

SIM *now*

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East Asia Edition

Knowing Him Through Suffering

1 PETER 2:21

“For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in His steps.”





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PARTICIPATION IN SUFFERING



Phil Bauman, International Director

When a new mission family were assigned to a very rural location, their parents were keen to better understand where they would be living.

They spoke to the entity leadership and asked for some pictures, which showed that their young family would only have very basic housing. The parents suggested some cheap and simple alterations they felt could make the housing more comfortable. But the team leader responded by saying that trying to improve the accommodation was unnecessary and that they should 'suffer hardship as good soldiers'.

Is this really what Peter meant when he said in 1 Peter 2:21-22, that 'if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God'?

Misunderstanding of Suffering

One of SIM's core values is that we will be a Christ-like community. We believe that 'following Christ's example means sacrifice, sometimes hardship and perhaps even death'. I do not think the suffering the leader above referred to is this sort of 'suffering' or

'hardship' that the New Testament writers were calling God's people to endure and participate in.

In Peter's first epistle, he was writing to believers who were suffering in various ways. Some were slaves to harsh masters; others were being treated unjustly. As believers, when we suffer in these ways, at the hands of those who don't know Christ, Peter reminds us to follow the example Christ has given us.

The believers Peter was writing to were not seeking suffering. Seeking or causing suffering is not what believers are called to. Neither should we ever seek 'suffering' for others.

The start of our core value statement to be a Christ-like community says, "we desire to be a transforming community dedicated to becoming like Christ in love, servanthood, holiness and obedience to the Father."

Becoming the source of Suffering

One of many tragedies is when God's people fail to be Christ-like and are instead the source of suffering for each other and

the wider world! May we, as God's people, never be those who cause that suffering! Unfortunately, all too often, that is the case. How tragic it is when we are the source of suffering!

Peter refers to 'harsh masters' and those who are 'under the pain of injustice'! Oh, how beautiful it is when we see believers enduring suffering together in these circumstances. It is in these circumstances that we should follow in His steps.

Behaving like Christ when others suffer

We are ambassadors of hope. We should seek the good of all people. We have agreed to be 'dedicated to becoming like Christ in love, servanthood, holiness and obedience to the Father.' Our call is to 'act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God' (Micah 6:8b).

As God's people, may we seek justice and love mercy in our dealing with all. When we suffer for being identified with Christ, may we endure it, knowing that it is God who gets the glory. May we be a Christ-like community! May the articles in this issue of SIMNow help us to understand this truth, deeper!



Timothy Pang
Mission Pastor,
Grace (S.C.C.) Church

Simon Peter, one of the original twelve disciples of Jesus is also one of the three closest to Christ (along with James and John). He is often also known as the disciple who denied Christ three times, yet was subsequently restored by Christ, with the call to feed/tend to His sheep/flock. Peter was eventually also one of the first and prominent leaders of the early church after Jesus' ascension. Tradition records that towards the end of the great persecution during Emperor Nero's reign, Peter desired to be crucified upside-down, as he deemed himself unworthy to die in the same way as his master Jesus.

KNOWING HIM THROUGH SUFFERING

In his first epistle, Peter writes to "those scattered" among provinces in the northern part of Asia Minor, who were likely Gentile converts to Christianity and were socially marginalized and faced persecution.

Knowing to Submit

In the context of 1 Peter 2, there are three types of relations that Peter addresses, focusing on the theme of submission, namely Christians to authorities, slaves to masters, and the husband-wife relationship. In v. 21, he writes, "For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps ..." The Greek word Peter uses here is "**pascho**" (which occurs forty-two times in the NT; notably twelve times in 1 Peter). It is also the root word of "**pathema**" / "**pathetos**" (passion, suffering) and "**pathos**" (strong feeling, passion). The Hollywood movie "The Passion of the Christ" depicted graphically the sufferings that Christ endured

during the final week before His crucifixion and death. Thanks be to God, the story does not end there!

Knowing to Sacrifice

Peter continues in vv. 22-24a to describe Christ's example, which we are called to follow. As a result of Christ's obedience to His Father's will to sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world, He paid the ultimate price and penalty so that we may be restored and reconciled to God, and to experience abundant and eternal life (through grace by faith). Lastly, Peter spells out in vv. 24b-25 how we are to respond – to die to sin, live to righteousness, experience healing (by His wounds), to no longer continually stray, and to return to the Lord. The final image he leaves us is the triumphant Christ who shall one day return – the Shepherd and Guardian of our souls. May we lead a life of submission, sacrifice, and service like Jesus as we continue to point the lost to Him!

Questions for Reflection

1. *In what ways has God called us to follow His purpose, His calling?*
 2. *How does God want us to respond to suffering around us, and the suffering we experience ourselves?*
 3. *In what way/ways have we strayed from our Chief Shepherd?
How is God speaking to us to return to Him?*
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SERVING THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING



Khochoben Odyuo, Kenya

For many years I made my fear, pain and rejection greater than my God.

God led me to the East Pokots, a small community, who were living in an area with harsh semi-arid climate. Drought that led to food shortage was a common occurrence. Often, the community would suffer severe hunger that culminated in malnutrition. There were no churches, schools, roads, running water, electricity or medical dispensaries in the community. I felt convinced that they were very much in need of a hope in Jesus.

Seeing Suffering as Christ sees

While returning from our first visit in 2011 August, after four days and three nights sleeping under thorn trees in Ayan village, I promised myself that I would never return to this community because of a frightening encounter with the villagers. But I could not purge these precious people, the East Pokots, from my heart, especially since I recognised that there was no one available to share the Gospel to them. Then I realized that if Christ had seen them, He would have been moved with compassion.

Serving those who are suffering

So, at the beginning of 2014, after three years, I started asking God for strength to visit them one last time. Unfortunately, fighting broke out between the East Pokots and their neighbour tribe. The Pokots killed many members of the Kenyan army and the strife

between them lasted many months. Every form of transportation was stopped but my spirit was determined not to let the armed operation deter me. So, I decided to travel in an army truck to the village. When I arrived in the village, mothers were crying as their children were scattered and in hiding. They were hungry as no food was allowed in.

Success in Serving Like Christ

On Christmas day in 2014, we invited everyone and shared with them the Word of God. From that day onwards, the community began to accept me because they said that in times like that, when they were filled with fear and hopelessness, I had come as I cared for them. From then on with great excitement, I went back to the village again and again and started building a relationship with the community.

When I began living in the Ayan village like one of them, I became doubtful that it was God who brought me there. My fear and uncertainty grew as I was unable to meet the villagers' expectations to provide them with food, drill boreholes, build hospitals and schools. But today, although it had taken many years, the East Pokot team – inspired by God's leading and motivated by how the believers gather under thorn trees to worship our living God – have planted eight churches (although one was pulled down). There are also trained leaders to carry on God's ministry in partnership with the African Gospel Church despite the fact that some of them had never gone to school.

FROM SUFFERING TO PRAISE

Samuel, South Asia

Our journey to serve in Asia started with language and cross-cultural training in Australia, Thailand, and Singapore. It was hard on our elder son YS who was only four years old at that time. Being far away from home in Australia, he would cry every night, saying, "I want to meet So-kun!" (his best friend and male cousin).

We can never forget, when we were at the airport in Japan ready to depart for our second term, how he cried sorrowfully as we were being sent off by our family and friends. Even though I knew God had called us, our hearts were torn apart when we saw our children crying and suffering because of our decision.

Unbearable Suffering

The ultimate suffering came during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown when very rapidly the infection spread throughout Asia. As YS's parents, we began noticing that something was wrong with him when he refused to study, remained silent, and started having crying spells. We did not really know what to do with him. He would scream and kick his sisters, throw all the toys around the house, and scream continuously over minor incidents such as someone's foot invading his space or someone sneezing in our home. The most difficult part dealing with him was his extreme anxiety arising from his vivid imagination that everything was contaminated. He would refuse to have his meals because of this overwhelming anxiety. He denied he was anxious and imagining things, and screamed every day, sometimes multiple times a day. We needed to give up all other work to take care of him. We could do nothing else but merely hold his arms and wait for him to calm down after one or two hours.

YS and his baby brother

Unshakable Trust

I believed God would heal him. I spoke to him the Word of God when, to our dismay, our nine-year-old son said that it was "better to die in a hopeless dark room". I prayed for him but had no answer from God for months, even one year later. The situation did not seem to improve. When it was time for us to return to Japan for our home assignment, we took him to a mental clinic where he was diagnosed with adjustment disorder. He started medication and counselling, but there was no significant improvement.

Unbelievable Recovery

Despite this, we decided to place complete trust of our future into God's Hands.

I was confident that the time for our son's healing would come. As we spent time in Japan, he seemed to improve, and we were able to sit down for a meal together which had never happened before in the field. We decided to return to the field when we found that he had recovered completely! We praise God for His healing, His mercy, and His faithfulness.

Through our suffering, we experienced God's mercy and compassion. We thank God for His special miracle which He performed through our pain and sufferings. Now our son who is full of joy holds his baby brother in his arms (his name means 'joy to the Lord'). He knows God is the one who listens to our prayers.



KUDZU MISSION AMIDST SUFFERING

Michelle Koh, Japan



Kudzu is a plant with astonishing spreading and breeding capabilities. In Japanese language, it symbolizes things being tangled and unresolved including conflicts, complexities, and disharmony which in a way represent what I experienced in Japan. It is a country that highly values systems, which can be challenging for foreigners to understand or familiarize with. Combined with language difficulties, I exerted a lot of effort in comprehending and adjusting to the strict regulations. Much of my time was dedicated to understanding and adapting to life in Japan.

Health Challenges

In May 2023, I had acute appendicitis, a common emergency requiring a simple appendectomy. However, this sudden illness resulted in me being hospitalized twice in Japan. Living in a rural area with a language barrier, I could not fully understand my own condition. The doctors would just check on me daily to ensure my pain was managed, asking me to patiently wait for the inflammation levels to decrease. The language barrier combined with high inflammation levels did not align with their immediate surgery procedures.

Discouragement and Doubts

The general populace (including Christians) appreciates Japan for its beautiful scenery, food, shopping, entertainment but pays minimal attention to the Gospel work. Japanese people are kind, united, and very polite, yet they harbour little favour towards Christianity and often

show strong resistance. Therefore, missionary work in Japan is extremely challenging and Missionaries easily feel discouraged. My acute health issue could not be swiftly resolved through surgery. When I reflected on the struggles I faced in Japan, my past 20 years of missionary experience seemed futile. I often asked God: "Why did you call me to Japan as I am not suited for Japan at all." In the end, I decided to undergo surgery in Taiwan, miraculously being able to fly back. Thank God, despite the lengthy process, my body eventually recovered.

God amidst suffering

At my lowest point, doubting why God called me to Japan, I unexpectedly met a loving Japanese couple. In my weakest moment, God encouraged me through this couple, showing that despite my 20 years of past missionary experience not directly translating into effectiveness in Japan, He would be sufficient to me. Upon learning about my missionary purpose, the couple thanked me excitedly for being willing to serve in a country where sharing the gospel was so difficult. At that moment, I felt like all my grievances and hardships were swept away. Amidst my pain, mental anguish and linguistic struggles, God was with me. I was reminded of how when Apostle Paul had an unknown thorn in his flesh, God's response was: **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"** (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).



Global Hethne Consultation 2024

Ashok Kumar, Ministry Point Person (“Hethne”)

Global Hethne Consultation 2024 was a global event that faced numerous challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Despite multiple postponements and hotel closures in Chiang Mai, we recently brought together 140 delegates from 20 countries, a testament to the global leaders’ seriousness and passion to reach “*Hethne”.

Dr Bijoy Koshy, the director of Interserve International, initiated the first-day devotion and set the platform for the rest of the consultation. During the four-day event, we conducted six plenaries, twenty-one workshops, and three devotions led by prominent mission leaders who provided deep insights and fresh perspectives. The event was a significant step towards reaching 1.3 billion “Hethne” as it ushered in a new era of collaboration with people worldwide, promoting unity among the participants. The consultation also facilitated new possibilities and discussions for future collaborations and initiatives.

One unique aspect of the consultation was bringing together global ministry partners, allowing them to connect and share resources. Some of the agencies represented include SIM, Interserve, Lausanne Movement, WEC, COMIBAM (Latin American Mission), Prayer Cast, Frontiers Ventures, SAC (South Asian), CRU, and many local churches too. We plan to hold another consultation in 3 years.

** “Hethne” refers to an ethnic group from a major South Asian country*