

Today's question – How Do I Move On? – is actually a question I formulated. On that first day that I announced this series, I received a lot of questions, but after that day, not very many. I then asked, "If you would like to hear a sermon on a particular topic, then write that down." I received several requests about grief and loss, forgiveness for self and others, and a simple plea, "Why me, Lord?" I saw a common thread in these topics. They often manifest into heavy weights that can cause us to feel stuck. We struggle and suffer, yet we aren't sure how to move on.

There are many things in our lives that can cause us to feel stuck and that may prevent us from moving on. If you don't feel like it's grief or loss or resentment or forgiveness for you, you can fill in whatever is applicable to you, and still follow what this scripture instructs. In fact, the context of this scripture is not about grief or forgiveness.

This letter was written by the apostle Peter to the people in Asia Minor during the time when Romans were persecuting Christians. In the chapter before today's scripture, "Peter talks about a trial – literally a 'fiery ordeal' – that is testing Christians. The reference to fire may be specific, because Nero killed Christians in Rome by burning them alive."¹ Peter writes to them about being steadfast in their faith despite their trials and testing.

This is the beauty of scripture. Being persecuted for our faith is not what is causing us to feel stuck. None of our lives are being threatened because of our faith. We live in a country that allows religious

freedom, so we aren't experiencing the same suffering as the people in Asia Minor.

But, we do suffer. We have all been devoured by the prowling lion at some point in our lives, and some are in the fight of their life right at this moment. We can apply whatever is causing us to suffer or feel persecuted to this scripture, and still use Peter's advice on how to keep our faith, no matter what "fiery ordeals" we experience.

So, how do we move on? First, verse 6 says: "Humble yourself." This is so hard for us, but it's the first thing we have to do. We must realize and acknowledge that we cannot get ourselves out of this "fiery ordeal." We are not strong enough nor have the power to do it on our own.

We also admit to our part in being stuck – are we holding on to the past, why are we refusing to let go of whatever is keeping us here, are we wallowing in victimhood or self-pity? We have to take responsibility for our part in being stuck, and then 100% surrender to God. We don't have what it takes to move on. We need God to help us.

This scripture promises that God will help us in "due time" (v.6). Some have interpreted this to mean that God puts us into these situations to test us. Even Peter uses that language, saying that God is testing their faith. I don't believe that God causes suffering to test us or our faith. God is not a punishing God who keeps us in troubling situations until we learn our lesson. Yes, we should learn from everything that we experience in life, but God doesn't use "tough love" in order to make us grow. Our "fiery ordeals" are tough, but God's love is not.

¹ Stephanie Ford, "Empowered by the Spirit," *Disciplines* 2020, 173.

We have to give our grief or trial its “due course,” by learning how to sit in our suffering. We hate to feel bad, so we will do whatever it takes to zoom through the hard parts. Especially grief. Most companies give you time off “to grieve,” but three days are not nearly enough. Grief takes as long as it takes, and there’s no standard time for all people. My dad was off a week when my mom died and was glad to get back to work, so he didn’t have to think about his loss. We never talked about my mother because we learned quickly that if we did, my dad started crying. I know now that crying is not a bad thing, it’s a necessary thing, in order to give your grief its due time.

We hate this part of the process, so we try to ignore it or numb ourselves with alcohol, drugs, food, TV, gambling, busyness -- anything that can give us a little reprieve from thinking or feeling our pain. But, as we all know, the buzz, the high, and the adrenaline rush wears off, and we’re back to being stuck in the “fiery ordeal.” As much as we don’t want to, we must give the suffering, its due course.

For many of us the grief or resentment consumes us and we can’t ignore it or numb ourselves from it. We can’t escape it. Thankfully, we have Christ to help us. Peter says it this way: “Cast all our anxiety on him because he cares for” us. (v.7). We go to Christ and pour out our hearts. Every. Single. Day. We tell him our problems, our fears, our weaknesses. We ask Christ to help us get through this, to show us how to move on.

Going to Christ is part of disciplining ourselves. The third part of Peter’s instruction in verse 8 says: “Discipline yourselves; keep alert.” In the beginning, we may allow ourselves to spend time in bed

with the covers pulled over our heads, and that’s ok to allow the feelings to well up and feel them. We need to take time to process everything. But, in due time, it’s time to begin our healing. Healing happens when we discipline ourselves and keep alert. By keeping alert, we are aware that we’re drinking too much or we’re eating our feelings or we’ve thrown ourselves into work. And, then we take steps to discipline ourselves from limiting or removing the unhealthy things, the things that keep us stuck.

As Peter puts it: “Resist the adversary” (v.9). When we’re numbed or checked out, we’re not alert to see our adversary coming for us. We all have something that prowls around and lays in wait for the most opportune time to pounce. So, to keep the adversary at bay, we discipline ourselves. We pray. We worship. We serve. We strive to be closer to God and be in God’s presence by doing spiritual disciplines. Going to Christ is part of disciplining ourselves.

Perhaps the greatest weapon the adversary uses is to separate people from one another. We have a tendency to isolate ourselves when we struggle. It’s during that time, that we forget that we have a community of people to help us. We feel the most stuck when we feel alone. Connection to others helps us heal and move on.

We see it throughout nature. Stephanie Ford said, “Trees were once thought to simply compete for light and nutrients. Though they do compete in some ways, trees more often assist one another. When one tree is sick, nearby trees may share nutrients through their roots to help it get well again. An intricate web of roots

and fungi connect tree to tree in a forest, twice as big as the canopy overhead, which enables trees to communicate about insect predators and much more.”²

Peter reminds us that our brothers and sisters in Christ are also suffering, so we are not alone. We stay connected to each other, so that we can help each other move on. So often when we ask, “Why me, Lord?” it’s because we feel singled out and alone. But Peter reminds us that we all suffer and Christ connects us in an intricate web for healing. Find a group or community, and cling to your faith together. Resist the adversary’s attempt at separating you from that community.

How do we move on? Humble yourself, and cast all your anxiety on Christ. Discipline yourself, keep alert, and resist the adversary. In due time, God will “restore, support, strengthen, and establish you” (v.10). With God’s help, we will overcome our fiery ordeals. We won’t succumb to them. That’s the promise we cling to. We won’t find that in the world’s promises. When we pursue God and be steadfast in our faith, we find peace like no other. The God of all grace will bring us through it and will help us move on.

Grace-full God, we admit that we are stuck in grief or are withholding forgiveness or we’re just consumed with a sense of being stuck in life. We know that we cannot move on without you. We need you to help us. Nudge us to humble ourselves and go to you with our anxiety and feelings. Strengthen us to be disciplined and stay alert for the prowling lion, especially when we’d much rather medicate ourselves. We cannot resist

our adversary without your power. Send us a supportive community to help us withstand the roaring lion. As we cling to you and our faith, we ask you to restore us, support us, strengthen us, and establish us. We know we will carry parts of this grief or pain for the rest of our lives, but we ask for your peace to help us carry it. We ask for your healing. Thank you, Lord, for walking with us through our fiery ordeal and showing us the way to move on. Amen.

² Stephanie Ford, “Empowered by the Spirit,” *Disciplines* 2020, 179.