

SESSION 4

The Endurance of Our Hope



QUESTION 1:

*When has your endurance
really been tested?*

THE POINT

We can endure suffering because of our hope in Christ.

THE PASSAGE

1 Peter 3:8-17

THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

No one signs up for pain, sorrow, disappointment, betrayal, or rejection, but they happen. Loving Jesus doesn't insulate us from pain and suffering. I learned that firsthand in 2018 when I was diagnosed with cancer. The treatments, coupled with the emotional roller coaster, were more than I expected.

At the same time, because of the prayers of the saints, the presence of the Holy Spirit, and the grace of the Great Physician, I have hope. I have had days when I had to choose to believe the promises of God, even when my feelings were overwhelming me or my mind was flooded with fear and doubt. Throughout the treatments, I claimed promises from Scripture. Some days, I claimed them while praying, "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief!" As I write this, all my scans are clear, and I rejoice in that.

But even more than clear scans, I rejoice in knowing Christ who sees, hears, knows, and cares. It is essential to our faith that we not let cancer or any other catastrophic or hurtful experience define us. Christ must be the source and sufficiency of our identity. We can endure because our hope rests in Him.

1 Peter 3:8-12

8 Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble,

9 not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing.

10 For the one who wants to love life and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit,

11 and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it,

12 because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

KEY WORD: Blessing (v. 9)—The term can mean either “to call on God to grant His grace to someone” or “receiving grace from God.”

These verses in 1 Peter 3 are a series of summary statements—maturity checkpoints, if you will—for personal evaluation of our spiritual lives. Peter made a passionate appeal for consistency, faithfulness, and wholehearted obedience. He identified six ways we are to “walk the talk” and live out our faith.

1. **Unity.** The command to “be like-minded” refers to unity on major points of faith. Believers reflect their devotion to God not in uniformity or unanimity, but in unity. We should stop being petty about peripheral issues. Instead, we should concentrate on Jesus and what we have in common with other brothers and sisters in Christ.

John Wesley and George Whitefield were prominent religious leaders in 18th-century England, but they had strong disagreements theologically and were on opposite ends of the spectrum regarding the doctrine of salvation. When Whitefield

died, Wesley attended his funeral, and someone asked him, “Do you expect to see Dr. Whitefield in heaven?”

“No!” Wesley replied. “George Whitefield will be so near the throne of God that men like me will never even get a glimpse of him.”¹ These men maintained sincere unity for the sake of Christ even in the midst of strong disagreement.

2. **Mutual concern.** To be “sympathetic” means to have compassion or to feel with others and suffer together. This isn’t only related to matters of sorrow, but anything that affects people and causes them to feel emotion. We rejoice with those who rejoice, just as we weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15). Peter called for believers to enter into another person’s life on more than just a superficial level, putting competition, envy, jealousy, and comparison aside. Our concern for others ultimately outweighs our concern for self.
3. **Love.** Peter employed the Greek word *philadelphos* to convey the Christians’ responsibility to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. We reflect our love for Christ in how we love the family of God.
4. **Compassion.** We live in a cold-hearted world where constant access to information can leave us insensitive and cynical. The church should be a place of compassion where we err on the side of grace and do too much rather than not enough. Jesus modeled this through His tender, genuine ministry to people. “When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36).
5. **Humility.** Peter knew Christians must have a realistic impression of themselves. We measure ourselves by Christ’s holiness, and no room exists for boasting or pride. We see the level of our humility in how we feel when someone criticizes us or when someone else is honored over us.
6. **Forgiveness.** An unforgiving spirit will disrupt fellowship, destroy joy, and ultimately send roots of bitterness deep into

the heart. Life is too short to maintain a white-knuckle grip on offenses done to us. Peter urged the church to respond supernaturally through the Spirit, “not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing.” We have been redeemed and forgiven by God, and we should offer the same forgiveness to those who’ve wronged us.

Don’t miss Peter’s warning in verse 12. Our obedience in putting feet to our faith directly impacts our prayer life “because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.”

QUESTION 2:

How do the teachings in these verses compare and contrast with the values in our culture?

1 Peter 3:13-14

13 Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good?

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be intimidated,

KEY WORD: Righteousness (v. 14)—Righteousness is being in a right relationship with God through Christ (Rom. 3:20-28), which in turn enables believers to conduct themselves in ways that please and honor God (Gal. 5:6,13-25; Jas. 2:14-25).

Our hope in Christ will carry us through difficult circumstances or suffering. We may experience times of unjust suffering because we stood up for what is right. Nonetheless, when our hope is rooted in Christ, enduring through such undeserved trials can strengthen us to face other troubling times.

I heard my mentor, Vance Havner, preach about the cheap way many Christians view the call to follow Christ. He said, “‘Lord’ is the most lifeless word in the Christian vocabulary. We have a cheap Christianity that does not cost us much. The shame and reproach of the old rugged cross means nothing more than a line in a hymnbook. ... Christianity is not a happiness cult; it is not a success cult. At heart it is the process by which God makes saints out of sinners. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son.”

As Lord, Jesus has universal sovereign authority. All will recognize His lordship when He returns (Phil. 2:10-11), and His lordship makes it possible for believers to walk in victory today. We’d certainly like to believe that choosing what is right would make the path smooth and easy before us, and we usually don’t face persecution because of right choices. However, we’re living in a world where, increasingly, people suffer for righteous living. Warren Wiersbe wrote:

“As Christians, we are faced with crises, and we are tempted to give in to our fears and make the wrong decisions. But if we ‘sanctify Christ as Lord’ in our hearts, we need never fear men or circumstances. Our enemies might *hurt* us, but they cannot harm us. Only we can harm ourselves if we fail to trust God. Generally speaking, people do not oppose us if we do good; but even if they do, it is better to suffer for righteousness’ sake than to compromise our testimony.”²

Our foundation of hope in Christ is secure. He is our Rock, our Cornerstone. Therefore, Peter affirmed that we don’t have to fear or be intimidated. The Greek word translated *intimidated* is *tarasso*; it means we don’t need to let others cause us inward commotion or take away the calmness we have in Christ. In fact, we are blessed to be counted among those who suffer for righteousness’ sake. This should serve to encourage us and strengthen our resolve, not trouble us or shake our calmness of mind.

“Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for the kingdom of heaven is theirs. You are blessed when they insult you and persecute you and falsely say every kind of evil against you because of me. Be glad and rejoice, because your reward is great in heaven. For that is how they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:10-12).

QUESTION 3:

In what ways have you seen people suffer as a result of their faith in Christ?

1 Peter 3:15-17

15 but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

16 Yet do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame.

17 For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.

When we’re tempted to fear or get sidetracked, Peter has given us the only correct response: “But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.” The conjunction *but* contrasts fear and intimidation to holiness and readiness.

1. **Holiness.** Peter recognized that if believers would set apart Christ as holy in their hearts, we wouldn’t worry about what other people thought. We wouldn’t be intimidated, but would be bold witnesses to the life-changing power of the gospel.

Holiness has to come first. We will not have readiness in our speech or actions if living holy and set apart under the lordship of Christ is not our priority. The hope of Christ will never work its way out into our life and lips if it's not in our hearts first. To paraphrase S. D. Gordon: "In every heart there is a throne and a cross. If self is on the throne, Christ is on the cross. But if Christ is on the throne, self is on the cross."³

There is a time to decide, a time for action that matches our belief. If we believe Jesus is Lord, then our actions and attitudes should reflect it. This means we yield our personalities to Him. Our time becomes His time. Our money, plans, career, and relationships are no longer ours but His.

ENGAGE

Record attitudes and actions that point to self.

Record attitudes and actions that point to Jesus.

2. **Readiness.** Once we've settled the holiness and lordship issue, we can be ready to give a defense for the reason for our hope in Christ. We don't have to fumble around for words or shrink back in fear when asked about what we believe; we can stand confidently in the lordship of Christ because we have

settled *who* we are and *whose* we are. Peter's words point to a connection between a person's lack of readiness to speak about the hope of the gospel and his acknowledgement of the Lord as holy. If we haven't set Christ apart as Lord—His rightful place—we can easily clam up or change the conversation!

QUESTION 4:

What does it look like to give a defense for the hope that is in you?

Our readiness is gracefully tempered with gentleness. *Gentleness* may also be translated as *meekness* and speaks to grace that's been implanted in us. It is an attitude of humility that considers Christ and the other person more important than self.

Our readiness is also tempered with respect. The Greek word translated *respect* is where we get our English word *phobia*. This word signifies a reverential fear of God, which prompts us to choose our words carefully and to seek to honor Christ in all our dealings with other people. When we set apart Christ in our hearts as holy, we will also give a gentle, holy response when defending the hope that is ours because of Him.

QUESTION 5:

How can we honor Christ in our interactions with those who cause us pain, conflict, or rejection?

LIVE IT OUT

How will you endure suffering because of the hope you have in Christ?

- ▶ **Surrender.** Choose to see your life and circumstances from God's perspective. Acknowledge the lordship of Christ and trust Him regardless of the actions of others.
- ▶ **Bless.** If someone has treated you like an enemy or you have treated another person that way, seek to bless that person with love, compassion, and humility.
- ▶ **Defend.** Ask the Lord for opportunities to display and defend the hope that is in you. When the Lord opens that door, be ready to verbally testify of your hope in Christ.



END NOTES

1 Wayne Detzler, *New Testament Words in Today's Language* (Victor Book, 1986), 223.

2 Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 2* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton Books, 1989), Wordsearch ed.

3 S. D. Gordon, *Quiet Talks on Power* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 77.



THE GIFT OF PIECES

By Elisabeth Elliot

I remember when I was a little girl wanting to buy Christmas presents for my parents and I had no way at all of earning money. My brothers had paper routes and earned maybe twenty-five cents a week or something like that back in the Depression days. But I had to depend on an allowance. So I would have had absolutely nothing to give to my mother for Christmas if my mother hadn't given something to me first. That's the way it is with us with God, isn't it? We are totally destitute. Everything that we have comes from Him and we have nothing to offer except what He has given us.

There's an old prayer of thanksgiving at the offering time. It goes like this, "All things come of thee, O Lord and of thine own have we given thee." We receive it from Him. We accept it in our hands. We say thank You. And then we offer it back. This is the logical sequence of the things which I have been talking about. Everything is a gift. Everything is meant to be offered back.

JUST A HANDFUL

I have felt as if I was destitute like the widow of Zarephath. You remember the story of how Elijah was fed by ravens for a time and then God told him that the ravens were going to stop. And that he was to go down to a place called Zarephath where there was a widow who would feed him. Now I don't think we can begin to imagine the absolute dereliction of a widow in those ancient times. But she was the most helpless and poor of all.¹

Now why in the world would God Almighty, who owns the cattle on a thousand hills, choose a destitute woman to feed his prophet Elijah? And you remember that when Elijah reaches Zarephath he finds this woman out gathering a couple of sticks, and he asks her for a drink of water. And then he asks her for the most unreasonable request imaginable, and he says bake me a cake.

Well, if she were speaking modern English, she would have said, "Surely you've got to be kidding. I'm out here gathering two sticks so that I can bake the last handful of flour and last few drops

of oil into a little cake, which is the only thing that stands between me and my son and death. We are starving to death and you ask me to bake you a cake."

But the woman recognized that this was a man of God. So to her, it was a matter of obedience to God to fulfill his request, so she baked him a cake. She believed his word that the flask of oil would not fail, nor would the barrel of meal be empty. What had God done in sending the prophet to a destitute woman? He had put into that woman's hands something to offer back. But what a pitiful offering. One little handful of flour, a few drops of oil.

ONLY A LITTLE BIT

Do you remember when the little boy brought his lunch to Jesus (or the disciples extorted that lunch from him)? He had five loaves and two fishes which the disciples brought to Jesus and he put it into Jesus' hands. One of the disciples even asked Jesus what good that little bit of food could be for such a large crowd.

Now I'm speaking to some of you who feel as if you have nothing whatsoever to offer to God. You don't have any huge sufferings, perhaps. You don't have any great gifts. You were behind the door when they gave out the gifts and you feel like, poor me, I can't sing and I can't preach and I can't pray and I can't write books and I can't be the hostess with the mostest. So I really can't serve the Lord. If I had that person's gifts then it would be a different story.

I don't know who I'm talking to but I'm sure that there are some of you who would be saying, what is the good of my offering for such a crowd. You're telling me that I have something that is going to matter for the life of the world? And I say, yes, that's what I'm telling you. Because God takes a widow with nothing, God takes a little boy's lunch and He turns that into something for the good of the world because that individual let it go.

I began to see, again very dimly. Please don't imagine that I was some kind of spiritual giant to see this thing. It was the Holy Spirit of God that said to me, give it to Me. Let it go. Offer it up. A sacrifice. Something in your hands to give Me. How does a mother feel when her tiny little two-year-old comes into the house with a smashed dandelion clenched in his little, sweaty fist and he offers her the smashed dandelion?

It means everything in the world because love transforms it. That's what this is about. Suffering and love are inextricably bound up together. And love invariably means sacrifice.

EVEN OUR EMPTINESS

Amy Carmichael, a single woman, became the mother of thousands of Indian children. There was a time when the family that she founded as a Dohnavur Fellowship—little children, rescued from temple prostitution—that family numbered over 900 people at one time. And she worked there for fifty-three years. And she wrote these words in one

of her poems, "If Thy dear home be fuller, Lord, for that a little emptier my house on earth, what rich reward that guerdon² were." You and I have no idea what God has in mind when we make the offering. But everything is potential material for sacrifice.



Again and again, I've had people say to me, how do you handle loneliness? And I say that I can't handle loneliness. They ask, "Well didn't you spend a lot of time alone in the jungle?" I inevitably reply, "Yes, I did. I spent a good many more years alone than I did married." They return, "Well how did you handle it?" To which I reply, "I didn't. I couldn't. I have to turn it over to Somebody who can

handle it.” In other words, my loneliness became my offering.

And so if God doesn't always remove the feeling of loneliness, it is in order that every minute of every day, perhaps, I have something to offer up to Him and say, “Lord, here it is. I can't handle this.” I don't know what your emotions may be that you can't handle, but I believe that every one of us knows something about loneliness. Singles always imagine that married people are not lonely, but I can testify that there are different kinds of loneliness.

“If my life is broken when given to Jesus, it may be because pieces will feed a multitude when a loaf would satisfy only a little boy.”

I have never forgotten what a missionary speaker said in chapel when I was a student. We had compulsory chapel five days a week at Wheaton College. So we heard hundreds of speakers and remembered practically nothing of most of them. But I have never forgotten what this woman said. She spoke about the little boy bringing his lunch to Jesus. And she said, “If my life is broken when given to Jesus, it may be because pieces will feed a multitude when a loaf would satisfy only a little boy.”

What have you got in your hand to give to Him?

ELISABETH ELLIOT was one of the most influential Christian women of our time. For a half century, her best-selling books, timeless teachings, and courageous faith have influenced believers and seekers of Jesus Christ throughout the world. She used her experiences as a daughter, wife, mother, widow, and missionary to bring the message of Christ to countless women and men around the world.

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