



Empowering People to Change the World

## **Bring It On – Finding Meaning in Suffering**

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We are going to say the Apostles Creed today. One of the Great Creeds of the Church. I want you to note at one point, we say “I believe in the holy catholic church,” does not mean the Roman Catholic Church, but the word catholic means *universal church*.

## **The Apostles Creed**

**I believe in God,  
the Father almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth,  
and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried;  
He descended into hell;  
on the third day He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;  
from there He will come to judge the living and the dead.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting.  
Amen.**

**My thesis: As a Christian, if you want to live a Life of Meaning; if you want a Life of Truth; if you want the Authentic Life, you will have to Choose a Life of Suffering.**

- Why do we go to movies that scare us?
- Why do we choose to run a marathon and push our bodies to the limit of endurance?
- Why do we choose to fast and pray?
- Why do we lift weights to the point of failure? Three, four, or five times each week?

- Because we know that meaning, purpose, and truth is found in suffering!

**If there is no struggle, there is no progress.**

**-Frederick Douglas, Former slave and leader of the Abolitionist Movement**

**We need Pain and Suffering to Live Rich and Happy Lives!**

- It's learning to stand up for righteousness.
- It's learning to being a witness for Christ.
- It's modelling who Christ is to the world

**Bring it On! Why we Rejoice in Suffering?**

**Verse 12**

**“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you.”**

- Trials, suffering, and difficulties are not strange. They are a normal part of life. Whether you are a follower of Christ or not, you will go through trials and suffering.
- In the life of a Jesus follower, trials are put there to test you. Yes, God is more concerned about your holiness than your happiness.

### **1. Rejoice in Suffering because you are Passing God's Tests and Building Character**

- God tests us: integrity tests, honesty tests, fidelity tests, and faithfulness tests. No one knows most of God's tests. Only we do.
- “Fiery” is the Greek word *pyrosis*. It's the fire that melts medals down. A refiner's fire. Building character by burning off selfishness, self-centeredness, and our callous thinking.

**“We glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope. Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:3-5).**

- The man or woman of character is one who understands perseverance. They know the suffering of not quitting. It's in not quitting that godly character is formed.

### **Untested Character is an Oxymoron. Character is only Built through Passing God's Tests**

- God tests us through fiery trials. We can choose to run from them or embrace them.
- Character is ONLY forged through hardships.
- If you've ever been around a spoiled child, a person who has always gotten whatever they wanted, you see the selfishness and ingratitude and usually a life of privilege with nothing to show for it.
- But when you get around someone who has been through great suffering and pain, but found Christ, the cross, and the meaning of their suffering, we find one who is full of joy, power, and peace.

### **Embrace Fiery Trials and God will Build the Character of Christ into You.**

- Honesty comes from not lying.
- Truth comes through knowing falsehood.
- The fiery trials of sin bring a passion for holiness.

### **Verse 13**

**“But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”**

### **2. Rejoice in Suffering because you are Entering into Identity with Christ's Suffering**

- You are identifying with Christ. Your identity is becoming more like that of Christ.
- My life verse, the verse on this pulpit is Galatians 2:20.

**“I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me” (Galatians 2:20).**

**Identity with Christ in suffering brings meaning to our lives.**

**“Jesus said, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost?’” (Luke 9:23-25).**

- For the Christian, meaning in life comes from suffering in life. We choose to identify with Christ.
- The Cross is the center of life. Jesus modelled it. It’s exactly at the Cross that we find the deepest meaning.
- If it wasn’t difficult; if it wasn’t hard; it has no meaning!!

#### **Verse 14**

**“If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed *are you*, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified.”**

### **3. Rejoice in Suffering because the Spirit of God and His Glory Rests upon You**

- Peter gives an example. The Spirit of God is upon those who are willing to suffer through being reproached for Christ.
- The glory of God rests upon those who suffer reproach for righteousness’ sake.
- We arm ourselves for suffering, *bring it on!*

#### **1 Peter 4:1**

**“Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin.”**

- Does that mean I need to just get into some good old-fashioned suffering then I will cease from sin? Not at all. What Peter means is that *suffering* for righteousness' sake is the opposite of sin.
- When we begin to learn to live less for our selfish desires and more for the will and glory of God, we are ceasing from sin.

**“And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Galatians 5:24).**

Two paths for the Christian:

- The path of self or the path of Christ.
- Now listen to what I’m going to say. While the path of self seems at first, to lead to happiness, it leads to more suffering. Because sin goes against the Kingdom of God within you.
- But the path of taking up one’s cross and following Christ is seemingly harder, leads to the abundant life!

**Verse 15-16**

**“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. Yet if *anyone suffers* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter.”**

There is a world of difference between suffering in Christ and suffering in sin.

- Suffering from sin is on you. Look, we’ve all done it and still do it but don’t forget, when we choose sin, we will suffer. Satan, the world, and your own flesh tricks you into sin and thus suffering.
- Your flesh tricks you every time. You think it will be easier and it turns out to be harder.
- Suffering in Christ is where we find richness and meaning. We identify with Christ. We discover meaning through Christ, the Cross, and the Resurrection.

**Turn to James 1:2**

**“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”**

#### **4. Rejoice in Suffering because God is Building into you a Complete Person**

**Survey of a million people. The people were asked, “How hard is your job? How meaningful is your job?”**

- The meaningful jobs were not the jobs of high status.
- Nor were they the jobs that paid the most.
- They were jobs like being an educator, a medical professional, the military, starting one’s own company, that involved struggle and difficulty.

#### **Hardships complete us!**

- We are hardwired for difficulties. God made us to be able to take it. You can take it!

We love the competition of life, the challenge of the possibility of losing.

- No one who gets married doesn’t think it’s going to be difficult.
- No one who decides to have a child doesn’t think it’s going to be hard.
- No one who enters a competition derives motivation if there isn’t the possibility of failing.
- What makes running a triathlon valuable, working out valuable, is that it involves suffering. You derive meaning from suffering.

#### **Verses 17-19**

**“For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now**

**‘If the righteous one is scarcely saved,**

**Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?’**

**Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to *Him* in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.”**

## 5. Rejoice in Suffering because you will be Rewarded by God

- We may not be rewarded in this life, but we will be rewarded by God.
- We commit our souls to Him. We commit our destiny to Him.
- The greatest reward in this life is a clear conscience. Knowing you've done the right thing!

So let me challenge you and myself to look out at the landscape before us and realize troubling times are coming and by faith we are able to say *bring it on* because we understand that God is mightily at work in our lives—building character into us, the glory of God upon us, and completing us to be His disciples.