
Day 1

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.12-14. Again Peter indicates that his readers were suffering [4.12]. We know they had been uprooted from their homes and exiled to remote provinces of the empire [1.1] and were facing persecution from the locals because of their faith [4.14]. Peter says they should not be surprised by such suffering [4.12], because it is a normal part of life on this tainted planet [1.6-7]. If we think we will never suffer, then when suffering hits we will react with shock, confusion, and shame, and we will begin to doubt and to struggle with walking in faith and obedience. Instead of being surprised when suffering comes, we should prepare for suffering *before* it comes, so we are ready to depend on God so as to persevere. We know that non-believers persecuted Christ, rejecting him, insulting him, beating him, and even killing him, so we should not be surprised when they do the same to us when we live out our faith as Christ-followers [2.20-25; 4.1].

Reflect: Do you expect God to make your life wonderful or do you expect to endure hardships for God? How can the two perspectives lead to different reactions when struggles come? Do you understand that suffering is inevitable while you live in this fallen world? Do you really believe that there is no need to feel shame when you suffer persecution, even though they are trying to shame you? Just keep walking in faith and obedience, trusting God loves you.

Day 2

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.12-16. Peter says there is no shame [4.16] when we when we suffer for Christ [4.14], when we suffer as Christ did [4.13], but rather there is a reason to rejoice [4.13] and to praise God [4.16]. In the US, most of us do not suffer because of being a Christian to the same degree as believers do in many other countries, where their lives and homes and families might be at risk. But if we truly live out our faith by sharing the gospel, living selflessly, and avoiding the fleshly sins predominant in our culture, we will stand out as extreme and might find ourselves in a hostile work atmosphere, shunned by certain neighbors, laughed at by non-believing friends and family, criticized by less faithful church people, or worse. Such suffering is part of God's plan for us. In one sense this suffering is a test [4.12; not all translations state this clearly] that will prove the genuineness of our faith [1.7]. Thus, one reason we should rejoice about this suffering is that it proves our identification with Christ is genuine, and so we will rejoice when he returns [4.13]. The suffering proves the genuineness of our faith both because our faith attracts the hostility of the world and because we persevere in faith and obedience even though it is attracting that hostility. This is not the case when we suffer because we do conform to our peers by sinning [4.15].

Reflect: If you are not feeling any persecution in your life, could it be that you are not remarkable for being Christian, that you are not so obviously different from the non-believers around you? If you do live out your faith well, you will face some hostility at least sometime in your life, so are you ready to pass that test? How can you prepare your mind for this test?

Day 3

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.12-16 again. Another reason to rejoice when we suffer for our beliefs or righteous lifestyle is because in those moments the Holy Spirit is empowering us to endure [4.14]. Almost all English translations say that the Holy Spirit will be "resting" on you, but the Greek verb can also mean "to give rest" or "to revive." In any case, the point is that you will experience the Holy Spirit's help and empowerment in those moments. One genuine response to the Spirit's empowerment is that our faith remains strong enough that, not only can we continue to walk in faith and obedience even though it is that which brings us suffering, but we even can rejoice and praise God for allowing us to suffer for Christ [4.13-16]. The apostle Paul wrote that he wanted to really know Christ more than anything else, in fact all the good of his life was like manure compared to knowing Christ; he wanted to experience resurrected life with Christ, even though that meant experiencing suffering with Christ [Philippians 3.8-11].

Reflect: If you have a choice of a peaceful life with a distant relationship with God or a life of struggle with an intimate relationship with God, which will you choose? Which does your lifestyle indicate you have chosen so far? Do you avoid situations that might be uncomfortable or do you step in and share the gospel or stand up for righteousness? What steps should you take to experience Christ's presence and empowerment more fully in your life going forward?

Day 4

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.17-19. We know that as Christians, we can count on God's protection of our salvation, through the completion of our redemption at our resurrection when Christ returns [1.5]. We also know that Christ has paid the penalty for our sins, so we are not condemned or judged guilty by God [1.19; 2.24; 3.18; see also Romans 8.1; John 5.24]. And yet, Peter says the final judgment begins with us [4.17]. Christ will return to judge the living and the dead [4.5], and that includes believers [Matthew 25.31-46; John 5.22-29; Acts 10.42-43]. Believers need not fear this judgment, because we know Christ has paid the penalty for our sin and thus God has declared us righteous [1.19; 2.24; 3.18; see also Romans 3.24; Galatians 2.16]. The Greek word for judgment [κρίμα = KRI-muh] does not necessarily mean condemnation, here it means the actual decision of the judge. What Peter means is that God has begun his evaluation of mankind with those of us in the church, evaluating our response to persecution to see who has genuine faith and thus will persevere in faith and obedience [1.7]. The "great tribulation" before Christ returns to judge will be the most severe form of this test, for people who come to faith during that time [Matthew 24.21-22; Revelation 7.14]. Those who are hostile toward us and those who fall away from us to conform to the world in the face of persecution reveal their lack of faith.

Reflect: If Christ returned today to judge, what evidence would he have of your faith? Would he have merely your claim to have believed or would there be a lifetime of evidence that you lived out your faith? One form of evidence, from this passage, would be that you persevere in times of suffering to continue boldly proclaiming your faith in Christ and boldly living out Christian values, even if this is what brings on the suffering. What other forms of evidence might Christ look to see from your life? Perhaps he would look to see how well you followed the Great Commission [Matthew 28.18-20]: how strong is the evidence in your life of sharing the gospel to lead others to faith and baptism, and of teaching and mentoring others to become mature and obedient disciples of Christ? Of course, you have to be pursuing your own spiritual development to remain effective in those activities, so what is the evidence of that effort? Christ also might consider the Great Commandment [Matthew 22.36-40]: how strong is the evidence that you love God with all of yourself? are you taking every opportunity to worship him, depend on him, and submit to him? how strong is the evidence that you have learned to put the need of others before yourself? Based on your answers to these questions, would you judge that you were a Christian, a Christ-follower? What steps should you take to better live out your faith? Note, we are not suggesting you have to do enough to somehow earn salvation, for Jesus certainly knows who has genuine faith in his deliverance regardless of what happens in each person's life. But it is also true that it is easy for us to deceive ourselves, even about faith [see Matthew 7.21-23!], so we look at the evidence of faith as a self assessment. If your life does not show much evidence, maybe you need to reassess whether you really believe or perhaps whether you believe but have misunderstood something about the gospel or Christian life.

Day 5

Learn: Prayerfully read 1 Peter 4.17-19 again. When Peter says we are saved with "difficulty" [4.18], he is referring to the persecution we endure in this life to prove our faith. But he points out that this suffering we endure is far preferable to the suffering awaiting those who do not believe in Christ and thus do not walk with God [4.17-18], for they will suffer far worse and eternally for being condemned, because they did not receive forgiveness through Christ. Our suffering is by God's will, as he refines and strengthens our faith and transforms our characters to be more like Christ and proves the genuineness of our relationship with him [1.7; 4.19]. This suffering brings shame within secular society, but is a badge of honor in the church community as evidence of our identification with Christ. When we are suffering for Christ and righteousness, we must continue to trust our souls to God – never doubting God's love or protection of our salvation! – and therefore we must also continue to obey [4.19]. Such obedience can be difficult, in part because we are more vulnerable to fleshly impulses and secular coping mechanisms when we are suffering, and in part because if our suffering is from persecution then we will be tempted to relieve the suffering by conforming to the culture instead of following Christ. We must evidence our trust in God's deliverance by continuing to identify with Christ in faith and obedience.

Reflect: How should we in the church react toward other Christians who are being persecuted? How can we encourage those persecuted believers with the truth we have been learning in 1 Peter? What else could we do to help Christians who face great persecution in other parts of the world? How aware are you of what is happening to believers in other countries? Perhaps you should consider reading and praying about one country a day, using resources like the book *Operation World*, or the monthly prayer guide *Global Prayer Digest* [available at www.globalprayerdigest.org].