
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 2.11-12. Peter reiterates that we are exiles in our culture, because we are citizens of a holy nation, citizens of Heaven, who are temporarily residing in this fallen world. With this perspective, we represent Christ by refraining from our fleshly lusts. Lusts are wrong desires, for improper sex, materialism, harm to others, or even for acceptance such that our desire taints our perspective and behavior [which Peter's readers might have felt, if they were facing persecution]. Peter describes these lusts as "waging battle" against our souls, a striking image that testifies to the intensity of our struggle even after coming to Christ, and the damage lusts can do to us. We must be vigilant about resisting these impulses. We represent Christ also by living our lives in such a way that non-believers who criticize and slander us might see the reality of Christ in us and thus come out of the darkness and into the light, resulting in praise for God when Christ returns [the "day of visitation" likely refers to the similarly labeled day of judgment in Isaiah 10.3]. We witness with our lifestyle to non-believers [literally, "the nations," as pagans were called in Israel]; this is not to say that we never verbally share the gospel, but people will accept our message more readily if they can see we are living out what we believe. We must live out our Christian values *always*: sometimes our values will overlap with those of society, and then people will recognize our goodness; other times our values will differ from those of society, but then people will recognize our self control and sacrifice to live up to what we believe, especially if we endure our persecution with grace.

Reflect: Read Matthew 5.16. Are you living in such a way that people notice Christ's work in you? Are you resisting sin in your life successfully? Is your discipline in this remarkable? If so, praise God for this victory! If not, pray for deliverance! Are you shining God's light also by showing his love to everyone, even the unlovable? Is your love outstanding, such that people would remark on your willingness to sacrifice for others? If so, praise God for this victory! If not, pray for deliverance from selfishness. How can you better shine God's light toward others?

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 2.13-17. Peter instructs us to submit to the civil governing authorities, even though they are secular. Certainly, God is of higher authority than the government, but God commands we obey the government, at least in anything that does not go against Christian teaching. Even if our moral conscience [guided by biblical instruction] would cause us to disobey an anti-Christian command of the government, we still should submit to its authority by undergoing its punishment [Paul expressed similar ideas in Romans 13.1-6]. One purpose in our obedience is that our upright living will shine God's light and silence those who slander believers. In Peter's day, there was a lot of concern that groups like Christians, who did not worship the emperor, could foment revolution. We might not be viewed as so dangerous today, but there are those who would accuse us, because they feel socially threatened that our beliefs and standards are different from theirs. By choosing to work within the law whenever that does not compromise following Christ, we show that we are good citizens who should not face accusation. Peter stresses that we do not submit as slaves of the government, rather as slaves to God; and we can do so as those who are free to pursue righteousness [see Romans 6.15-23, where Paul discusses being a slave to God instead of a slave to sin].

Reflect: Are there specific laws you ignore, such as pirating music or breaking the speed limit? Do you realize now that these are sins? Make a commitment before God to pursue obedience to civil authority in all cases except when they might command you to do something un-Christian. We can take our civic duty to the next level by helping improve our society, serving at charities and on civic boards, voting responsibly, encouraging improvements. How could you help?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 2.18-20. Greco-Roman writers were concerned about household relationships as the foundation of a stable society. With this and the following section, Peter makes a deliberate attempt to engage the culture by addressing this concern with a form similar to what other writers had used. While the apostles did not defend slavery as an institution [which they did with marriage], they did not see their purpose as overthrowing the cultural institutions of their day. Rather, they addressed how people could come to know God and be transformed by him, and then how such transformed people should operate within society. They knew that a continual process of transforming individuals would eventually lead to a change in society. While Peter asks people to continue operating within the household structures of society, he also brings a Christian influence to them. For example, unlike the Greco-Roman writers, Peter addressed slaves and women directly instead of just talking about them, subtly asserting their dignity and their freedom to make moral choices. While Peter instructed slaves to submit to their masters, he told them to do so as people who have found freedom in Christ to do the right thing, and who know that before God they are just as accepted as anyone else in society.

Peter also suggested that the slave had the right to worship God, even if his master did not, which was a strong departure from the cultural norm. Some translations of v.18 say to show every kind of respect to the master, but the Greek could also mean to be subject to the master out of reverence for God [see NIV]. In either case, vv.18-20 paint a picture of a slave being subject to his master, but also suffering under that master for doing what is right. This could be a case of having a harsh master, but it also could suggest that the slave, like the citizen under the authority of the government, sometimes suffers for not obeying when the command goes against Christian principles. In such a case, as we said before, we still submit in that we accept the punishment for not obeying. In both cases, the upright behavior of the slave is guided by his relationship with God through Christ. The general principle Peter offers in vv.19-20 is that when people suffer for doing what is right, that finds favor with God. This then can be a model for how to endure injustice in many social contexts. First, we submit to authority over us, even if that authority is unscrupulous. Second, in submission, we obey whenever we can without compromising the moral principles we have received from God. Third, in submission, when we cannot obey for moral reasons, we accept the punishment for not obeying.

Reflect: We should notice that not all suffering finds favor with God, especially not when we deserve our suffering. But can you see that you must do what is right, no matter what the cost? Can you see that it is better to do what is right and suffer now for it, than to sin and not be rewarded in eternity? What sort of things should you not do if people in authority over you ask you to? In what sort of situations might you have to obey, even though you don't want to?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 2.21-25. Peter makes a shocking statement: we *all* are called to suffer like slaves for righteousness! He offers two reasons. First, Christ is the *example* for us: we follow Christ, who allowed himself to be treated with contempt like a slave and even to die a slave's death on the Roman cross [vv.21-24]. Peter quoted several times in this passage from Isaiah 52.13-53.12. Isaiah described God's suffering servant [the Messiah], and how he would suffer and die to bring healing to God's people. Christ, in dying on the cross, paid the penalty for your sin, so that you could be free from the bondage of sin and free from the penalty for sin. Christ was innocent of sin [v.22] and had done nothing to deserve suffering or punishment, but he underwent them for us. The Greek word translated as "example" in v.21 referred to the patterns of letters that children would copy when they were learning how to write: it requires effort to make the closest copy possible. Jesus is the only "stencil," the only example we are to follow, and his way, as we will discuss more tomorrow, involves suffering. To live as slaves of God [v.16] is to suffer unjustly, like Jesus. The second reason we accept our suffering is that Christ died so that we could die to sin, be healed [free of our bondage to sin!], and thus live righteously [v.24]. We follow Christ, because he saved and transforms us [v.25]. His fatal physical wounds healed our fatal spiritual wounds. Suffering is part of our identification with Christ. We follow Christ to the safety of our deliverance, even though the path takes us through times of suffering first [v.25].

Reflect: Can you see that being a slave for God means you will have to undergo some suffering, at least persecution for sharing the gospel and living out your faith and some sacrifice to do what is right no matter how much it hurts? Do you accept this example of Christ, and commit to following him?

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 2.11-25. Peter says we are all called to suffer for righteousness, following Christ's example [v.21]. Christ's example was to undergo unjust and sacrificial suffering for the sake of the gospel mission; to undergo unjust and sacrificial suffering for the sake of righteousness; to undergo unjust and sacrificial suffering for the sake of others [vv.21, 24]. Christ's example also was to remain sinless, to continue doing what was right, even if it led to more suffering; to keep his heart from turning against his antagonists and to avoid even threatening them with retaliation; to trust himself to God, trusting in the deliverance we know we can expect [deliverance out of suffering and into our inheritance in Heaven, and eventual resurrection of the body when Christ returns] and trusting in God's judgment at the end to make things right [vv.22-23]. Injustice will reign until Christ returns to judge, so we endure it gracefully without sinning in response, trusting in Christ's example and in his promise of deliverance and judgment.

Reflect: Peter's readers were experiencing unjust and sacrificial suffering, like Christ. Would they endure righteously, as Peter taught in vv.11-25, or would they conform to the culture to avoid suffering? The same question applies to you: are you willing to suffer if it helps shine God's light so that people can see Christ at work in and through you? if it is the only way to avoid sin? if it is helpful to others? Are you willing to suffer instead of sinning to get out of it, such as by lying, manipulating others, throwing the blame on someone else, et cetera? Can you endure suffering and still pray for the salvation of your tormentors, instead of hating them? Can you truly trust in God's end times judgment and deliverance, instead of seeking justice or an end to suffering for yourself now?