

# BaptistWay: Stay steadfast in the faith

October 25, 2013

- *The BaptistWay lesson for Nov. 10 focuses on 1 Peter 4:12-5:11.*

## **A summary of suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19)**

The theme of suffering is prevalent throughout 1 Peter. It often is mentioned in a general sense because 1 Peter was written to many different communities. More important than suffering are certain perspectives summed up in 4:12-19 a Christian can have toward suffering. During suffering Peter exhorts his readers to remember: 1) their union with Christ (v. 13); 2) the coming revelation of Christ's glory (v. 13); 3) the blessedness that comes with suffering (v. 14); 4) that suffering can bring glory to God (v. 14); 5) their suffering is different from lawbreakers (v. 15); 6) there is no shame in suffering for Christ (v. 16); and 7) suffering should not diminish your faithfulness to God (v. 19).

Perhaps this last item is the most applicable if we are looking to apply these words with tangible action. The lofty theology in the other points is important and necessary, but this seventh item answers the "so what" question that brings the Bible to life in our everyday world.

One homebound widow I visit who spent her whole life serving God through teaching Sunday school, helping with Girls in Action and supporting the WMU reminds me of what faithfulness looks like even in the midst of loneliness and loss.

After asking about current special projects, mission endeavors and offerings being carried out and chatting about life and general, she always writes a check for her tithe and another for something else church-related.

I tell her the same thing every time: “That’s not why I visited,” only to hear the same response—“It’s one way I can still be of service.”

### **A challenge to elders (5:1-4)**

Peter elaborates on what service in the face of suffering looks like for a couple of different groups in chapter 5. He addresses elders first, which are understood to be the leaders of the church. Baptists equate this term with pastors. It is a tangible reminder that leaders are not perfect and need to be held accountable.

Perhaps the most powerful aspect of this address lies in the fact that Peter identifies himself in this group as he addresses it. In other words, he is saying, “I’m not asking anything of you that I do not strive to do myself.” His remarks demonstrate church leaders have some of the same struggles as ordinary people: 1) being rightly motivated (v. 2); 2) avoiding greed (v. 2); and 3) properly handling authority (v. 3).

I have to admit the first struggle mentioned above hits closest to home for me. As the pastor of a small church, I have to wear many hats. After Sunday school, worship, preaching, mingling and finally eating lunch with family, I rarely want to do anything else.

Visiting homebound people with deacons, speaking at our nursing home service or attending a committee meeting rarely rank high on my list on these days. I was told by one mentor that in order to get things done you sometimes have to divide tasks in your mind into things you want to do and things you get paid to do.

Perhaps this is helpful in getting me through the day, but it fails to meet Peter’s imperative to “be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care ... not because you must, but because you are willing” (v. 2).

### **A challenge to all (5:5-9)**

And what about everyone else? Don't worry, Peter leaves no one out: "All of you clothe yourself with humility toward one another" (v. 5). Humility is the chief characteristic behind all else mentioned in 5:5-9. It enables believers to surrender all anxiety to the Lord (v. 7), to control themselves with alertness to temptation (v. 8), to resist the devil and to stand firm in the faith (v. 9).

Leaders, followers and people in between the two roles need humility to function together as a church. I decided God might be calling me to some kind of church vocation before graduating high school. I'll never forget the summer before I left to go to college when my Sunday school teacher called me and asked me to stop by his house. When I did, he led me into his bedroom, instructed me to take off my shoes and proceeded to wash my feet with a towel and a bowl of water.

My first reaction mirrored Peter's when Jesus offered to do this for him. I jerked back, feeling embarrassed and undeserving, emphatically saying "No!" My teacher insisted, saying this was his way of affirming me and God's call on my life.

This was much more than an affirmation. It was both a lesson and example in humility. If I don't model this kind of humility as a leader, then I can't expect everyone else in my care to understand its value.

### **The result (5:10-11)**

What happens when these challenges are taken seriously in the face of suffering? Peter says "the God of all grace ... after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast" (v. 10).

Suffering must not diminish our faithfulness to God because it is only temporary.