

Re-read 1 Peter 2:1-3.

3. These verses say we should *long for*, or crave, the pure milk of the Word. What is meant by “the word”? (Remember, Peter is continuing his line of thinking from Chapter 1. Notice that we are “newborns” because we have been “born again” (1 Peter 1:3, 23). This is a further reminder of our new identity as children of God.)

4. What will generate or set the stage for such longing? (From this text, please.)

5. What will hinder an appetite for the word? (From this text, please).

6. “Pure” has the meaning of unadulterated or not mixed with impurities.
a. Why do we need this kind of a word?

b. What about the word “grow” can give us a hopeful outlook on the goal of becoming more like our Father God?

10. What do you learn from 1 Peter 2:4, and how can this apply to your life?
11. In this passage (1 Peter 2:4-10), Jesus is said to be a “cornerstone” and also a “stumbling stone.” Explain (from these verses) how He can be both.
12. In verses 9 and 10 Peter uses several terms to refer to God’s people. To whom do these words originally apply? (See Deuteronomy 10:15 and Exodus 19:6.)
13. According to this passage in Peter, to whom do they apply today? What does this mean to *you*?
14. Verse 9 sets forth the *purpose* for all who are now God’s people. What is it?

15. *How* is the purpose we just discovered accomplished? What more could be done by the church in general to carry it out? What more could *you* do? (Be specific, please.)

16. Give one instance when you used your memory verses (1 Peter 2:1-3) in your life this week.

PROSPECTS OF THE FUTURE LIGHTEN PAIN OF THE PRESENT

by David Roper

It seems to me that God is invariably careless about His own. Crosses, arenas, scaffolds and firing squads are often the reward for a life well done. Most real saints seem to go the hard way. And for the rest of us mere Christians, strange, terrifying and painful things happen almost daily. Apparently, God's caring doesn't mean that He goes in for the soft treatment.

The world can be a miserable place to live; at least it seems that way off and on. We should, of course, be full of enthusiasm and high spirits, but we should never forget the darker side of life. Everyone should be prepared to live a life of some discomfort. Charles Williams once commented that when young people confide in adults about their troubles and discontents it is all wrong to tell them that they are not really unhappy. Young people usually are unhappy, and the most helpful reply we can give them would begin, "But of course." Holding a pretty stern view of this world, as Williams did, generally makes one more optimistic in the end.

I've always admired poor old Job whose life fell apart so completely. He took his hot and impatient complaints right back to God, and God approved. He informed Job that, of course the world was a miserable place to live. Who would think otherwise? All was not well and wasn't supposed to be. The weight of God's displeasure, in fact, fell upon Job's would-be friends who tried to insist that it was. It's true God has scattered moments of joy and fun along the way to refresh us. But the security and happiness we crave, we can never have in this life. I think I know why: it would keep us from God.

Part of the problem arises from our limited definition of the word "good" and the way we apply this term to God. In fact, given the usual understanding of goodness, I would have to say that the greatest test for me as a Christian would be to believe that God is good. There is so much of life that suggests otherwise.

Unfortunately, our concept of the goodness of God is based on the faulty assumption that personal happiness is the highest good. And happiness is usually understood in terms of personal ease and affluence. Authentic happiness, however, is something much more profound than staying in the comfort zone. And true happiness is not precluded by suffering. God, in His wisdom knows that there are things to be done to our character than can only be brought about through suffering. To shield us from this suffering would be to rob us of the highest possible good. As the apostle Paul once put it: "All things (even pain) work together to produce good" (Romans 8:28). And in context, the good is the character of the man.

Now we must not assume that suffering itself is good. It isn't. I agree with fellow columnist Bill Edelen that suffering is bad. Regardless of the benefit to the sufferer, pain is never good in itself. There is not the slightest doubt that we ought to prevent and relieve misery in every way we can. But, though pain itself is not good, it can produce something good.

Theologians have told us that the proper role of every creature is to submit to his Creator. But in our present condition self-surrender is a hard if not impossible task. As long as things go well, the idea of surrender to God never enters our mind. We feel safe as long as we can.

Error and evil are often masked and undetected and we're unaware of our trouble. But pain puts us on notice that things are wrong with us. It shatters the illusion that we are complete in ourselves – that what we have is enough. Pain can lead an unbeliever to God, and it can force a Christian to depend on God as he should.

As I wrote this paragraph, I remembered a brief meeting with the young parents of a congenitally deformed infant, whose name, they said, was Andrew. Like the apostle of that name, he had brought them to Jesus. It seems they were riding high; they had no room or reason for God in their life. Then Andrew came. George Herbert was right: "If goodness lead us not, then weariness may toss us on God's breast."

Furthermore, we Christians shouldn't be surprised when things don't go smoothly, when illness, money problems or new kinds of trouble come our way. There are no guarantees that in this life we will be healthy and wealthy -- only wise. God does promise to give the wit and wisdom necessary to cope with life and its ups and downs, if we want it.

*When God wants to drill and skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man to play the noblest part,
When He yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man that all the world
will be amazed,
How He ruthlessly perfects when He royally selects.
How He hammers him and hurts him and with mighty blows converts him into shapes
of clay which only God understands.
How He bends but never breaks,
When His good He undertakes.
How He uses whom he chooses and with every purpose fuses him, by every act induces
him to try his power out.
God knows what He's about.*

Ultimately, of course, only heaven is the answer to our pain. Paul states in Romans 8:18 that the present "light momentary affliction" is far outweighed by the future weight of "eternal glory." The prospect of the future lightens the pain of the present. In the meantime, pain has to be borne but we can trust God's love in the same way in which we expect our children to trust us when kind actions taken for their welfare (such as a trip to the dentist) seem utterly cruel and terrifying. Peace comes when we realize we are able to see only a few threads in the tapestry of life. We do not yet have the whole picture. But someday, looking back, we will be able to say that all things did indeed work together for our good. ☪

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