



Call to worship: Come and hear, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me. I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened; but God has surely listened and has heard my prayer. Praise be to God, who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me!
Psalm 66:16-20 (NIV)

Opening Prayer: Lord, we come once again remembering your many blessings in our lives. We stand in wonder at your ways, and we stand in awe of your Word. As we come to worship you today, may your Holy Spirit guide us to experience your presence, to understand your purpose, and to receive your peace. Open our hearts, Lord, that we may listen to you, trust in you, and walk in your ways. We offer this time into your hands. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn: Give to Our God Immortal Praise

<https://youtu.be/qKfCf3D01d0?si=w568ZO4mDvxVAS1J>

Give to our God immortal praise
Mercy and truth are all His ways
Wonders of grace to God belong
Repeat His mercies in your song

He sent His Son with power to save
From guilt and darkness and the grave
Wonders of grace to God belong
Repeat His mercies in your song

He built the earth; He spread the sky
And fixed the starry lights on high
Wonders of grace to God belong
Repeat His mercies in your song

Through this vain world He guides our feet
And leads us to His heavenly seat
His mercies ever shall endure
When this our world shall be no more (His mercies)

He fills the sun with morning light
He bids the moon direct the night
His mercies ever shall endure
When suns and moons shall shine no more

His mercies ever shall endure
When this our world shall be no more

Prayers:

Lord, when we look at ourselves and around us, we see the greatness of your creation.

You are a mighty God, who brought all things out of nothing— from chaos into a beautiful cosmos. You have never given up on your handiwork. Lord, we adore you, because you are our portion, and therefore we have hope in you.

We magnify you, for you have never forsaken your creation. In the fullness of time, you gave your Son as our Saviour. We glorify Jesus Christ, who endured suffering without sin, who was obedient even to the cross. We rejoice in his resurrection, and we wait in hope for his coming again.

Though he ascended, he did not leave us as orphans, but gave us your Holy Spirit, our comforter, our guide, your living presence among us always.

Lord, help us to praise you, not only with the words we say in worship, but also in all our works, in all our ways. May every breath we take praise you and may every person we meet and every part of your creation remind us of your goodness.

And again, Lord, we thank you for the hope you give even in our failures and shortcomings. Your mercies never come to an end. So we come before you humbly, to confess our sins.

Many times, Lord, we did not understand the pain and trials we went through. We did not respond with grace or gentleness. In our own suffering, we looked only for comfort for ourselves, and we forgot those around us who were also suffering.

Forgive us, Lord. Renew our hearts. Teach us to trust you more, and to care for others with your love. In the name of Christ, Amen.

All for Jesus, all for Jesus,
this our song shall ever be;
for we have no hope, nor Saviour,
if we have not hope in thee.

All for Jesus, thou hast loved us;
all for Jesus, thou hast died;
all for Jesus, thou art with us;
all for Jesus crucified.

All for Jesus, thou wilt give us
strength to serve thee, hour by hour;
none can move us from thy presence
while we trust thy love and power.

All for Jesus, all for Jesus,
this the church's song must be,
till, at last, we all are gathered,
one in love and one in thee.

Bible Reading: 1 Peter 3: 13-22 (NRSV) : Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight people, were saved through water. And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Sermon : Suffering Lifestyle: A Christian Way to Live Through Pain - Back in my first theological college days in India, we were always under pressure – assignments, exams, other extracurricular responsibilities and financial struggles. We had a different way of greeting one another. Instead of asking, “How are you?” we used to ask, “How are you suffering?”. And you know what? We would reply, “Yes, I am suffering well.” Suffering may be one of the words we dislike the most. Nobody wakes up in the morning and says, “Today I want to suffer.” We avoid it. We fear it. We question it. It crosses all cultures, it enters every nation, and it speaks a language that every human being understands—the language of pain.

Our Bible reading from the first letter of Peter was written to believers who were suffering because of their faith. They were rejected by society, losing their social identity and facing persecution and questions. The believers Peter addressing was suffering in three main ways. First, they were not accepted by the society around them. Because of their faith, they faced rejection and opposition. Second, their social identity was shaken. When they became Christians, they lost their old place in society and felt uncertain about who they were. Third, they struggled with deep questions: Why do good people suffer? And will God do something about it now, or only later?

In their real struggles, Peter addresses their suffering. He does not ignore the reality of pain. He accepts it honestly and responds in a meaningful way. Peter does not say, as we often say, “Everything will be alright.” Instead, he encourages them to see suffering from a different perspective. Therefore, again and again, Peter speaks about hope. And he brings before them some important ways to respond to suffering, a suffering lifestyle.

Firstly, Peter says when you suffer, consider yourself blessed. In verse 14 he says, “But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed.” This is very different from the world’s thinking. The world often sees suffering as a result of sin, failure, or curse. It looks down on those who suffer. But Peter does not reduce the pain of suffering. He does not deny it. Instead, he gives dignity to those who suffer. He calls them blessed. Jesus himself said, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

This is a powerful perspective. To call a suffering person “blessed” is to give them worth and honour. It is a way of resisting the thinking of the world that looks down on suffering. When we see suffering in this way, it gives strength to the one who suffers not to feel ashamed or discouraged, but to face it with hope in Christ. Suffering is not a time or situation to end our story; rather, suffering is where God writes our story in his way. So, Peter’s call to see the suffering as blessed

requires a change in two kinds of people. First, how we see others. We must not look at those who are suffering as cursed or degraded people. Instead, we must see them as people honoured by God.

Second, how we see ourselves when we suffer. Those who endure suffering must believe that they are not worthless, but they are worthy in God's sight. They must have confidence in who they are in Christ. This is something we need to learn even today. It is a way of standing against a world that looks down on suffering. And this perspective gives strength so that a person who suffers does not feel ashamed or discouraged but stands firm with hope in Christ.

The second lifestyle to respond to suffering is to place Jesus in the place of our fear and trouble. Peter says, "Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord." (1 Peter 3:14b–15a) Peter is not saying that fear will not come. Fear will come. Trouble will come, but place Jesus at the centre.

Jesus also said in John 14:1, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me." When Christ is Lord in our hearts, no situation is bigger than him. There is a powerful thought from Marie Curie: "Nothing in life is to be feared, it is only to be understood."

In 1735, John Wesley and his brother Charles Wesley were travelling by ship to America. During the journey, a great storm arose and people were filled with fear. Even the Wesley brothers were afraid. But there was one group on that ship— the Moravian believers. In the middle of the storm, they gathered for worship. Men, women, and even children were singing praises to God. They were not afraid. After the storm passed, this deeply touched John Wesley. He began to ask himself: "What kind of faith is this, that even children are not afraid of death?" That is the difference. When fear takes the centre, we panic. But when Christ takes the centre, we find peace. So in our suffering, let us not give space to fear. Let us give that place to Christ. Let him be Lord in our hearts. Let his peace rule within us.

Finally, Peter encourages a lifestyle in suffering that is to be ready to give a defence. In 1 Peter 3:15b he says, "Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you." The word "defence" here comes from the Greek word *apologia*. It means to give an account, to explain, to testify. From this, we get the word "apologetics." But Peter is not asking us to argue or fight. He is asking us to witness.

When we see ourselves as blessed, when we refuse fear, and when we make Christ Lord in our hearts, something changes. People begin to notice. They will ask, "How are you still hopeful?" "How are you still at peace in suffering?" And that becomes our opportunity to share the hope we have in Christ. Miroslav Volf, a well-known Christian theologian, wrote: "Christians who adopt a posture of soft difference are strong, but not hard. . . . They have no need either to subordinate or damn others but can allow others space to be themselves. For people who live the soft difference, mission fundamentally takes the form of witness and invitation. They seek to win others without pressure or manipulation, sometimes even 'without a word."

So, my dear friends, suffering is part of our life, but it is not the end of our story. In Christ, we are called to see suffering as blessed, to place Jesus above our fear, and to live in such a way that our life itself becomes a witness. Let us have that lifestyle. Amen.

Hymn : Sometimes a light surprises

<https://youtu.be/PtdkrQcbijU?si=5dAVE1On0JXcHJ8a>

Sometimes a light surprises
Believers while they sing;
It is the Lord who rises
With healing in his wings;
When comforts are declining,
He grants the soul again
A season of clear shining
To cheer it after rain.
In holy contemplation,
We sweetly then pursue
The theme of God's salvation,

And find it ever new;
Set free from present sorrow,
We cheerfully can say,
E'en let th' unknown to tomorrow
Bring with it what it may.
It can bring with it nothing
But he will bear us through;
Who gives the lilies clothing
Will clothe his people, too;
Beneath the spreading heavens,
No creature is not fed,

And he who feeds the ravens
Will give his children bread.
The vine, nor fig tree neither,
Their wonted fruit should bear,
Tho' all the fields should wither,
Nor flocks, nor herds be there;
Yet God the same abiding,
His praise shall tune my voice,
For while in him confiding,
I cannot but rejoice.

Prayer of intercession

God has given us an opportunity when we come together in worship, the ministry of intercession, where we pray for ourselves and for others. So let us approach God with confidence and trust. Let us first bring ourselves before God our own lives, where we endure suffering and face fear. (Silence)

Lord, grant us grace to go through the realities of our lives. Help us to grow in faith in every season. Let us now place before God the needs and sufferings of our families, our friends, and our neighbours. (Silence)

Lord, we ask your unending mercy upon everyone we know, and even those unknown to us, who are in distress, illness, or brokenness. May all who seek you experience your presence. As you cover them with your wings, may they find refuge, strength, and hope. Let us seek God's intervention for the world around us— for places of war, conflict, and natural calamities. (Silence)

Lord, you are a God of justice and peace. Protect the innocent and those who suffer. Look upon people who long for peace and reconciliation. Bring comfort and stillness into their lives. We also pray for leaders of nations— grant them wisdom to choose the paths of peace, justice, and harmony. Let us commit the ministry of the Church into God's hands. (Silence)

Lord, strengthen your Church. Make us beacons of hope in this world. Help us to stand with those who suffer, to serve with love, and to witness with faith. We especially remember our circuit, our churches, our Prayer Month and Bible Month— guide us and use us for your glory.

Now, Lord, we lay down our hopes, our dreams, and our desires before you. You have called us. Strengthen us. Guide us in your will. Hear our prayers and lead us in your way. We gather all our prayers together in the prayer your Son, our Lord taught us, saying:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn StF 455 All My Hope on God is Founded

All my hope on God is founded;
he doth still my trust renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown, he alone
calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray his trust;
what with care and toil he buildeth,
tower and temple, fall to dust.
But God's power, hour by hour,
is my temple and my tower.

God's great goodness aye endureth,
deep his wisdom, passing thought:
splendour, light, and life attend him,

beauty springeth out of naught.
Evermore, from his store
new-born worlds rise and adore.

Daily doth th' Almighty giver
bounteous gifts on us bestow;
his desire our soul delighteth,
pleasure leads us where we go.
Love doth stand at his hand;
joy doth wait on his command.

Still from earth to God eternal
sacrifice of praise be done,
high above all praises praising
for the gift of Christ his Son.
Christ doth call one and all:
ye who follow shall not fall.

<https://youtu.be/DohxO6ytsaU?si=w33A2tV4yk5OKG>

Blessing : Go gently, go lightly, go safe in the Spirit, live simply, don't carry much more than you need: go trusting God's goodness, go spreading God's kindness, stay centred on Jesus and where he will lead.

Go singing, go bringing the gifts of the Spirit, go hopefully searching for things that are true: in living, in loving, whatever befalls you, God keep you, God bless you in all that you do. (Words By [Shirley Erena Murray](#))