies to spring out of one segment of the evangelical church is commonly known as the health and wealth movement...the notion that if you just have enough faith...you and your loved ones will never be sick and never be poor...
 - that's how some of the better known people in these movements justify such lavish lifestyles...they teach that material blessing is an evidence of their great faith...
 - that's a sermon all in itself, I suppose...but the point is – taking that position would require you to ignore massive amounts of Scripture in both the old and new testaments...
- here's a couple of random examples...**Matthew 10:22 - You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved.**
 - that same concept is repeated in all four gospels...so Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all practiced full disclosure of this issue...
- then there's Paul – who said -- **2 Timothy 3:12 - Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**
- at the risk of piling on here – Peter said the same thing -- **1 Peter 4:12 - Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;**
- being a follower of Christ definitely includes periods of suffering...for all of us...
- here's the question I'd like to ask you this morning...is God's plan that we would suffer together...or that we would suffer alone?...
 - another way of asking that is – what is the relationship between suffering well...and both having, and being a good friend?...
- a local church is the perfect setting to raise these questions...
 - because week after week, we hear news of a brother or sister who is suffering...
 - and we have the opportunity to enter into that experience with them in a variety of ways...
 - the last couple of weeks we've been asking you to pray for Jamie and Jamie Johnson and their newly adopted daughter Madilyn...
 - they've been at Riley hospital this week...
- Madilyn has gone through a series of surgeries just to make it easier for her to breathe. Some of you have been in that exact same situation with your infant—where your little baby is hooked up to all these tubes, monitors, and machines. It can really break your heart. But by God's grace, Jamie and Jamie have worked hard both to have—and to be—good friends to a number of people in this church over the years. And that in turn is helping them now as they go through this period of suffering.
- 'Mrs. Jamie' was just telling me yesterday, "What a wonderful thing it is to have such great friends in our lives! We have had meals and babysitting provided, gift cards given, notes of encouragement and phone calls and visits. We are truly blessed and never feel alone in our trial. One thing that we have learned is that friendships that have been made in the past are only strengthened in a trial. It is so important to be a good friend and have good friends so that when the pressure of life is on you, you aren't alone! God is so good to us and have given us blessings in trial that are not to be believed!"

- we're in the middle of a series right now entitled...**Friend Request....**
 - we're thinking about what the Bible teaches us about the art of real friendships...
 - this morning we'd like to focus on this...**When You Need a Friend, Because Two is Better Than One...**
- with that in mind, please open your Bible to 1 Peter chapter 1...[page 180 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you...]
- this is a great book to direct our thoughts this morning because Peter is writing to a group of people he describes as aliens...men and women who are scattered around the Roman empire because of the growing persecution of God's people...
- and Peter has never been the kind of person who minced words...or was afraid to address the issue at hand...
 - so he speaks openly about suffering...mentioning it in our English versions at least 15 times in one book, using at least 8 different Greek words...
 - but what is especially important for us to understand is that he does so in the context of an equally strong emphasis on the power of the community...the people who are...
 - 1 Peter 2:5 - ...being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**
- so that's what we're asking ourselves...how do the themes of suffering and friendship fit together?...
 - are two really better than one?...
 - and if so, what are the implications to the way people like you and me live?...
- now here's the dilemma I face at this point of the message...how much of this book should I read right now...because truthfully, an incredible percentage of this entire book applies in one way, shape or form to the issues we've raised...
- but here's what we're going to do...for sake of time...we're going to read selected portions beginning at chapter 1...
 - but then I'm going to assume that you have at least a working knowledge of the rest of the book as we proceed...
 - and if that's not the case for you, I hope I'll whet your appetite to the point that you'll say – I want to study that book a lot more thoroughly in my personal Bible study time...
 - because honestly, 1 Peter is the kind of book you could read once a week and find great profit...
- so let's dig in...read 1:1-2:3, 3:13-18, 4:1-10, 12-19...
- now, with the time we have remaining, let's look for **3 principles to help us have a friend, and be a friend, during times of suffering.**

I. God Calls Upon His People to Suffer Well.

- as I mentioned earlier, by the time Peter writes, the persecution of the church, at least in parts of the Roman empire, is heating up...
- and as we saw earlier...all of that had been clearly predicted by Jesus and recorded by each of the gospel writers...
- none of this was a surprise to the Lord or to those who carefully considered what it meant to become one of Christ's followers...
 - **Luke 9:23 - And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.**

- Luke 14:27 - Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple.

- people in that culture understood that a cross was not a nice piece of jewelry worn around a person's neck...it was a cruel and painful instrument of death...
- and now those words are coming true for men and women in the church...
- but what we find amazingly is not a group of people who are heading for the exits...but instead, a victorious army who are learning what it means to suffer well together...
- that is an essential aspect of the call of God...
- why?...how could God expect so much of His children?...what themes did we see as we were reading the text?...

A. Because of our new birth so mercifully given.

- 1 Peter 1:3 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again...

- that same idea was repeated in...
- **1 Peter 1:23 - for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God.**
- the Lord can expect much from us because we are simply not the same people we were before we came to Christ...
- our entire constitution is new...
- **2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.**
- including the fact that you are now in Christ, and He is in you...you have new life coursing inside your veins...
- the Holy Spirit has taken up residence inside of you...
- and according to this passage – that was an act of tremendous mercy...[His saving you....do you still believe that]...
- so when God allows periods of suffering for His children, it's not to knock us down--- it's an opportunity for us to demonstrate the power of the new birth...what Christ can and will do in and through us...
- that's why Paul also said -- **Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.**
- that is a powerful combination...which is why Paul would also make the outlandish claim that...**1 Corinthians 10:13 - No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.**
- you who?...
- you, as a person who has been born again at the hand of a merciful God...

- of course that begs the question of whether you have ever had a definite time in your life when you trusted Christ as Savior and Lord and therefore in fact have been born again...
 - but if you haven't....here's my experience as a pastor...
 - many times God uses trials as a way of bringing men and women to Himself...
 - why not let the pain do its work of bringing you to a point of admitting that you're not qualified to handle life on your own...and you're not prepared to someday

meet a God whose qualification for entrance to heaven is perfect righteousness...

- you need a Savior who can pay for your sin, and whose righteousness can be placed on your account...and whose Spirit will take up residence in you and make you the new person you desperately long to be?...
- once that decision is made, you finally have access to resources that enable you to suffer well..

B. Because of the hope we have in the resurrection.

- **1 Peter 1:3 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,**
- Peter is helping these men and women see that they are anything but hopeless, passive victims...
- what defines their existence is not what other people are doing to them...
- but its instead, how their resurrected Savior is drawing them closer to Himself in the midst of their suffering, and conforming them progressively into His image...and why/how they can therefore have great hope...
- in other words, they are learning to preach the gospel to themselves....right now, as followers of Christ today...
 - what are the present day implications of the gospel right now for me as I suffer?....
 - how does the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ affect what is happening to me today?...
- Paul said it this way in **Romans 6:11 - Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.**
- think about the “but alive” part of that verse...
- **Ephesians 1:18-20 - I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know...and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,**
- well, when are you and me in the best possible position to learn more about the resurrection power of God?...when we’re suffering...
 - that’s why Peter uses a verse repeatedly that might bother you...a little while...did you notice that....in places like...
- **1 Peter 1:6 - In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,**
- **1 Peter 5:10 - After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.**
- you may hear that and say....just one minute...I’m living with a spouse who very well may never change...do you have any idea how hard that is?...
- or, I or someone I love has a terminal illness...
- how dare any writer of Scripture use the phrase “little while” to describe what I’m going through?...
- here’s the answer – it’s a little while...in comparison to the length of eternity...
- **Romans 8:18 - For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.**

- yes, God calls upon us to suffer well, but He gives us plenty of resources to fulfill that expectation...
- there's plenty of other truth in this text...let me just highlight a couple of other emphases...

C. Because of the assurance of our salvation.

- **1 Peter 1:4-5 - to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**
- I was talking to someone who was recently robbed...and he said, I feel so violated...
- and that may be the way God has called upon you to suffer right now...someone has stolen something from you....or you may stand to lose something that is very valuable to you...
- well, here's the bottom line...you have all sorts of assets that person can never touch...if you know Christ as Savior and Lord, your salvation is imperishable and undefiled...
- you can stick your tongue out at trials and say, nah, nah, nah...

D. Because this demonstrates the genuineness of our faith.

- **1 Peter 1:7 - so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;**
- **Warren Wiersbe said – A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted.**
- and that's true...
- that's one of the reasons we can rejoice during times of trial...because if we handle them well...it proves the truthfulness of what we believe...
- did you see that emphasis?...
- **1 Peter 1:6 - In this you greatly rejoice...**
- **1 Peter 1:8-9 - ...you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.**

- now, if you really believe all of this, where does it lead?...the answer is..straight to your heart...

E. Because you can cultivate your inner man to handle suffering like an obedient child of God.

- **1 Peter 1:13-14 - Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance,**
- see, the circumstances around you may be raging in ways that are completely out of control...and truthfully, from your perspective, they are outside of your ability to control or change...but where does that leave you?...
- in possession of a heart....an inner man that can be growing and maturing in a way that is very much characterized by the Spirit's fruit of self-control...
- in fact, that fruit often grows best in the hothouse of great trial...
- **2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at**

the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- now, I realize you might say right about now...but I can't do all of this...in a sense...you're right...you can't do this...alone...you were never designed to suffer by yourself...
- that is why there is also such a heavy parallel emphasis in this book on the issue of community...
- living life together...
 - admitting that you need friends during times of trials...
 - and attempting to become the kind of friend where you can share burdens that are too heavy for them to bear alone...and here's the principle...

II. There's Nothing Quite like the Beauty and Power of Suffering Together.

- did you notice that emphasis in the passage as we were reading?

A. Choose to fervently love one another.

- **1 Peter 1:22 - Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart,**
- now, that has to be taken in context with the background of the book, and the overall theme of God's people suffering....
- sure we should fervently love one another in all sorts of ways and all sorts of times...
- but a key point is...are we learning to do that as we suffer?...

- one of the challenges in American Christianity is that a person can come in and out of church and never really be connected to the body and never really be in a position where they are fulfilling the clear command of this text...we are to choose to fervently love one another...
- and I would just ask every person here this morning – is there evidence in your life that you are doing that?...that you are consciously sacrificing yourself and seeking to build stronger friendships and relationships with the men and women in our church family?...
- and if not, God's Word would want you to start...
 - and I understand that's hard in a group this size...
 - that's why we have all these smaller groups...[ABF's, connection groups, FCI, Point Man, Ladies Bible studies, etc.]

- and when this is done well, it can be a beautiful picture...
- there are so many stories that flood my mind when I say that – that's one of the great aspects of having a long-term pastorate...I've seen this happen a lot...
- I remember when one of our members, Dave Shaw was diagnosed with brain cancer...
- he was in ICU and the nurses said it was OK for us to bring a large group of people in...
 - and Dave and his wife Amy had been such delightful servants of God here that there were all sorts of people who wanted to be with them in their hour of need...
 - and one of the things we did was just sing a number of hymns a cappella...it was absolutely beautiful...
 - his friends literally sang him into heaven...

- can you imagine how sad it would be for a man and his wife to suffer like that...alone?...
- yet that often happens in the world...but it should never happen in the church...

- and please note this...

B. This is a matter of the heart.

- **1 Peter 1:22** - ...**ferverently love one another from the heart,**
- this is a choice you make in your inner man...
- and if you would say – but I struggle so badly with selfishness and only caring about my own thing...
- we all do...which is why we should...

C. Let God’s living and enduring Word guide you in this way.

- that’s why this chapter ends the way it does...
- **1 Peter 1:23-2:2** - **for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. For, “ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” And this is the word which was preached to you. Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow...**

- so what does all of this mean?...here it is in a nutshell...

D. Never forget that two are better than one.

- **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12** - **Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.**

- now, what do we do with this?

III. Takes Steps Now to be Best Prepared when Suffering Comes to You or Others

A. Be honest about your need for friends.

- this rugged American individualism has no place in the church of Jesus Christ...
- please think about the passage we just read from Eccles.
 - my question to you is – do you agree?....
 - and do the habits of your life show that you agree?
 - what have you done this quarter to take steps toward Living Life Together?...

B. Look for opportunities to share in the sufferings of others.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 - **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.**