



# Central Peninsula Church

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1 Peter 1:6-12

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## The “Now” of Sorrow and Joy

SERIES: *A Guidebook for Aliens*

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About 14 years ago I was walking through one of the darkest seasons of my spiritual life. I felt like I had lost my compass. I had just gone through the most difficult year of ministry that I have ever faced. My whole family was feeling the strain. I was being confronted with the brokenness of my past. And that year ended in the closing of the little church I had poured my heart into for five years. So on top of it all I was out of work. And God provided a job that I never would have applied for if I hadn't been in such a place of need. I got a job as an admin assistant on an Alzheimer's ward at the VA hospital in Palo Alto. And I thought, thanks a lot God. Just when I needed some brightness and beauty in my life, you put me in this world of sorrow surrounded daily by the groans and grief of 50 severely demented men. For the first six months it was a struggle to just get up and face the day. The sorrow of the disease that surrounded me just seemed to amplify the discouragement I felt on the inside.

But then I began to notice a woman named Glorina Ochangco. Glorina was born in the Philippines. She had a tough life. She was nearing retirement but wasn't slowing down. She had a certain gentle way about her that seemed to bring a quiet and a calm in the most difficult situations. She was a veteran nurse who knew how to think quickly on her feet. But the most remarkable thing about Glorina was her joy. She had a winsome way of living that was deeply rooted in her love for Jesus Christ. And it frustrated me because here I was the pastor/seminary student who was supposed to have the answers but I was overwhelmed by sorrow. Glorina was a daily reminder that I was missing the simple presence of joy in my life. Well, the Lord was faithful to keep me at the struggles and frustrations of the job long enough for me to begin to grasp what Glorina knew in her heart of hearts. And that's this: In the life of those who follow after Jesus Christ, sorrow and joy are side by side. That sounds strange, doesn't it. We usually think of sorrow and joy as two incompatible realities. Emotional polar opposites that cancel each other out. This morning as we return to the letter of 1 Peter we're going to talk about those two things: sorrow and joy, and how they're strangely mingled together in the life of those who trust in Jesus Christ.

William Blake wrote:

*Joy and woe are woven fine  
A clothing for the soul divine,  
Under every grief and pine  
Runs a joy with silken twine.*

As we have seen in these last few weeks together, the apostle Peter has been writing to a scattered band of believers whom he calls resident aliens. They were men and women and families who lived a life of obedience to Christ in the face of growing hostilities. From his vantage point in Rome Peter warns them of the storm clouds of hardship and persecution that were rolling their way. He writes to remind them and us of who we are

and where we're going; He tells us that as believers in Christ, we have been chosen by the Father, sanctified by the Spirit, forgiven and cleansed by the Son. Born again into a dynamic and vital hope. We've been put on the reservation list of heaven and by the power of God our faith will stand until we're finally home.

But this morning the focus shifts from our heavenly inheritance that is to come to the current realities of sorrow and joy in the walk of faith. Let's read beginning with chapter 1 verse 6. **“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.”**

### I. The “Now” of Sorrow

Peter begins with this great outburst of joy. “In this, you greatly rejoice.” In fact, he uses the present tense to emphasize that rejoicing is the emotional reality of the day. We could translate it, “In this, you are currently and continually greatly rejoicing.” “This” of course is referring back to the amazing and ridiculous salvation of ours. The fact that we've been embraced by the love of God. We have a living hope and a heavenly inheritance. And we are guarded by the power of God. So, as we go through this life as strangers and aliens, displaced wanderers, we rejoice because of the wonder of our salvation and the confidence of our hope.

But this current reality of joy as sweet as it is, is mingled together with the sorrow and grief of this present life. And so Peter says, “... now... you have been distressed by various trials...”

Like it or not, distress and trials are the “now” of our life here on earth. We shouldn't be surprised when they come our way. Jesus prepared His disciples for this when He told them, **“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”** Don't be startled or caught off guard by sorrow in this life. This world is not our home. It may have great beauty and God may gift you with seasons of great delight in this life. But the things of this world are passing away and they were never intended to satisfy. The world is full of sorrow, disappointment and grief.

Now I know that there are many of you this morning that don't need a reminder of this. And today you're here with grief that's heavy on your hearts. Peter, by the way, places emphasis on the emotional content of sorrow rather than on the circumstances that cause them. The NIV translates this “though now you may have to suffer grief.” The word means we experience a great heaviness. A few years ago many of you prayed our family through a tremendously difficult time. Nancy had just about recovered from her first emergency surgery when she was hospitalized again a second time. I remember that heavy weight of distress and fear that stayed with me for

months. We all recognize that feeling, don't we. And maybe even this morning you feel like your feet are barely able to drag you through the day, like there's a great weight you're carrying without rest or relief. George MacDonald said, "Sometimes tears are the only cure for weeping." That is so true. Sometimes the best we can do is ride out the waves of grief as they come.

We do everything we can to insulate and distract ourselves from this heaviness of heart. But sooner or later the weight of distress will bear down upon our lives.

**a. It's Varied.** Peter says that this grief will come to us through "various" forms of trials. That word means multicolored or diversified. If we could go around the room this morning and each one of you could tell your story we would find an endless variety to the sources of sorrow in this life. Someone grieves this morning over the loss of a loved one. Someone is struggling in a marriage that can't seem to get beyond the same barriers. Others are mourning the failed dreams marked by divorce. For many parents it's the hurt and fear that you experience for your children. For others it may be chronic unrelenting pain, depression, or the persistent nightmares of past abuse. The list is endless. If you need an illustration this morning I encourage you to pick up a prayer sheet on your way out. Read through it and pray for folks in our body who are distressed by various trials today.

But Peter says even though distress is a current reality that comes to us in an endless variety of trials, they are only for "a little while."

**b. It's for "a little while."** The Psalmist says, "**weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.**" That's great encouragement. But this is not a truth that we say casually to someone who is experiencing great suffering. Maybe you've been in that place where you've been devastated by some severe event in your life and some well meaning Christian who is probably uncomfortable with sorrow themselves says, Cheer up! Trust God! This too shall pass. It's like Little Orphan Annie who sings, "The sun will come out tomorrow" so don't be so gloomy today. That may be a great song for Broadway, but it's lousy counsel for a friend who is truly in need. The truth is we don't know how long grieving may last. The sun might not come out tomorrow on your grief, or the next day or the next. We don't determine the days or weeks or years that sorrow may visit us or our friends. Sometimes I listen to stories and I think how can all of this happen to one person. But it does!

We need to be clear on this. Peter is not predicting or promising that we will only experience short bursts of distress in this life. But he is saying that no matter how long it lasts—for a day or a lifetime—it is only "for a little while."

The apostle Paul looks out over the hardship and sorrow of his life and says that "these momentary light afflictions are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us when Christ comes again." You see, it's as we place them in contrast to eternity with Jesus that our sorrows take on their proper dimensions. And in comparison to the glory and joy of eternity with Christ they're only for a little while.

**c. It has a Purpose.** For those who trust in Jesus Christ, the trials we face are for divine purpose in our lives. This is so important for us to grasp. Peter continues in vs. 7, "**That the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**"

He uses a picture that is common in Scripture where faith is compared to a precious metal that is being refined in the fire. And just like a refiner's furnace, God is using the distress of our lives to refine our faith, to purify it so that when it's removed from the fire what remains is a purified and genuine faith, like the pure gold that emerges when the goldsmith is through. Whatever is heavy on your heart today, God is at work in your grief. He is faithfully and graciously producing something of great and lasting beauty in your life. He's shaping in you an authentic and proven faith.

On the wall of his bedroom the great British preacher Charles Spurgeon had a plaque with Isaiah 48:10 which says, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." Spurgeon said of that verse, "It's no small thing to be chosen of God. God's choice makes chosen men choice men... We are chosen, not in the palace, but in the furnace. In the furnace, beauty is marred, fashion is destroyed, strength is melted, glory is consumed: yet here eternal love reveals its secrets, and declares its choice."

Whatever sorrow you are facing this morning or whatever lingering grief is present with you today, know this: God is refining your faith. The pain is not pointless or without purpose. For sure, not everything that God is doing in our sorrow will be known in a day or a week or even a lifetime. But we can be confident that when Christ is revealed (when He returns) our purified faith will result in praise and glory and honor. One day, believe it or not, there will be nothing left to burn away. We'll be done with the sorrow and grief of this life and our proven faith will join with the chorus of all the faithful and tested saints throughout the ages Peter himself will be there giving Him praise and glory and honor for ever and ever.

Sorrow is present and now in the life of faith, it's varied, it's brief in light of eternity, and through it all God is purifying and refining our faith.

So, let me ask you this morning. Do you have a theology that lets you be real with the heaviness that life can bring? Do you have a God who invites you to honestly face the distress that sometimes visits us through various trials. It's such a comfort to know, isn't it, that the scriptures invite us get real. We don't have to be emotionless drones in the face of suffering. Nor do we need to pretend that we are "more spiritual" because we are above sorrow. Distress is real and now. Remember Jesus himself wept and grieved over Jerusalem. He experienced the heaviness of sorrow at the gravesite of his friend Lazarus. He was a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief.

## II. The "Now" of Joy

Praise the Lord! Because this isn't the whole picture for those who trust in Christ. Mingled with the "now" of sorrow is what Peter calls the "now" of a great and inexpressible joy; the joy of having Jesus Christ in our lives. "**And though you have not seen Him you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of**

**your faith the salvation of your souls”** (1 Peter 1:8-9).

This is great news. Peter give us four things that are true of our life in Christ now. Four things that mark the reality of joy in our lives even in the midst of sorrow. He says: we love Him, we believe in Him, we rejoice in Him, and we receive from Him. It sounds like the chorus of a good worship song, doesn't it! We love, we believe, we rejoice, and we receive. I love that!

**a. We Love.** First he says that even though we haven't seen Him we love Him. We've entered into an intimate and deep relationship of love with our Savior. Rom. 5:5 says, **“The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”** The apostle John says “we love Him because He first loved us.” And so because he's captured and captivated us in His love, we have the great delight of responding to Him in love in return. And this is particularly true in seasons of great sorrow. At those times when we've got no one else to turn to, Jesus, the lover of our souls, is both the source and the object of our love and delight.

In about a month Steve Aurell and I will be traveling down to Peru to work with a ministry that my daughter Sarah is a part of called Word Made Flesh. Their vision is to be the Flesh and Blood representatives of Jesus to children and youth who live on the streets of the city of Lima. I was there last year and met a young man named Luis. Like all of the street kids, he's had an unbelievable life of horror and sorrow. Luis has a gift for writing and this is how he describes his life: *“I was born into misery, cold and nakedness. My lullabies were insults and contempt. My diet depended on old bread and wasted drink I found in the trash. My covers were the banks of rivers. I knew only cold. Lack of care and love was something I felt more in the depths of my soul than in my body.”*

Sarah often reminds me to please pray for Luis. And I'll ask you to do the same. His life continues to be filled with challenges none of us will ever have to face. But out of the depths of his sorrow and horrendous grief has been birthed a deep and passionate love for Jesus Christ. I can't wait to see him again because his life is a living reminder to me of this very truth. Though we don't see Him we love Him. Peter says, “And though we do not see Him now; we believe in Him.”

**b. We Believe.** We believe in Him. We trust in Him. This is actively trusting in and surrendering to the care and strength of Jesus in my life. Because He loves me I can trust Him. I can put my confidence in His love to sustain me, even through the darkest of times, even though I don't see Him now.

After his wife was diagnosed with a malignant tumor, Dallas Holm said in an interview: “Sometimes in our valley and in our sorrow we believe if we just knew what God was doing, that would settle it. I'm not sure that would make any difference. Faith is when you *don't* know. When it *doesn't* make sense. When you *can't* understand. But you *trust* in God.” Though we don't see him now, we trust in Him.

So often we want answers but we face God's silence instead. Even though you don't see Him now, and though the trials you face today may not make any sense at all, still by faith we can trust in Jesus Christ. Keith Green wrote a song that went: *“How can they live without Jesus, how can they live without God's love. How can they feel so at home down here when there's so much more up above.”* I don't know how they do it. But we can trust in Him even in the darkest hour. When we don't know the answers, when it doesn't make sense, when we can't understand, we trust in

the person and the presence of Jesus Christ to be our peace and strength.

**c. We Rejoice.** And in the darkest of times when sorrow surrounds us we can rejoice in Him “with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

I was reading this week about the story of Martin and Gracia Burnham, missionaries who were abducted in the jungles of the Philippines in May of 2001. Martin and Gracia had really been thinking after their long ordeal that there would be a chance that they really wouldn't make it out alive. Gracia remembers their last moments together she writes:

“Martin said to me, ‘The Bible says to serve the Lord with gladness. Let's go out all the way. Let's serve him all the way with gladness.’” The two then prayed in their hammock, recited Scripture to each other, and sang. They laid down to rest. Then the rescue assault began and bullets began to fly, puncturing Gracia's leg. She was rescued. Martin died from a stray bullet through his heart. But there in the jungles of the Philippines, in the terror of those final hours, his last thoughts and words were ones of praise, and gladness and rejoicing in Jesus Christ.

You know, I've seen this over and over again. In the life of those who follow Jesus Christ through grief and sorrow, there's a joy that is unstoppable and inexpressible, beyond words. A joy that sustains and strengthens in the midst of life's various trials and losses.

So though we don't see Him and we don't have all the answers now, we love Him, we believe in Him, we rejoice in Him, and as we do that Peter says, we receive from Him.

**d. We Receive.** Peter expresses this in the present tense. We are “obtaining (now) as the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.” We are receiving now more and more of our salvation as we love, believe, and rejoice in Jesus Christ. That means as you trust the Lord today in the midst of your loss, or as you love Jesus in the midst of your financial struggles, or as you rejoice in Jesus while loneliness covers you at night; Peter says in all of that you are receiving more of the fulness of God's saving work in your life.

I love to run. In fact it amazes me that I can enjoy something so much that I'm so bad at. It really says something about the nature of God that he's given me a runner's heart but stuck it in this body. I can't quite figure that out. But I love running. I love to press into the wind. I love to work up a good sweat. I love to feel my heart pounding. But I also know that while I'm running I'm receiving the benefits of running. So that's a great deal. While I'm engaged in doing something I love, at the same time I'm receiving more and more of its long term benefits. That's what Peter says here about our salvation. While we love Him, trust Him, and rejoice in Him, we're actually receiving more and more of the benefits of our salvation. It's almost as if we're getting an advance payment on our heavenly inheritance. We get to taste now the glory of our heavenly inheritance and the sweetness of the person and presence of Christ.

So we rejoice even while we grieve. Sorrow and joy are mingled together in this alien life of ours. And in this last paragraph Peter tells us that our sorrow and joy is reflective of the suffering and glory of Jesus Christ Himself.

### III. The Pattern of Christ

**“As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.”**

The Old Testament prophets wrote about Jesus Christ. Did you know that? In fact Jesus told the pharisees, “You search the scriptures (the Old Testament) because you think that in them you have eternal life: and it is these that bear witness of me.” Jesus is present in the Old Testament from the opening chapters of Genesis through the Pentateuch, the psalms the wisdom literature, straight on through to the prophet Malachai. Peter says though they didn't even fully understand what they were writing they prophesied of the grace that would come to you and me. And as they made careful search they discovered that Christ must first suffer and only then would glory follow. The life of Jesus, the death and the resurrection of Jesus is a journey from grief to glory. And I think Peter is saying this: That pattern in the life of Christ is our pattern as well. In some sense the sorrow and suffering we encounter now is a reminder of the glory we will share with Him in eternity. Peter says even angels long to see these things. But we have received them. And it reminds us that the sorrow and grief we experience in this life doesn't diminish the joy of the presence of Christ in our lives now or the glory of our hope that is to come. Sorrow and joy are mingled together in this life. But one day when we're done with the grief of this world, we will enter the glory that lasts forever.

I'm so grateful for the long season of sorrow 14 years ago and for other seasons of distress. I don't enjoy them but those seasons wean us from this world, they pull back our layers of insulation and they remind us that we're not yet home. But as we journey through it all mingled with the sorrow that surrounds us, even though we don't see Him, we love Him, we believe in Him, we rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and full of glory, and in all of this as we cling to Jesus we're receiving more and more of the wonder and the glory of our salvation in Jesus Christ.

Come to Him this morning with whatever heaviness of heart you carry - whatever grief or loss, however varied and complex the trials might seem: love Him, trust Him, rejoice in Him with joy beyond words, and receive from Him today.

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