

Offertory: *It Is Well With My Soul*

Let's open our Bibles to **2 Peter 1** as we continue our summer series in the first 11 verses. And would you please join me in prayer? Father, as we open Your Word together now, we also open our hearts to You. Speak to us, Lord, that we might experience Your peace, as we learn to trust You always and to obey You fully, no matter what obstacles we may face today or tomorrow. In Jesus name, Amen.

2 Peter 1:1-11 - *Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:*

2 May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

3 His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, 4 by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

8 For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

10 Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. 11 For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

How do you suppose you would react if your doorbell rings tomorrow, you go to the door and you're greeted by a UPS guy who hands you a parcel marked Special Delivery. And when you open the package,

You're greeted by one of these (*an alligator*)! What would you do with that? This is exactly what happened one day to the actress and comedienne **Gracie Allen**, the wife of George Burns. A friend sent her a baby alligator as a practical joke. She was heading out the door at the moment, and she didn't know what else to do with it, so Gracie put the alligator in the bathtub and left for an appointment.

When she came home, she found a note from her maid. *Dear Mrs. Allen: I quit. I don't work in no house with an alligator. I should have told you this when I started, but I just never thought it would come up.*

I'm guessing that some of you have been thinking about quitting too, and for pretty much the same reason. You don't work in no house, no job, no church, no marriage, with an alligator. When you volunteered for this position, or signed on for that commitment, you didn't know it would come up.

Maybe you didn't know what you were getting into. But you're tired now of all the hassles. Maybe you're weary from dealing with someone who is always so obnoxious and stubborn. Or you've had it with trying to do the right thing when your situation never seems to get any better or easier. In fact, things are probably getting worse. So you just want to quit.

Or maybe you want to quit what you've already quit. You quit drinking or you quit smoking, but you're under a lot of pressure right now... maybe you picked the wrong month to quit. You quit pornography, but now you're thinking it wasn't that big of an issue and no one will ever know if you take a quick peak now and then. You quit gossiping, but this latest news you've heard is just too major to keep to yourself! Peter understands all this. It's hard to work in a house with an alligator.

5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness.

Steadfastness means endurance, perseverance, patience, persistence – refusing to let setbacks defeat you. It means hanging tough even in the face of incredible opposition or obstacles.

Sinful pleasures are always going to entice us; that's why we need self-control, as we saw last week. But suffering and trials are also here to stay; that's why we need to add steadfastness to our self-control.

In the original language, the word Peter uses here is *hypomone*. It's a compound word, coming from two Greek words: *hypo* meaning "under," and *mone* meaning "to remain." So the word literally means "to remain under." If you're steadfast you are unmoved by difficulty or distress. When life seems to be caving in on you, and it seems too much to bear, you stand your ground nonetheless.

Hypomone was actually a military word used to describe a soldier holding position. Whether nothing's happening and boredom is setting in – or when pressure is high and the enemy is attacking – either way, the good soldier does not abandon his post, alligators or not. If you're a Christian, you are enlisted in the Lord's army, and the Bible calls you to *Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus (2 Tim. 2:3)*.

But Peter knows this is not easy. It's always a temptation to quit. So if you're going to supplement your faith with steadfastness, here are a couple things you need to understand:

1st, Trials are normal when you follow a crucified Savior. We see this very clearly in **1 Peter 4:12-16**, where he writes, *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.*

Some people have unrealistic expectations about the Christian life. The assumption is that if we belong to a loving God, we should experience a comfortable life. We should be healthy, wealthy and trouble-free. Beware of any teaching that does not recognize the role of suffering in the Christian life.

According to the New Testament, alligators come in many forms and face believers at every turn: illness, loneliness, financial setbacks, and even death. Some of these trials are simply due to the fact that we live in a fallen world, broken because of sin. So for all people, life includes its upsets and hardships. But when you said *yes* to God – when you became a Christian, giving your life to serve Jesus Christ –

You signed up to follow a crucified Savior, who said, "A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (**John 15:20**). Peter's original readers were living at a time and in a place where being a Christian was definitely a dangerous and costly thing. Even secular historians from the first century record that our earliest brothers and sisters in Christ were constantly the object of their neighbors' scorn and ridicule, suspicion and hostility.

Rumors were circulating: “When these people meet to worship, they eat the flesh and drink the blood of their leader, you know... cannibals maybe? Plus, they refuse to bow the knee to Caesar or honor any of our local gods. So the drought we’re facing now... must be their fault. And the fire that nearly destroyed our city? I hear those Christians are responsible.”

The early Christians were a soft, wide target for all kinds of abuse and opposition. And Peter tells them, “Don’t be surprised by all of this. Count it a privilege to be identified with Jesus Christ, and never be ashamed of Him. Hold your ground. Don’t let the enemy take back what he lost when you left his side.” When you trusted Christ, did anyone tell you that you made a new enemy? Peter will tell you:

Look at **1 Peter 5:8-9** - *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.*

This November another missions team from Summit will be visiting some of our brotherhood who have been suffering for Christ in India. We’ll visit our orphanages, and we’ll lead another conference for the 500 national missionaries who serve the Lord with our friend **Dr. Joab Lohara** and AIM Asia.

It’s been almost year a now since some of these dear brothers and their congregations were targeted by Hindu radicals in the eastern state of Orissa. Joab reported 118 deaths, 78,000 people displaced, 1,400 churches demolished (such as the one pictured on the screen), and 18,000 Christians injured. Almost 2,000 families from the congregations of AIM Asia lost their homes and everything else. It’s difficult for us to grasp those numbers or imagine the mayhem and grief.

One young man by the name of **Rajesh** played the drums at our last conference in November of 2007. Rajesh was still in Hyderabad with his friend Babul when the persecution broke out.

I’ll let Joab tell the story: *A week after their village was attacked by the Hindu radicals, Rajesh and Babul traveled to Orissa to see their family members. They reached Kalinga by bus, and then decided to walk through short-cut forest path since public transport system did not operate in the area due to communal tension and the curfew imposed by the state. Their village Bondemilla was about 30 miles away. They had hardly walked 10 miles when they were met by a group of unruly strangers at Paburia. On seeing these two young men, the first thing they did was to enquire of their religious identity: “Hindu na Kristian?” (Are you Hindus or Christians?). Evidently they were there to terrorize local Christians and to make sure Christian sympathizers never made it to that point. Christian houses in the village had been burnt and the people had fled. When Babul said he was a Hindu, they let him go.*

Rajesh sensed by now there was danger to his life, but he did not want to hide his Christian identity at any cost. “I am a Christian,” said Rajesh. The irate mob just pounced on him. They served him punches and blows; they pulled out the cross that was on his neck and frenziedly trampled under their feet. They ordered kerosene to be brought shouting, “Ano mo, podidio solaku!” (Bring it, burn this bastard!).

They poured kerosene on him and set him ablaze. According to Babul who was an eye witness, the charred mortal remains of Rajesh were later thrown into a river. Neither police nor his family members have been able to trace the body. Babul has been threatened by the radicals to bury the truth about his friend’s death. Rajesh is survived by his pregnant young wife Arpita and two young children, 3 and 2.

To one group of believers in the first century, the apostle Paul wrote, *Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring (2 Thess 1:4).*

This is how I feel about our friends in India. When we consider their persecutions and the afflictions they are enduring, what do you and I really know about steadfastness anyway? How much have we really endured for the sake of Christ? Why are we so quick to say, “I quit” – when others have sacrificed their lives? The Bible never promises an easy or pain-free life. It calls us to be steadfast. Are you steadfast?

I recently came across the story of a devout Christian in another part of the world, who was being threatened by one of the soldiers who had just conquered his village. His attacker said, “Don't you know I'm the one who can have you torn apart without batting an eye?” The believer in Christ answered, “Don't you know that I'm the one who can *be* torn apart without batting an eye?” That's steadfast!

Maybe your life has never been threatened, but you've discovered that following Jesus hasn't turned out to be such a great career move after all. Becoming a more committed Christian hasn't enhanced your reputation or expanded your opportunities as you thought it might. You haven't become rich or popular or free of sickness. In fact, sometimes it may seem to have the opposite effect, as you find yourself an object of ridicule, or your relationships with family and friends are more strained than ever.

And we all know that some of these trials would vanish immediately if we'd simply do one thing: Quit. Quit your faith, or at least quit talking about it. Quit obeying God, at least when it makes you different from everybody else. Quit worshiping, quit reading your Bible, quit walking in purity, and you'll find some relief. Just say, ‘I never knew him,’ and the pain will go away.” If anyone knows that, Peter does. And maybe you can relate: This isn't what you had in mind when you decided to follow Jesus.

Sure, Jesus said, “*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me*” (**Luke 9:23**) – but you never really took that personally! Oh, you're more than willing to wear a cross necklace or earrings, or display it on a T-Shirt. And you like to see the symbol of the cross when you go to church. You're thankful Jesus died on the cross, but *you* never agreed to die on one!

Somehow we need to be startled again by His call: “Take up your cross daily and follow me.” To take up your cross didn't mean to become rich and popular and comfortable. A cross was not a decoration; it was an instrument of execution. To take up your cross meant your life was as good as over. You were embarking on a journey that would end in certain and painful death.

But unlike one who was sentenced to a Roman crucifixion, the follower of Christ can give up any time he wants to. There are no soldiers surrounding us, demanding and forcing us to deny ourselves and bear the cross. You want to be free of that cross? You'd rather take the easy way out? Quitting is always an option, you know. You wouldn't be the first, nor the last. But don't quit, Peter is saying. Don't bail now. It's too soon to quit. Because trials are normal when you follow a crucified Savior.

But **2nd**, **Trials are beneficial because they prepare us for glory.** In the verse we looked at earlier, **1 Peter 4:13**, Peter calls us to *rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* Everyone wants the glory, but nobody wants the suffering.

Charles H. Spurgeon said, “*There are no crown-wearers in heaven who were not cross-bearers here below.*” For Jesus and for us, the crown follows the cross. The apostle Paul also loves to emphasize this truth, that suffering not only precedes glory, it also prepares us for glory.

He reminds the **Corinthians** that our *slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison* (**2 Cor 4:17**). And to the **Romans**: *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us* (**8:18**).

How do trials prepare us for glory? **1st, by proving the genuineness of our faith.** For Peter, trials are a test. He says, *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you (1 P 4:12).*

Or look at **1 Peter 1:6-7** – *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Just as a metal smith uses intense heat to melt silver and gold in order to test the metal and cleanse it of physical impurities, so God uses suffering to test us and cleanse us of spiritual impurities. And for those who pass the test, there is great reward because they will share in the glory of Jesus Christ.

James makes the same point when he says, *Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him (1:12).* You see, trials do not produce steadfastness in everybody.

For some people, trials unleash bitterness and resentment and complaining. So one way to gain assurance of your salvation is to remain steadfast in a trial – because this demonstrates you are not a fair-weather disciple, the kind Jesus describes in the parable of the soils, who receive the Word with joy, but when troubles come, they immediately fall away, proving they do not really belong to the Lord.

But as steadfastness grows in your life along with these other qualities, you *make your calling and election sure, and in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:11)* So don't quit.

Because only those with genuine saving faith will share in the glory of Jesus, and trials are one way that our faith is proven to be genuine. But it's even more than that. Because trials also prepare us for glory,

By growing us into the likeness of Christ. **James** says, *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. (1:2-4)*

This puts a new perspective on trials, doesn't it? The good news is that God is in control and God loves us. That means there is always a purpose in our pain. And one purpose is to develop steadfastness, which is a key step in this ladder to Christian maturity. In fact, if you think about it, we couldn't learn endurance without suffering, because without suffering, we would have nothing to endure!

So Paul writes in **Romans 5:2b-4**, *We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope.*

In other words, God's goal is not simply to bring us to glory but to bring glory to us! In fact, He won't quit on us before the job is finished! And if God is not quitting on you, then why would you consider quitting on Him? Make every effort to supplement your faith with steadfastness.

Being steadfast is a lesson that kids need to learn as well as adults. Your middle school student comes home crying and says, "I hate school! I never want to go back there!" How do you handle that? Maybe it's a teacher who seems to be treating her unfairly. Maybe he just failed a test that he studied two hours for. Maybe her friends are talking about her behind her back, or he lost his starting position on the team.

As a parent, your heart aches to see your kids struggle through any of that, and our natural tendency is to do anything possible to shield them from every possible difficulty. But you know what? God doesn't do that with His children. Trials bring growth, and those are prime teachable moments with our kids, when prayer and Bible verses and trusting God becomes real and practical. As mom and dad remain under those trials with them, to debrief and encourage on a daily basis, our kids can develop endurance in ways that would have been impossible apart from those trials.

But steadfastness is more often caught than taught. When your child watches you persevere in a difficult circumstance, without quitting, they see what it means to be steadfast – whether keeping a positive attitude in a difficult employment situation, or fulfilling your wedding vows when your spouse is hard to live with or is not treating you very kindly.

As **Gary Thomas** writes in his excellent book Sacred Marriage: *If your marriage is difficult, get down on your knees and thank God that He has given you an opportunity for unparalleled spiritual growth. You have the prime potential to excel in Christian character and obedience... All of us experience certain things about our spouses that may be difficult for us to accept. I've known men who were married to alcoholics and women who were married to demanding tyrants who showed little appreciation or respect. But a difficult marriage does not pronounce a death sentence on a meaningful life. It presents several challenges, to be sure, but it also provides wonderful opportunities for spiritual growth. Look at your marriage through this lens: What am I learning? How is this causing me to grow? More important, consider how this marriage draws you closer to God and shapes you in the character of Jesus Christ. Look at your situation through the lens of eternity.*

The Lord's love for us is a steadfast love. So don't quit on your marriage. Don't quit on your family. Don't quit on your Savior. It's too soon to quit. Anyone can start the race; God calls us to finish well.

During the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, the last runner to finish in the marathon was an athlete from Tanzania. He'd had a difficult race, to say the least. He'd stumbled at one point and ended up bruised, bloodied -- and with a broken leg! But he didn't quit. Even though everyone else had already finished the race and gone home, he kept at it. Only a few spectators remained, but they gave him a standing ovation as he crossed the finish line. Afterward, a reporter asked him why he didn't quit, since had no chance of winning. He seemed confused by the question. Finally he answered, "My country did not send me halfway around the world to start the race; they sent me to finish."

Jesus Christ was steadfast when He went to the cross for us. He was more than bruised and bloodied and broken. Isaiah says that in His crucifixion, Jesus' appearance was marred beyond recognition. He barely even resembled a human being. Worse yet, He bore our sins in His body on the cross. And He could have called 10,000 angels at any time to put an end to His suffering. But He did not.

So as the author of **Hebrews 12:1b-2** says, *Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.*

Make every effort to supplement your faith with steadfastness. Because trials are normal when you follow a crucified Savior. And trials are beneficial because they prepare us for glory, by proving the genuineness of our faith, and growing us into the likeness of Christ.

And after you have suffered a little while, Peter says at the close of his first letter, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10) Amen.