

# Joy

## JOY IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS

Focal Verses • 1 PETER 4:12-19

### Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EVALUATE** whether suffering is a part of Christian living; **RECALL** a time when we found joy in suffering; and **SUPPORT** or seek support for those who are suffering, through prayer and outreach.

### In Focus

Pastor Jenkins was getting excited as he shared the Sunday morning sermon, “Paul stood by watching as the mob stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7:58; 8:1). As Paul observed Stephen’s murder, he had no idea that he, too, would one day suffer for Christ. However, after his conversion, Paul suffered greatly for Christ. He described his suffering as follows,” Pastor Jenkins paused dramatically, “Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one.”

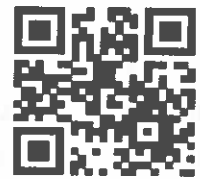
“Jesus! My God,” came the response from the congregation. Pastor Jenkins continued, “Paul said, three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move...I have labored and toiled and have gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face the daily pressure of my concern for all the churches.”

Pastor Jenkins quietly whispered, “But you know what?” Deacon Foster jumped to his feet, “Say it, Pastor!” Now shouting, Pastor Jenkins said, “Joy! Despite all his suffering, Paul counted it all as joy for the glory of God.” The congregation echoed shouts of “Amen! Hallelujah! And Preach Pastor.”

*God does not guarantee believers freedom from suffering. In fact, Jesus said we should expect some suffering in our lives. In today’s lesson, Peter explains the joyful rewards of suffering with Christ for righteousness. What joyful rewards have you experienced in the past as you have faced difficult situations?*

### Keep in Mind

SCAN FOR VIDEO



“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Peter 4:19, KJV).

## Focal Verses

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**KJV** 1 Peter 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you:

13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

14 If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

17 For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?

18 And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?

19 Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

### The People, Places, and Times

**Peter.** The apostle is usually remembered for his three denials of Christ, rather than his changed life. After receiving the Holy Spirit, the same Peter who denied Christ preached the Gospel wherever he went, regardless of the consequences. Peter willingly suffered for his belief in Christ. Tradition maintains that Peter was crucified in Rome during the persecution unleashed by the emperor Nero. According to the legend, Peter felt he was unworthy to die in the same manner as His Lord, so he was crucified upside down.

### Background

Suffering and salvation are the main themes of Peter's first letter. Because of their faith in Christ, many first-century believers were experiencing abuse and persecution. They were shunned and harassed by their Jewish brethren and persecuted by Rome because of their refusal to worship Caesar. Peter wrote to encourage the believers to endure their trials faithfully.

The apostle does not promise his readers an end to their suffering. Instead, he tries to prepare them for more persecution. Peter was concerned

about their behavior during their suffering. He instructed them and us to live righteously and in harmony with one another, whatever the circumstances. Believers are not to respond to evil with evil, but with love (1 Peter 3:8–12).

### At-A-Glance

1. The Fiery Trials of Our Faith (1 Peter 4:12)
2. The Believers' Response to Fiery Trials (vv. 13–14)
3. The Reward of Glorifying God in the Fiery Trials (vv. 15–19)

### In Depth

#### 1. The Fiery Trials of Our Faith (1 Peter 4:12)

It is easy to understand suffering that results from doing wrong, but to suffer for doing right seems unfair. Yet Peter warns us that this could happen. Christ is our example of suffering in righteousness; therefore, we should not be surprised when we suffer. Consequently, Peter tells us, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning

the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (v. 12). "Fiery trials" refers to the ordeals that purify us and make us more familiar with what Christ endured.

What better example can believers have than Christ, who suffers for righteousness' sake? Even He was not exempt from suffering in this life. He is the perfect example of what it means to suffer unjustly, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins" (1 Peter 3:18). Although Christ was sorely tempted, He was without sin. Our Lord, who had no sin, paid the price for all those who had no righteousness. He was an innocent man who sacrificed His life for the guilty. Christ suffered the punishment we deserve—the just for the unjust. If Christ had to suffer, why would Christians believe we can escape it?

Why would God allow His Son to suffer unjustly? The Word of God tells us so "that he might bring us to God" (v. 18b). Bringing us to God or restoring our relationship with God was achieved through Christ's atoning death and resurrection. His death bridged the gap of sin that separates humanity from God.

## **2. The Believers' Response to Fiery Trials (vv. 13–14)**

Peter explains that knowing the reason for our suffering means we can "rejoice" when we experience "fiery trials," inasmuch as we are "partakers of Christ's sufferings" (v. 13). Peter's admonition reminds us of Jesus' teaching, "Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven" (Matthew 5:12). Our joyous attitude comes from knowing that as we share in Christ's suffering, we will also share in His glory. We look forward to the day when Christ returns, and His glory is revealed to all humanity. What a day of rejoicing that will be!

*How should believers respond to such suffering? Peter tells us to be happy! (1 Peter 4:14).*

A better translation of "happy are ye" is "you are blessed." Yes, we are blessed to suffer

for doing what is right. This may be hard to believe, but Jesus taught a similar idea in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:10). This blessing or happiness results from finding favor with God and knowing that we belong to God, who promises future vindication.

Thus, rather than being afraid of trouble, we should redirect our focus to the Lord. Instead of concentrating on our ordeals, believers should look "in [our] hearts" to our relationship with God (1 Peter 3:15). We acknowledge that He is holy and in total control of whatever happens. When we revere the Lord in our hearts, we increase our confidence in Him. This confidence in God overcomes our fears.

Focusing on God prepares us to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (v. 15b). When believers rejoice in the midst of suffering; people recognize a difference in us. They begin to wonder and question why we have such hope. Peter tells us to always be prepared to explain why our lives are different. Believers must be ready at all times to witness and share the Gospel with everyone who questions our faith. Suffering for righteousness often leads to opportunities to share our faith.

The apostle tells us that we should be happy when people have insulted ("reproached") us for the name of Christ. It affirms that "the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (v. 14). Peter draws from Isaiah 11:2 to remind his readers that this power of the Holy Spirit enables Christians to glorify God, even when suffering.

## **3. The Reward of Glorifying God in the Fiery Trials (vv. 15–19)**

Peter's life is a prime example of the difference the Holy Spirit makes in one's life. Remember how Peter fearfully denied knowing Jesus three times during Christ's arrest and trial (Matthew 26:69ff.).

But after Christ's resurrection, when Peter had received the Holy Spirit, he preached, suffered, and was martyred for Christ. For Peter and all Christians, suffering is nothing to be ashamed of because it glorifies God. According to legend, Peter was crucified upside down for preaching Christ, but his death was not disgraceful because God was glorified.

When people suffer for breaking the law or doing evil, they deserve the shame that results from their deeds (1 Peter 4:15). Often, their families are tainted by their disgrace. On the other hand, suffering for Christ brings glory to God and to the entire family of faith (v. 17).

Because we can look past the trials to the rewards, believers have hope in suffering. The rewards of suffering are many: Suffering strengthens the faith of all who endure; it strips away superficial beliefs; and believers' joyful attitude, while suffering, serves as an example to others.

*When Christ returns, all who have suffered for His sake will be greatly rewarded.*

### Search the Scriptures

1. If we suffer for doing what is right, what should be our attitude (1 Peter 4:13)?
2. What is the ultimate result of Christians' suffering for doing right (v. 14)?
3. What are some things that believers should not suffer for (v. 15)?
4. Where will God's judgment begin (v. 17)?

### Discuss the Meaning

1. Can believers really be happy while suffering?
2. How is this accomplished?
3. What is a "testimony"?

### Liberating Lesson

Suffering for ideals or beliefs is rare in our society. The very idea of suffering is abhorrent to most. One reason for the high suicide rate is

that many people cannot cope when things do not go well. We are taught to avoid, instead of endure, suffering.

If we lived in a country where being a Christian could mean imprisonment or death, would you admit to knowing Christ? Would you be willing to suffer for Christ in order to bring glory to God? A more specific question is: Are you willing to stand up for Christ at work, school, and among your friends and relatives, knowing that you may suffer or be ridiculed?

### Application for Activation

Are you experiencing persecution or suffering? Evaluate your situation to see if your suffering is the result of wrong choices or righteous living. If you are suffering for righteousness, what is your attitude toward the suffering? Are you rejoicing in suffering? Can you thank God for it? Ask God to give you a spirit of joy, happiness, and endurance.

Maybe you know someone who is suffering for righteousness' sake. Take time this week to encourage the person with a brief note, email message, or phone call.

### Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

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### Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

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**Sources:**

Clowney, Edmund. *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988.  
Grudem, Wayne. *First Peter*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988.  
Marshall, I. Howard. *First Peter*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991.  
Michaels, J. Ramsey. *First Peter*. Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988.  
Scott, John, revised by Stephen Motyer. *Peter and His Message*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. 128–140.

## Say It Correctly

Reproach. ri-PROHCH

## Daily Bible Readings

**DAY 337**

Ephesians 3–4

Proverbs 15

**DAY 338**

Ephesians 5–6

Proverbs 16

**DAY 339**

Philippians 1–2

Proverbs 17

**DAY 340**

Philippians 3–4

Proverbs 18

**DAY 341**

Colossians 1–2

Proverbs 19

**DAY 342**

Colossians 3–4

Proverbs 20

**DAY 343**

1 Thessalonians 1–2

Proverbs 21

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