



Links Players

SIX DEGREES FROM SUFFERING: PETER

If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. (1 Peter 4:14, NIV)

NOT ALL KINDS OF GOLF SUFFERING AFFECT US THE SAME. A bad bounce is part of the game and mostly beyond our control. If these bounces don't come at a crucial time, we do our best to grin and bear them and move on. But the suffering that comes by our own poor decisions or uncommitted swings can be truly painful. Yet worst of all is the suffering that happens to us inexplicably. We seem to be keeping to our same tried and true routines and nothing is working. That's hard to endure.

In his first letter, tucked away near the end of your Bible, the apostle Peter wrote of different kinds of suffering that might come to us in life. Some of it we bring upon ourselves by our own ill actions, great and small. But there was a kind of suffering that many of Peter's readers were experiencing, and you may be too. It was suffering for the name of Jesus.

Persecuted believers in Jesus are numerous today. The Voice of the Martyrs ministry reports severe persecution in as many as 60 nations, with Christians there facing harassment, imprisonment, seizure of their possessions, and death. For those of us in the West, this is mostly unimaginable. But doubt and ridicule can come our way. In John 7, the temple guards were sent to arrest Jesus. They returned without him, saying, "No one ever spoke the way this man does." The Pharisees rebuked them with these words: "You mean he has deceived you also?" This is the kind of pushback we might hear for what we believe about Jesus. We are told our faith is only fantasy, a fairy tale or myth that's out of touch with the world today. Critics suggest we're short on intellect and prudish in our ways.

There may be no overt conspiracy in our culture to eradicate Christianity, but Paul wrote that there are "powers of this dark world" and "spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Peter told his readers, "Do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering," and we might take his words to heart still. That others insult us because we cling to Jesus should not surprise us; the world is that way.

But here is the lesson and the blessing: If we hear insults, we can also be certain of the promise that the Spirit of God will rest on us. He will be present for us. "If God is for us," Paul asked, "who can be against us?" Many can be against us, surely, but none can stand. God himself holds us fast in the greatest of trials.

Opening questions What are some examples of suffering you have been thinking about during this series? Do you have a soft spot of mercy for any particular people?

READING 1 Peter 4:12-16; John 15:20-21; 1 Peter 1:6-7

Struggles and triumphs (1 Peter 4)

What should be our response to suffering? What do you think it means to bear the name of Christ as a Christian? If you are a Christian, do others know? What kinds of responses do you get when tell others?

Why we suffer (John 15)

Jesus told his disciples they would suffer for what particular reason? Why do people persecute those who trust in Jesus? Have you ever faced such persecution?

What comes of suffering (1 Peter 1)

Why do we face trials? What comes of maintaining a genuine faith in a time of suffering? How does your faith provide motivation to keep going amidst trials?
