



# We Can Suffer Because Christ -Joey Tomlinson

---

*“Therefore, let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.”*

– Hebrews 13:13

The Hebraic audience needed to hear this. The author of Hebrews is ministering to them as who they are—societal outcasts, persecuted for their new-found faith in Christ.

The author of Hebrews knows their struggles. He knows this congregation intimately, and he is speaking to them specifically to encourage them not to give up; to hold firmly to their profession of faith to the end (Heb. 3:12-14). He is once and for all telling them to abandon Judaism and embrace wholly the Christian faith in spite of their present sufferings.

Most importantly, the Hebraic author is saying, “We can suffer and endure because Christ has suffered and endured.”

## **THE REALITY OF OUR SUFFERING**

While our suffering as American Christians is different than what the early Hebraic church experienced, the exhortation to persevere in the midst of trials and tribulations remains the same.

Many of you reading this are suffering presently at no fault of your own as you deal with:

- Cancer
- The loss of someone you love
- An abusive relationship
- A strained relationship because of your commitment to Christ
- A commitment to a life of celibacy for the glory of God that leaves you feeling lonely at times
- A lost job
- A disability

Your trials can lead you to question your faith. It did for some of those in the Hebraic church, and they lived within the same generation as Christ. We live two thousand years removed from the time of Christ. How much more do we need to be comforted by his Word?

## **A LIFE-SHAPING ENCOUNTER WITH SUFFERING**

I think back to my Grandma Janie. For most of her adult life she was confined to a wheel chair and cared for at a nursing home. She was unable to do many of the tasks I take for granted on a daily basis. Furthermore, she was unable to do many of the things a mother would want to do for her children. She died when I was 17, and I think of her often. I think of her not just because she was my Grandma, but because of how she endured her suffering.

In all my memories, I have not one of her complaining. I have not one memory of her being angry or bitter or unpleasant. My Grandma was joyful, and not in a superficial way. Her joy came from deep within. It was the kind of joy that could be seen and felt by others. As a child, I didn't pay much attention to it, but her life and legacy shaped the way I view suffering. You see, my Grandma Janie didn't *waste* suffering.

My Grandma allowed her suffering to be used as a means by which she could rely more on God. Her intimacy with her Savior was evident. The memory of it is quite vivid to me. She prayed to him. She read the Scriptures. She communed with God, and that intimate communion was evident in her posture and speech. It was evident in the way she prayed for her children. It was evident in the way she suffered until her death.

What was my Grandma Janie's secret? I believe she "went outside the camp" and looked to Christ. Her faithful legacy of suffering reminds me that we can persevere even in immense agony. And we don't have to suffer timidly, barely hanging on. We can suffer with immense joy.

## **COUNT IT ALL JOY**

James taught us this, didn't he? He said, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Jas. 1:2-4).

From a biblical worldview, no suffering is meaningless. God is working in the darkest shadows of our lives to conform us into the image of Jesus. God uses suffering so that he may build us up. Certainly, this is folly to the world, but Christians know that it is true.

Our joy isn't contingent on God changing our circumstances. If that were the case, my Grandma would not have reason to be joyful. Our joy is found in knowing our Savior who suffered. Our joy is found in knowing the Holy Spirit is changing us through our suffering and making us new day by day.

## **FINDING COMFORT THROUGH THE SPIRIT**

The Holy Spirit can minister to you as he did the Hebraic church. The Holy Spirit can minister to you the way he ministered to my Grandma. He is pointing you to your faithful Husband, Christ, who, "has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb. 4:15). The Word reminds God's suffering church that, "For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Jesus endured the worst suffering of all. Every single sin his church would ever commit was laid on him—the sinless, spotless Lamb. And every ounce of God’s wrath was poured out on him.

There is no more wrath left for God’s church.

My brothers and sisters who are suffering: *Look to Christ!* What a treasure it is to suffer as a believer and to declare utter dependence on him!

Go outside the camp and bear the reproach that he endured. Persevere.

### **SEEK THE CITY TO COME**

When we look to Christ and model his perseverance, we can, by the power of the Holy Spirit, seek the city that is to come even in the midst of our suffering.

“For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” – Hebrews 13:14

There is much benefit in meditating on the city that is to come. My whole being aches for this day. This is the city where there is no more suffering or pain. This is a city where people are in awe and consumed for eternity by the glory of God and the supremacy of Christ over all things. This is what the Apostle Paul was looking forward to in Romans 8 when he states,

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. – Romans 8:18-25

Christian, you are not alone. God is near and a very present help in trouble (Ps 46:1). You are his possession. He chose you before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), and you can have confidence in your future inheritance as you joyfully suffer and wait to acquire possession of it (Eph. 1:14).

---

**Joey Tomlinson** lives in Yorktown, VA with his wife, Brayden and their son, Henry Jacob. He has served as a pastor at Coastal Community Church for over 10 years and is pursuing his doctorate in biblical counseling at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also blogs over at *Servants of Grace*.

©2016, Copyright Biblical Counseling Alliance  
May not be copied or reproduced.  
For use by current members.