

# When the Pressure Seems Unbearable

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

**Bible Text:** 1 Peter 1:5-12

**Preached On:** Sunday, August 25, 2013

## **Faith Church**

5526 State Road 26 E

Lafayette, IN 47905

**Website:** <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>

**Online Sermons:** <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

A couple of weeks ago a bus from Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Indianapolis was returning with a group of young people from a week of camp in Michigan. We have a relationship with Colonial Hills because our Christian school has played them in sporting events over the years and so there are quite a few friendships and acquaintances between our two church families. For reasons that are still under investigation, when the bus was a mile away from the church, coming off an exit ramp from I465, the driver reported that his brakes failed and he crashed into a raised median barrier and overturned. More than 20 people were injured and four persons died. Imagine being in the church parking lot, waiting for the bus to return with your child from a week of camp and learning that an accident like that had just occurred. It was eventually determined that the four persons who passed away included Mrs. Tanya Weindorf, a mother of five, who was accompanying her 13 year old Down Syndrome son at camp and Chad and Courtney Phelps and their unborn daughter who was the church's youth pastor and wife and the senior pastor's son.

Now, I understand that this story is unspeakably sad but I believe it's important and instructive for many reasons including the amazing way God has enabled this church family and even Chad's father to respond. In fact, as I have watched this story unfold, I have thought repeatedly to myself, I can't imagine a better way for them to respond than the way God is enabling them to do so.

This is part of the statement that was posted on their website shortly after the accident:

“On Saturday, July 27, 2013, at around 4:30 p.m. the Lord allowed a bus accident to take Pastor Chad and Courtney Phelps and their unborn baby and Mrs. Tanya Weindorf home to enjoy him in his presence forever. Dozens of our children and teens were returning from a week of camp when the accident occurred with a teen bus. The Lord spared the lives of all 33 teenagers and two children onboard and the bus driver. Although many are still recovering from significant injuries, God's mercies in this tragedy are too many to recite and we magnify his sovereign goodness even in the moment of sorrow.

“We believe the biblical message of good news that God willingly and lovingly sacrificed his own Son, Jesus Christ, upon the cross in order that we might be rescued from the penalty of our sins and because that same Jesus rose from the dead, we of all people have an assured hope of eternity beyond the grave through his resurrection and life. Furthermore, we have heard of God drawing people to himself in saving faith through this situation and we’re amazed by a God who brings beauty out of ashes. For these reasons and many more, we rejoice even as we sorrow. God’s grace is being found to be sufficient for our every need and we’re grateful for the rich and everlasting hope we have in Jesus Christ. So, as absent from the body is present with the Lord, we sorrow not as those who have no hope for an everlasting reunion is promised with friends and family who have gone before and in our midst will be our accomplished and victorious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Did you hear where they said, “For these reasons”? Not emotions, not present circumstances. In their own words, “For these reasons and many more, we rejoice even as we sorrow.” Friends, how in the world is that even possible? Let’s talk about that today.

With that in mind, please open your Bible now to 1 Peter 1. That’s on page 180 of the back section of the Bible under the chair in front of you if you need that this morning. Our church’s theme this year is “Planning to Grow” and one of the verses that we have emphasized many times this year is Proverbs 21:5 which says, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance.” Friends, that’s a promise from God. The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance and especially now that we have completed work on the construction and launch at Faith West and because we’re also on the cusp of the final approval of the five year strategic ministry plan that our church family has been working on so diligently this year. That means, where we are right now, we really can double down on this third key way that we had especially hoped and prayed and worked toward this theme become a reality, “Planning to Grow” by continuing to discuss and refine and implementing our discipleship process. If we have those other two issues: Faith West and strategic ministry planning out of the way, now we can really focus on this for the remainder of the year.

Well, what does that mean? Tie it to our church’s mission statement. Do you have our church’s mission statement memorized? I hope so. The mission of Faith Church is to glorify God by winning people to Jesus Christ and then equipping them to be faithful disciples. So, the question before the house would be: what does “Planning to Grow” and what does spiritual growth and even numerical growth look like among us this fall and how do we kick all of this even into the next gear or how do we take it to the next level together? One of the answers is by doing a verse-by-verse study of this great book of 1 Peter together. We’re organizing this loosely around the theme of decision making in the will of God because this book is just intensely practical. Many of us can relate to Peter because of all that we know in the gospels about his life but think about now, where he’s writing. He has 30+ years of experience in seeing the birth and development of the church of Jesus Christ meaning he now has a seasoned wisdom in exactly how to grow,

exactly how to make wise decisions. What areas of everyday life especially need to be addressed? He's all about growing because he's seen it in action. He's seen God doing it in the lives of brothers and sisters in Christ.

In fact, it's interesting that he concludes his final letter, at least from the perspective of what we have recorded in Scripture, with these words, 2 Peter 3:18, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen." See, there's a guy who can help us accomplish our annual theme. There's a guy who can help us know and follow God's will in ways that are relevant and helpful to where we're living today.

Now, we're going to spend the bulk of our time this morning in verses 6-12 of this great chapter. But I would encourage you, just kind of glance down over verses 1-5 and as you do that, you'll recognize pretty quickly that Peter is writing to people who are facing hard times. In fact, they're described as individuals who "reside as aliens." He uses the verb "scattered" to explain the life situation that they're in. So, they're not sitting in a hot tub sipping a cool beverage. And we all know that hard times have a way of producing failure, huh? Or, better stated perhaps: hard times have a way of revealing the weaknesses, the failures that reside in our own hearts.

But there's hope. Why is there hope even you glance down over those first verses? Well, from the first word, the name of the guy writing the book, because we know the many ways he failed in the gospels yet here he is being used by God in mighty ways anyway. God has transformed him into being a stone that the name that Jesus gave him signifies. So, yes, they're facing hard times and yes, maybe they messed up before, but there is hope.

There's also hope because of the phrase after phrase that describes their relationship with the Lord in these early verses that can help them handle this feeling of alienation and feeling of being scattered. Please remember what the church family at Colonial Hills said: there are reasons why they were rejoicing. Not fluff, not emotion, not human speculation. That's why in this text, we read line after line after line reasons that can guide us and reasons that are guiding our friends in Colonial Hills through the hard times that they're facing.

Let's pick up the discussion in verse 6. Please listen carefully to the Word of God. 1 Peter 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so 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; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him," and hear this, "you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible." Do you think God's trying to say something to us here? Is he trying to get our attention? "With joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." Now, follow the logic: "As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit

of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ.” What a fascinating statement, “and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you,” you, you, like people at Colonial Hills; you, people like you and me, “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.”

What an incredible passage of Scripture and we’re talking this morning about decision making in the will of God when the pressure seems unbearable. But the time we have remaining, let’s organize what we just read around two resources available to followers of Christ during times of suffering: how can God help us? What does he want to do for us even when times are hard?

Here is the first resource, undoubtedly you saw it in the text, it’s amazing joy. What the church family at Colonial Hills, led by their senior pastor, even as he grieves his personal loss, what they spoke about in their statement is exactly what the Apostle Peter emphasized in this text and that is that it is possible for followers of Jesus Christ to have joy even as you suffer. And friends, listen, the passage is clear: you can do that greatly. We’re not talking about barely. We’re not talking about hanging on by the skin of your teeth. Greatly, did you see that in the text? Verse 6, “In this you greatly rejoice.” Verse 8, “you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible.”

Peter is actually choosing a particular word there to try to get our attention. In the original language, it’s *agalliao*. It’s purposely distinct from the other term that we would typically find for joy or rejoice in the New Testament. It’s an intensified form. That’s why in the King James if you remember some of you this verse from that particular version, saying that you can “be exceedingly glad” as you suffer. And because it’s in the present tense, Peter is suggesting that it’s possible to be in a continual state of joy when and as you’re alienated. And when and as you’re scattered. When and as you’re suffering. In fact, Peter says “at some point it’s joy beyond words.” Joy inexpressible. And the original term that is used there literally means “higher than speech.” And when you think about it, for Peter who was never at a loss to say something at any given moment, for Peter to acknowledge that it’s possible to have the kind of relationship with God and it’s possible for God to work in you in particular ways that it’s inexpressible. That’s making a significant claim for sure.

Now, I have no trouble if in your mind right now you’re saying, “Yeah, really. Is this kind of church talk right now? Is this pastoral platitudes until we go to lunch and face the reality of the real world?” No, this is true and here’s why: it’s because of its source. See, our friends at Colonial Hills alluded to this, they were not conjuring this up on their own strength, hear me: they have a source of joy that is supernatural. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus promised before he went to the cross and died on our behalf. John 15:11, Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you so that,” what? Note the pronouns, every single word in the Bible is important, “So that My joy,” Jesus said, “may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.”

John McArthur said this about that in his commentary on 1 Peter, he said, "Salvation joy is not some brief, shallow, circumstantial emotion." Thank God for that, huh? "But rather something permanent and profound. Mere happiness comes from positive external events but salvation joy results from the deep-rooted confidence that one possesses eternal life from the living God through the crucified and risen Christ which joy will be fully realized in the glory of heaven." That's why I hope there's been a definite time in your life where you've acknowledged your need and you've placed your faith and trust in Christ as Savior and Lord. And if you've never done that, you can even do that today and here's what happens: the moment that occurs, you're establishing a personal relationship with God that transcends religion and transcends ritual and transcends regulations. We're talking about something here that is supernatural. God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him how? In spirit and in truth. And the kind of joy we're seeing in this text finds its source in the person of God himself. So much so that the pronouns can be interchanged, where Jesus would say that "My joy may be in you so that your joy may be made full." That is a work.

How does this source of supernatural joy impact the way that we would handle a particular trial? Here's one answer: it's because of your new perspective. Friend, there is a crucial phrase in this passage that changes everything. It's in verse 6 where Peter says, "In this you greatly rejoice even though now for a" what? "For a little while." Now, think with me about that: what does that mean? Was Peter suggesting that this alienation that they were experiencing because of their faith in Christ or this being scattered by the gathering winds of persecution of Christ's church, was he suggesting that it was about to end? Was that why it was a little while? You're only going to be alienated for like two more weeks, hang on. You're only going to be scattered but it's not going to last until the end of the month, then it's going to be over. Was he saying that all that they were facing was about to end, therefore it was a little while? Quite the contrary. The persecution was about to intensify. Many of them would be martyred for their faith including the human author of this book.

And I realize you might say this morning, "Pastor Viars, I'm not even sure that this message is for me because the hardness that I'm facing right now shows absolutely no sign of abating." In fact, you might say, "I think I'm going to have to face this issue the rest of my days." Well, if that's where you're coming from and I recognize a number who are part of our church family would have something hard about their life of which that's the case, I would just encourage you to finish the statement. It makes all the difference in the world. "I may have to face this issue the rest of my days," where? "The rest of my days on earth." Which is a little while in comparison to eternity.

That's why Paul said it this way, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time" even if you face it forever on this earth, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed in us." Which is why the Psalmist said it like this, "Weeping may last for the night." And there are people in this church family who know that well, who could talk about that in living Technicolor for sure. "Weeping may last for the night but a shout of joy comes in the morning."

I want to ask you a question at this point and friends I have prayed that I would do this as gently as possible because I understand this is not just an academic exercise. There are many here who are facing great trial right now but I want to ask you this question: is it possible that one of the reasons you lack joy during times of trial is because you're focusing on the immediate loss more than your eternal future? In fact, one of the takeaways from this passage is learning the discipline and that's what this is, it's a discipline of saying, "I can rejoice today even when it's hard because what I'm facing today, even if it lasts for the rest of my natural life on earth, what I am facing today is just a little while." This is just a little while when compared to eternity. "Weeping may last for the night but a shout of joy comes in the morning."

I recognize that someone might say, "Well, okay, this churchy stuff, I guess it's okay unless the challenge really gets hard." Is that what the passage says? No, to the contrary. Inexpressible joy is possible in the midst of incredibly hard times. Peter talks about people who have been distressed by various trials and the original word there suggests many colored trials. It's not like, "Okay, I can handle the one I've got or the two I've got but if I have three, I'm done." Nope, that's not what Peter is talking about at all. He's talking about trials coming at you from all sides. Anybody here like that? "Got something going on with my spouse. I've got something going on with my kids. I've got something going on with my boss. My neighbor's dog bit me, for crying out loud." Many colored. Yet Peter says the joy that you have received and continue to receive from your crucified Savior can sustain you.

Something else that is very important to note about this passage: what we are reading about in this text is not a command. Now, rejoicing is a command in other places in the Bible, there's no question about that, but what I want you to note about this passage is, it's not a command here. It's simply a report. It's an observation. It is a reminder to them of something that is already occurring in their midst. Even though you're facing these various trials in this, you greatly rejoice. In other words, he's saying, "Look around. Look at the church family. Look at your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Some who are going through incredibly difficult times and yet God, in his power, is helping them greatly rejoice."

I want to suggest to you: that is one of the great reasons to want to become part of a church family. The Christian life was never intended to be lived in isolation of other people. I want to encourage you to become part of a church family, to build relationships with people some of whom have been in this matter of following Jesus a lot longer than you and taste, by your relationship, what it's like for someone to have had joy for a long, long time. In fact, if you're younger around here, defined as under 40, and I recognize that definition will change over time, so don't quote me on that for anything but today, but if you're younger around here, I would encourage you and I'm quite serious about this, to make it one of your goals this fall to proactively build a relationship with someone in our church family who is older than you. Someone who has walked with God for a long period of time and see what it is like through their story to learn about the joy that Christ has given them. We have a lot of people in this church who meet that condition. They've been at this a long time and they've had some rough patches for sure

but they have greatly rejoiced in a way that is a marvelous model for us of the power of God working in and through them.

Here's an example, I could pick many. Some of you might recognize this picture, this is Toughy and Wilma and Stevie Fuller. Toughy and Wilma have been faithful members of this church since 1976 and God gave them a son with Downs Syndrome named Stevie. You might say, "Oh no. How sad." Don't ever say that to the Fullers. And don't ever say that to anybody who was here at this church while Stevie Fuller was alive. Stevie Fuller knew Christ. There was absolutely no question about that and Stevie Fuller was a joyful young man and he brought his parents and he brought this church immeasurable joy. In fact, some of us remember coming into Sunday night services and just part of Sunday night church for many of us was messing around with Stevie and laughing with Stevie and us laughing with him and him laughing with us. He loved Whoppers from Burger King, he loved them. And if you started messing with him about it, "Stevie, I don't think your parents are going to take you to Burger King after church." Oh man, I mean, he knew you were kidding and you could just laugh and giggle and that was just a regular part of coming into church. God giving him, God giving his parents, God giving this entire church family immeasurable joy.

And I recognize that all of that is counterintuitive, but do you understand that much of Christianity is just that: counterintuitive. And many of us would say that because we had the privilege of watching the Fullers experience the joy of Christ in the midst of their many colored trials, that made it easier for us to experience joy in whatever circumstance we might have been facing at the time. And I believe this every bit as much as I believe anything: that some day I'm going to see Stevie Fuller again in a place where there is no Downs Syndrome. In fact, they told Toughy and Wilma when Stevie was born that he would not see his teenage years and he would certainly not get out of his teenage years. Stevie lived until he was 40 years old and I think, humanly speaking, that that has a lot to say with the joyful, compassionate way his parents served him all of his days. And I hope maybe to a small measure, to the way his brothers and sisters in Christ just loved the fire out of him. But he struggled with Downs for 40 years and biblically speaking, that was just a little while. Just a little while.

And because as a church family we were able to rejoice with those who were rejoicing and weep with those who were weeping and, by the way, do you understand, sometimes those two phrases describe the same situation at the same time, but because we were able to do that, according to this text, that provided an opportunity to prove the value and genuineness of your faith. That's the point of the purpose clause in verse 7, "So that the proof of your faith," there it is, "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."

Think about this, it's a hard question but it's important: why is God allowing a season of hardship in your life if that's the case? And undoubtedly there are many answers, but one of them is to give you an opportunity to prove just like our friends at Colonial Hills, is to give you an opportunity to prove the precious and powerful nature of your genuine faith

in Christ. And I realize you might say, “I’m starting feel I’m backed in a corner because, Pastor Viars, I just can’t see it. I just can’t see how it’s all going to turn out. I can’t see it.”

Peter had that one covered, too, didn’t he? He anticipated that objection and he said, essentially, believing without seeing is always best. Trust and love are the cornerstones of any meaningful relationship and though you’ve not seen him, you love him and though you don’t see him now, you believe in him. Did you notice what they named this church? Doubt church? I’ll believe it when I see it church? Skeptics church? Thomas church? Thomas, what do you mean Thomas? I’m talking about one of Jesus’ disciples who even after he had seen the miracles and even after he had heard the teaching and even though he had experienced the empty tomb, he still said, “I won’t believe unless I see.” And amazingly, it shows the grace of Jesus that he allowed Thomas to see but then in a gentle rebuke, Jesus said this, “Because you’ve seen me have you believed? Blessed are they,” who would that be? Colonial Hills Baptist Church in Indianapolis. People like you and me if we’re following this text, “Blessed are they who did not see and who yet believed. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” We can have amazing joy.

If we stopped at that point, I think we would miss a crucial aspect of Peter’s logic because verses 10 and 12, that’s why we read them together, explains the foundation of all of this. Yes, we can have amazing joy because we also have sustaining confidence. You see, the overall point is: our joy is based on the settled and unchanging Word of God. You saw that in that statement I read from Colonial Hills. It was chock-full of what? References from Scripture.

And it’s fascinating the way Peter describes the Word in this text. He talks about how the prophets predicted this kind of grace. “As to the salvation,” verse 10 says, “the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries.” What does that mean? Well, it means that it was impossible for them to fully understand how a Messiah could come who could both die for our sin but also be our living and eternal King with the capacity of providing the kind of joy that sustains us through trials that we’re describing today. And it wasn’t for lack of trying that they couldn’t understand it. The text says they made careful searches and inquiries of their own prophetic writings. They wanted to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicated as he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. In other words, how could all of this be true? I want something that is firm.

Did you see the answer in verse 12? It’s that the prophets weren’t writing only for themselves but for us. The recipients of the gospel of grace. And Peter’s point is: you can have joy in the midst of hard times because you have a settled and God-given confidence that his Word really is true. What he said about your present condition and what he said about your future hope is his honest truth. And I take you back to that first statement that I read from Colonial Hills, “For these reasons.” Do you have the reasons in your heart? Are you getting them deep into your inner being so that you’re prepared when hard times come? “For these reasons and many more, we rejoice even as we sorrow.”



Peek ahead for a second to what we're going to study in a couple of weeks because Peter talks about this at the very end of this chapter. He says, "you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring," what? "Word of God." That's what the prophets were searching for; that's what they were working out; that's what they were receiving from the Holy Spirit, the enduring Word of God. "For, "ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER. And this is the word which was preached to you."

On October 10<sup>th</sup> of just last year, Pastor Chad Phelps presented a message to his youth group entitled "What is the Purpose of Suffering?" Just a few months ago, "What is the Purpose of Suffering?" In fact, you can download the entire presentation from the church's website but the words are breathtaking in light of what subsequently occurred. One of the illustrations that Pastor Chad used with his youth group that night was from the life of Martin Luther in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Here's the story in Chad's own words,

"Martin Luther's was a life marked by enormous suffering for the cause of Christ. He suffered societal rejection and even physical pain and torment that manifested itself in various diseases at the end of his life. Here's what Martin Luther, the Reformer said regarding suffering, 'If I,' what? 'Believe the Word, I shall on the last day after the sentence has been pronounced not only gladly have suffered ordinary temptation, insult and imprisonment, but I shall also say O, that I did not throw myself under the feet of all the godless for the sake of the great glory which I now see revealed and which is come to me through the merit of Christ.'"

Do you see what Pastor Chad was trying to help the young people in his youth group understand? That joy was possible in times of suffering if they based their hope on the inspired and sufficient Word. The same Word that the prophets had searched, that the angels longed to see, that unlike the grass that withers and the flower that fades, the Word of the Lord, which endures forever.

In that same message, Chad used a number of passages of Scripture, but one of them was Psalm 73:26 where he reminded his youth group of the Psalmist's words, "My flesh and my heart may fail but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." And then he went on to say this,

"There are many things I hope you remember from tonight but first and foremost I want you to remember that against all logic and against the background of the acknowledgement that God is sovereign and intensely providential, suffering in this world occurs in order for people to understand that Jesus is enough just like the Word proclaims."

Believing that is what helped Chad and Courtney when they were engaged to be married, to have a picture taken in front of this monument which says, “Faithful unto death.” Faithful unto death.

Well, the takeaways from this passage for us today: one would be to make sure that you have established the kind of relationship with God that is able to sustain you through the toughest of times with joy. And if you would be here and would say, “Pastor Viars, I really don’t have that.” Thank you so much for your honesty and the good news is that you can have that right now. In the quietness of this moment you can place your faith and trust in Christ. You can simply say to him, “Father, I know I’m a sinner and I want to place my faith in what Jesus Christ did on the cross for me. I know I need him to save me and I know I need a Lord that is this sustaining.”

If you’ve never done that, I would encourage you to do that today. Christian friend, I’m really serious about that challenge I made earlier: get to know somebody older than you. Get to know someone in our church family who has been walking with Christ for a long, long period of time. Buy them supper at a place they like. In other words, MCL. It won’t kill you and just ask them – some of you have no idea where that is, do you? Just ask them to tell you the story of how God has helped them be such a joyous person through all of the trials that they have faced over the years and you will learn much.

I would encourage you also to ask yourself this question: if inexpressible joy proves the genuineness of one’s faith, what does your response to hard times prove about yours? I would encourage you also to cultivate the habit of adding that phrase, “it’s just a little while” to whatever challenge you’re facing right now. Tell yourself that, “it’s just a little while. It’s just a little while. It’s just a little while.”

Lastly, I would encourage you to do everything you can this fall, that you’re going to ground yourself in the unchanging truth of the Word. I understand that we’re living in a culture that doesn’t want to study, that doesn’t want to read, that doesn’t want to work, that doesn’t particularly enjoy preaching, blah, blah, blah, blah. There’s an incredible amount of pressure on me to do something other than preach the Word. Guess what? I think you know: I’m going to keep preaching the Word. And that’s exactly what you want, that is exactly what you want because you understand that the sufficient Word of God is our only hope.