

**“A Walk on Suffering Road”**  
**Hebrews 10:26-39**  
**September 19, 2021**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

For the first time in Hebrews, today’s passage gives some specifics on the sufferings endured by the recipients of this book. It included public shaming, imprisonment, and the confiscation of their property. Suffering is an inevitable part of life in a fallen world, and Christians often experience the added suffering that comes from swimming against the current of the world. We don’t get to choose whether or not we have to experience suffering, but we do get to choose how to respond to it.

This passage describes two responses to suffering. It helps me to visualize it like this. At various times in life all of us walk on suffering road, and we come to a fork in the road. One fork takes the way of self-trust and anger against God. I can tell you that I have encountered this response repeatedly in my years as a pastor. Just recently, I was talking to a young man whose wife had experienced some significant suffering in her life five years ago, and she responded in anger toward God that led her to leave the church. She’s not been back since. This fork, if followed to the bitter end, leads to the apostasy warned of in the first half of our passage. The other fork is marked by faith and confidence in God. It remembers that we have solid joys and lasting treasure in Jesus. Thankfully, I have encountered far more people taking this fork in the road, many of them in this church. The suffering has been real and bitter and difficult. But many of you have encouraged me as I have seen you hold fast to the faith, trusting the love of God and his sovereign purposes even when things look most bleak. These two paths can be expressed in the formulas below.

**I. Suffering Plus Unbelief Equals Apostasy – v. 26-31**

These verses are in the form of a warning. This is now the fourth time the author has warned his readers of the danger of apostasy. As a reminder, apostasy refers to falling away from the Lord. It is not just backsliding, which is temporary and remediable. Apostasy, on the other hand, is permanent. That was taught clearly in chapter 6, and again in this passage. For the one guilty of apostasy, **“there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins”** (v. 26). This is a warning, and warnings are intended to be received. The danger is real, and the warning is given that we might steer clear of such apostasy.

I want us to ask three quick questions of this before we move to our next paragraph. First, who are the intended recipients of this warning? The answer is in verse 26. It is those who have received the knowledge of the truth. This is

a warning for those inside the church, not those outside the church. The quote from Deuteronomy 32 in verse 30 shows the same thing. **“The Lord will judge his people.”** There are other places in the Bible where those outside the church are warned of their peril and invited to put their trust in Jesus. But this passage warns those inside the church of their danger. That doesn't mean that a person can lose his or her salvation, because God promises us repeatedly in the Bible that he will hold on to us and never let us go. It does mean that a person can give a profession of faith without genuinely possessing true faith, and it is often one's response to suffering that reveals the difference between profession of faith and possession of it. That is what Jesus taught in the parable of the soils. The seed sown on rocky, shallow soil germinated and grew quickly. But when the sun beat down upon it, the shallowness of its roots were revealed and it withered.

The second question is, “What are the marks of apostasy?” Several are included in this passage. The first one is that this person goes “on sinning deliberately” (v. 26). Their sin is both an ever-present pattern and intentional. They know it's a sin and they no longer fight against it. Their hearts have grown so hard that they give in to sin and are no longer bothered by it at all. Second, the apostate **“has spurned the Son of God”** (v. 29). Literally, he has trampled under foot the Son of God. We trample under foot things which we regard as worthless. The apostate has concluded that Jesus has nothing to offer. He's not the Son of God, but just another teacher who died prematurely. Next, **“he has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified”** (v. 29). To profane something is to treat it as common. In other words, this person has denied the work of Christ on the cross. To the apostate, the death of Jesus is nothing more than another death. It has no saving benefit. Finally, he **“has outraged the Spirit of grace”** (v. 29). The work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the beauty of Jesus so that he becomes a treasure to us. But the apostate has determined that Jesus is worthless, not a treasure. This is what Jesus meant by the unforgiveable sin. This is not the person who has temporarily fallen into sin. It is the person who would renounce both the divinity of Jesus and the saving blood of Jesus. It is the end of the road for the person who does backslide but never comes back to faith. So we should fear this danger, both for ourselves and others, but we should not be too quick to determine that someone is in this category.

The third question is how this strong language of God's judgment can be reconciled with the strong language of his love that we saw in the previous passage. There are many today who have renounced the existence of hell precisely because they see it as in conflict with the Bible's clear language about the love of God. Apparently, the Bible itself doesn't have that problem. The author of this passage is the same author of the previous paragraph on the staggering love of God through Jesus. The reconciliation of these two teachings of the immense love of God and the terrifyingly awful eternal judgment of God in hell is the cross of Christ. So great is God's love that he endured hell on our

behalf. J. I. Packer describes the sufferings of Jesus on the cross like this: “The physical pain, though great (for crucifixion remains the cruelest form of judicial execution that the world has ever known), was yet only a small part of the story; Jesus’ chief sufferings were mental and spiritual, and what was packed into less than four hundred minutes was an eternity of agony—agony such that each minute was an eternity in itself” (*Knowing God*, p. 176). That’s why there remains no sacrifice for sins (v. 26) for those who reject the only sacrifice there is.

## **II. Suffering Plus Faith Equals Life – v. 32-39**

When we walk on suffering road and encounter this fork in the road, there is a path available to us other than the path of unbelief that leads to apostasy. There is the path of faith and endurance that leads to life. The author asks his recipients to recall the days of suffering. **“But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings”** (v. 32). He doesn’t ask them to recall the “Good old days.” The measure of spiritual vibrancy is not how many days of prosperity we might enjoy, but rather how we respond to the days of suffering. These are the important, defining days of our lives. There is some evidence in the Bible that even in heaven, we will recall these days of suffering. In Revelation 12, we hear again a loud voice in heaven. There are repeated occasions in Revelation of a loud voice in heaven. Sometimes it’s the voice of God, other times the voice of angels, and still other times the voice of the multitude. In any case, it’s a voice that drowns out all others, a final-word kind of voice. Here’s what that voice says in Revelation 12. **“Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death”** (v. 10-11). Even after Satan has been thrown down, this loud voice in heaven remembers the suffering of God’s people. I think it likely that millions of years from now, we will still be telling stories of God’s faithfulness to us in our times of suffering.

This leads me to an application. We are clearly in a time of suffering now, afflicted by this pandemic and by political polarization that has entered the church and challenged our unity. In addition, there is personal suffering endured by many within the church. These are the days we will speak of a million years from now. The application is to live today in a way that you will not regret then. What does such a life look like? It means to respond to suffering with trust in God. These verses go on to describe some specifics of what that looks like in the previous experience of the recipients of this book.

Three specific descriptions of their suffering are highlighted. First, they were **“publicly exposed to reproach and affliction”** (v. 33). All suffering is difficult, but public shaming is among the most difficult. It would mean that former so-called friends, as well as family members, would no longer associate with you. It would feel like a betrayal. When a first century Jew confessed faith in Christ, there was usually a high price to pay in the form of being cast out of former relationships. A second suffering they endured was to continue their associations with those who had been cast out. Whenever someone is cast out of a community, it is a dangerous thing for people to continue their associations with the one cast out. The danger is that you too could be cast out and treated similarly. But these Christians didn’t let that stop them, becoming willing **“partners with those so treated”** (v. 33). They even showed compassion to those who had been imprisoned, likely visiting them and caring for them. Their third suffering was **“the plundering of your property”** (v. 34). It was no uncommon for Jewish Christians of this era to have their businesses ruined by their faith in Christ. The mild version of this would be boycotting by non-Christians. But this speaks of something more severe, the confiscation of property. This was done, apparently, with the widespread approval of the people, since communities don’t normally accept such things.

Sufferings such as these are severe, leaving the sufferers isolated, shamed by many, and impoverished. Yet they endured, not stoically but joyfully. They **“joyfully accepted the plundering of [their] property.”** The source of their joy wasn’t that their property had been plundered. Rather, it was the fact that this plundering reminded them and reinforced to them a wonderful truth. They knew they **“had a better possession and an abiding one”** (v. 34). The source of their joy was their confidence in God’s promises to them, promises about their bright future as co-heirs with Christ.

John Chrysostom was a famous preacher in the early church, around the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century. At one point, he was brought before the Roman emperor, who threatened him with banishment if he remained a Christian. Chrysostom replied:

“You cannot banish me, for this world is my father’s house.” “But I will slay you,” said the Emperor. “No, you cannot,” said the noble champion of the faith, “for my life is hid with Christ in God.” “I will take away your treasures.” “No, but you cannot for my treasure is in heaven and my heart is there.” “But I will drive you away from man and you shall have no friend left.” “No, you cannot, for I have a friend in heaven from whom you cannot separate me. I defy you, for there is nothing you can do to hurt me.”

That is the confidence that we are told in verse 35 not to throw away. It is a confidence that God is for us and that he is in control of all things for us. It is a confidence that our best days are ahead of us. This is such a crucial point that

our author is going to spend an entire chapter in the very next part to describe how faith in our bright future strengthens our current lives.

Our confidence in God's promises results in an attitude of joy. If you think about it, only three things can happen to the Christian, and all are good. First, we can experience prosperity of all kinds. We are successful in school and job. If you have children, things go well with them. In such a case, we joyfully thank God for his blessings. Second, you can suffer, and your sufferings can rise to the level of death. In that case, the Bible teaches that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. Your everlasting joy begins. That is very good. Third, you can suffer short of death. In that case, the Bible teaches that God uses our sufferings to make us more like Christ. To become more Christlike is to become more joyful. We don't get to choose which of these three possibilities happen to us. But we do get to choose, indeed we must choose, how we will respond.

The need we have is the same as that of the Hebrews. **"You have need of endurance"** (v. 36). What does it mean to endure? It means simply not to give up. Giving up happens at a point in time. So to endure is going to require the simple act of deciding today not to give up. Endurance is a decision to trust God and ask him for the grace to endure today. It is to say, "God, walk with me today, and give me your strength to remember and to believe your promises. If you go with me, I'm willing to go anywhere you lead me today." Verse 37 is speaking ultimately of the Second Coming of Jesus, but it also applies to Jesus' coming to us by his Spirit every day. **"Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay."** He will not delay coming to us each day in the person of the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, we live by faith rather than shrinking back. To shrink back is to give up.

## **CONCLUSION:**

I want to close with this application. Will you ask God to help you see your sufferings as an opportunity rather than something to be endured stoically? It is an opportunity to draw near to God as you give up power and control of your life and walk by faith instead. It is an opportunity for outreach, since God often uses the weak for such purposes. Your sufferings could simply be God getting you sufficiently weak to be able to use you. Don't despair. The God who used the sufferings of Jesus to save the world knows how to use your sufferings for his good purposes both in your life and in the lives of those around you. Just hold on to these truths today. You don't need to hold on to them for tomorrow yet. The time will come tomorrow for that to happen. Just trust God today.

**Small Group Discussion Questions**  
**Hebrews 10:26-39**

1. How have you been encouraged by the faith of other Christians during times of suffering? Describe the sufferings of those fellow Christians and its effect upon you.
2. Verses 26-31 contain another warning (the fourth in this book) of apostasy. An apostate is someone who has fallen away from following Christ. What are some inappropriate ways to view this warning? How should we receive it?
3. How could a wrong response to suffering lead someone into apostasy?
4. Review the four marks of an apostate in this passage. He “goes on sinning deliberately” (v. 26), has “spurned the Son of God,” “profaned the blood of the covenant,” and “has outraged the Spirit of grace” (v. 29). How would you summarize this? What is the difference between someone who has wandered away and the apostasy described here?
5. The author asks his readers in verse 32 to recall the former days of their suffering. What benefit might there possibly be in recalling our suffering?
6. As you imagine yourself a million years from now in heaven, telling “war stories” of your times of suffering during this earthly life, what stories do you think you will tell?
7. The opposite of endurance in this passage is “shrinking back” (v. 38). What does it mean to shrink back?
8. What does a life of faith look like, and how does it keep us from shrinking back?