

Responding To Trouble, Part 2

1 Peter 4:19-5:7

William Tyndale was a theologian and scholar who lived in the early half of the 16th century. He was the first person to take advantage of Guttenberg's printing press to make the Bible available to everyone. However, not everyone was thrilled about his work. When Tyndale was persecuted for translating the Bible into English so that the people could read it, enemies tried to take his life, and did eventually have him strangled and burned at the stake on October 6, 1536. Once he spoke with a friend about his persecution, and this was his calm response to his trouble: "I never expected anything else."

In previous messages from the latter portion of 1 Peter, we discovered some responses we as Christians should make whenever trouble comes into our lives. These are especially important because sometimes the trouble comes from sources we would least expect. So far, here's what we've explored. When trouble comes, we are to

- 1. Rejoice without surprise, 4:12-13*
- 2. Praise God without shame, 4:14-16*
- 3. Commit to the Creator without rebellion, 4:19a*

Today we uncover two additional responses which Peter outlined in his letter.

4 Continue to good without bitterness, 4:19b

Peter knew what might happen to Christians who go through trouble. So he wrote in verse nineteen of chapter four: "*So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.*"

When trouble comes into our lives, too many times we react with bitterness, as if we somehow expected that we would never have difficulty of any kind. We react as though we think that we deserve better than that. And the bitterness we allow to creep in and settle down into the recesses of our hearts and spirits can cause an amazing amount of damage. One author described it this way: "Resentment is the basic problem which keeps most of us torn up on the inside....Anger without resentment is mostly an emotional release. Defeat without resentment is hardly a setback.... But resentment that feeds on the mind and claws at the emotions is doing the work of a cancer in the spirit" (Leslie Parrott, *The Habit of Happiness*).

I've never seen it personally, but I've read that if a rattlesnake is cornered, it will sometimes become so upset that it will turn and bite itself, injecting its own poison into its own body! There's a parallel in us humans: we think we are harming others when we hold grudges and resentments against them, but many times when we strike out at others we are causing much deeper harm to ourselves.

In her book, *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom detailed some of the horrors of the Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany during World War II. Corrie and her sister Betsie had been crowded with ten thousand other women in filthy, degrading conditions. Corrie and Betsie remained faithful to God through all their suffering, and their faith in God became stronger because of their unjust treatment. Everyone was cold, hungry and covered with lice.

One day Betsie was leading a Bible study out in the middle of the rows of beds. A woman called out from her bunk in a scornful tone, and mocked the women as they attempted to worship God. She derisively flung words at them that Christians everywhere in every time have heard: "If your God is such a good God, why does He allow this kind of suffering?"

Not really expecting an answer to that question, the woman on the bunk tore off the bandages and rags that had been clumsily wrapped around her hands. Holding her hands up for everyone to see, the woman displayed the mangled, broken, bruised and bleeding fingers, and in great anger said, "I'm the first violinist of the symphony orchestra. Did your God do this?"

Everyone was silent for a long time. Then Corrie stepped to the side of her sister Betsie. She replied, "We can't answer that question. All we know is that our God came to this earth, and became one of us, and He suffered with us and was crucified and died. And He did it for love."

We don't know what happened to the violinist with the broken fingers, but it was obvious from that exchange at least that she was dealing with a great deal of bitterness in her life. We read that story, and we think that she was certainly justified to have feelings like that. When trouble comes into our lives, we may be justified ourselves to have strong emotions. We are supposed to hurt and cry when trouble stabs our lives.

I'm not saying that we are somehow supposed to become emotionally numb and pretend as though it did not happen. That's not faith. That's not even Christ-like.

God has designed us in such a way that we do have emotions, and like most other things God has made, our emotions can be used for our good and His glory. But if they are misused, they can turn on us and bite us. The poison of bitterness can flow through our lives until we have essentially killed ourselves. That is why God's Word tells us in Hebrews 12:15, "*See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*" Listen to that verse from the old Living Bible: "*Watch out that no bitterness takes root among you, for as it springs up it causes deep trouble, hurting many in their spiritual lives.*"

You see, *my* bitterness can hurt *you!* And it works the other way, too! Ten, twenty, or even fifty years ago, something happened that caused you to be bitter, and suddenly it jumps up and hurts someone *today!*

Instead of harboring bitterness and resentment, Peter says that we are to "*continue to do good.*" I'll tell you, that can be extremely difficult, because the natural human response is to get angry and get even. It is not always easy to continue to do good, especially when you are under attack, especially when trouble seems to be the daily fare. So let me share with you a couple of things I've discovered which have helped me to stay focused, even in trouble.

The first was written years ago by Andrew Murray:

First, He brought me here; it is by His will that I am in this strait place: in that fact I will rest.

Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child.

Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.

Last, in His good time He can bring me out again—how and when He knows.

Let me say that I am here, by God's appointment, in His keeping, under His training, for His time.

Isn't that good? I don't know the author of the second, but it contains some great wisdom:

There are three simple words that begin with an "S,"

That are wise with a wisdom the world cannot guess;

But those who employ them their beauty confess:

Keep Silent—Keep Sweet—Keep Stepping.

*Keep Silent when rumor against you is stirred
When friendship is hurt like some broken-winged bird;
When clamors the heart for the right to be heard:
Keep Silent—Keep Sweet—Keep Stepping.*

*Keep Sweet when provoked by some petty affair,
When those whom you love, your loyalty wear—
When the milk of your spirit is curdled with care,
Keep Silent—Keep Sweet—Keep Stepping.*

*Keep Stepping when other folks hinder your way;
When weary and worried you finish your day,
Too footsore to walk, and too breathless to pray:
Keep Silent—Keep Sweet—Keep Stepping.*

*Keep Silent and spare yourself needless regret—
Keep Sweet and the whole world will be in your debt—
Keep Stepping with Christ, the truest Friend, yet,
Keep Silent—Keep Sweet—Keep Stepping.*

(Author Unknown)

God tells us through Peter that when trouble comes into our lives, we can respond to it by continuing to do good without bitterness. And we can know that if we allow bitterness in, the good stops immediately.

5 Humble yourself without anxiety, 5:6-7

Peter then wrote in 5:6-7, “*Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*”

Imagine this scene in an examination room of a doctor’s office. A mother has brought her child to the doctor for some illness, and the doctor says that the child must have an injection. That child may not understand all the medical and technical reasons why the nurse must stick a needle in his arm or his hip. And it really wouldn’t help that child to know the reasons why, anyway.

Watch that child begin to cry at the prospect of getting a “shot,” and watch the mother as she moves closer to her child. Watch her as she lovingly wraps her arms around her child. The needle is thrust in, and the child cries, and the mother

squeezes even tighter. The mother can very easily intervene, but she chooses not to, so her child will recover. The pain of the injection is necessary for her child to get well, so she willingly allows her child to suffer.

God is quite able to intervene, to keep trouble far away from His children. Most of the time He chooses not to, because of the eternal good the experience of temporary trouble will do for us. But just as a child turns to his mother in tears of pain and fear, we can know that we can turn to our Heavenly Father, and know that He is closer than ever when we are suffering.

But Peter's words here give us an important thing to remember during those times when our Heavenly Father is allowing pain, trouble and difficulty into our lives. Peter says that one response we are to make is to humble ourselves without anxiety.

Oliver Wendell Holmes once said that humility is "the first of all other virtues—for other people." Saint Augustine was quoted as saying, "It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as angels." Gene Brown was quoted in *Reader's Digest*: "The really tough thing about true humility is that you can't brag about it."

And God's Word tells us here in 1 Peter 4:6 that we are to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand. The phrase "mighty hand of God" is a common phrase in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 9:26 tells us that God brought His people out of Egypt with a mighty hand. The idea behind that phrase is that God's mighty hand is on the destiny of His people, if they will humbly and faithfully accept His guidance. The Christian should never resent the experiences of life and never rebel against them, because he knows that the mighty hand of God is on his life and that God has a loving, tailor-made plan for him.

But Peter is careful to point out that simply humbling ourselves before God is not enough if we continue to carry the burdens ourselves. So verse seven tells us to "*cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.*" In other words, the very reason we can cast all our anxiety on Him is because we can be certain that God cares for us.

The word "cast" means "to throw on." There's only one other place in the New Testament where we find this word. In Luke 19:35, the disciples threw their garments on the colt on which Jesus rode as He made His royal entry into Jerusalem. Picture that in your mind: God's own Word tells us that we have His

permission to take our worries, our cares, our anxieties, and throw them on Him, the way we would throw a blanket across a horse.

There's even a verse in the Psalms which tells us the same thing: "*Cast all your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you*" (Psalm 55:22). God is saying, "Humble yourself enough to admit that you can't carry the burden of your trouble alone. But guess what? I'll do it for you, if you'll give Me the chance. Cast your burden on Me."

So basically we human beings have a choice to make. Is Jesus going to be Lord of our lives, and are we going to allow Him to be Lord even in times of severe trouble and testing? Or are we going to try to do things our way, ending up broken, bitter and exhausted?

Which are you going to do?