

5 | The Joy Arising from Our Hope



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

After a diving accident in 1967 left her a quadriplegic as a teen, Joni Eareckson Tada longed to be free from her suffering and walk again. After two years of intense rehab, she left the hospital in a wheelchair, still longing for a breakthrough. She eventually grew bitter and cried out for God to help her know how to live this new normal.

While reading the Gospel of Mark, Joni read where Jesus had been healing crowds of people, but then He went off to be alone and pray. When His disciples found Him the next morning, Jesus urged that they go elsewhere to preach—even though more people needed His healing touch (Mark 1:33-38). Joni noted, “That’s when it hit me ... It’s not that Jesus did not care about all those sick and diseased people, it’s just their problems weren’t His main focus. The gospel was. ... To me, physical healing had always been the big deal, but to God, my soul was a much bigger deal. And that’s when I began searching for a deeper healing, not just a physical healing.”⁵ Joni had joy in her walk with Christ. God can use suffering to deepen our walk with Him.

GROUP TIME

THE POINT: _____ for Christ can deepen our _____ with Him.

The Christian life is often portrayed in a positive light, to the exclusion of any trials, difficulties, or sacrifices. But the reality is that living for Christ can be *hard*. As followers of Christ, we are to turn our backs on the former way of life and embrace a new way of living in Christ. Our hope in Christ not only carries us through such circumstances but gives us cause to rejoice.

1 Peter 4:1-2 ¹ Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding—because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin—² in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God’s will.

In the face of suffering, _____ Christ.

The Christian life isn’t a stroll through a grassy meadow; it’s a battle. This life is all-out war with our enemy, Satan, and when faced with suffering, we must use the right weapon to fight these battles. We are to “arm” (v. 1) ourselves with Christ’s mind-set. This is the only place in Scripture we find this Greek word which means to equip oneself with a weapon. The weapon is our understanding—our mind-set and recognition—that Jesus has already suffered in the flesh. That realization is a weapon that equips us “to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God’s will” (v. 2).

1 Peter 4:12-14 ¹² Dear friends, don’t be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you as if something unusual were happening to you. ¹³ Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

In the face of suffering, _____ Christ.

Not only do we have a new mind-set in Christ, but we also have cause to rejoice in our suffering. Peter knew his brothers and sisters in Christ would be tempted to respond in wonder and confusion when faced with adversity, just as we do today. So many times we gasp or scratch our heads when we hear of another believer’s suffering, yet that response is

quite contrary to what the apostle Peter outlined for us in his letter. “Rejoice with great joy” (v. 13). For those outside a relationship with Christ, rejoicing in suffering sounds ludicrous. The idea can be difficult even for us to comprehend because we live in a world that rails against suffering. Anything out of joint or uncomfortable must be changed immediately to ease all discomfort. But for these first-century believers, the reality of suffering was a simple fact they accepted as part of the pattern for living out their faith in Christ.

LIVING FOR CHRIST

Choose one of the following scenarios. What truth from today’s study speaks to this situation?

Your boss dislikes you because of your faith and chooses to bully and harass you different ways each day.

Your relationship with the person you’re dating is in danger because the two of you have different spiritual foundations.

Your decision to follow Christ has caused significant strife and discord within your extended family.

1 Peter 4:15-19 ¹⁵ Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. ¹⁶ But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name. ¹⁷ For the time has come for judgment to begin with God’s household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God? ¹⁸ And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? ¹⁹ So then, let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good.

In the face of suffering, _____ to God.

Peter included a word of clarification, noting that suffering in this context is for righteousness’ sake. A person shouldn’t glory or rejoice in the face of suffering that is a consequence of their disobedience or sinful lifestyle. Suffering for bad behavior is a cause for shame, but we have no shame when we suffer for following Christ.

No one wants to suffer, but when you do, let God be brilliantly glorified through it. Don’t waste what God wants to do in and through the painful places of your life. We certainly don’t have to go looking for suffering, but we don’t need to fear it when it comes. As you endure, let God deepen your walk with Him. Let Him mold you more and more into Christlikeness. It will lead you to glorify God.

LIVE IT OUT

How will you let God deepen your walk with Him through suffering?

- ▶ **Rejoice.** Voice a prayer of thanks to the Lord no matter what you're currently facing. Make a list of ten things that have brought you joy today, and allow that practice to set the tone for a lifestyle of rejoicing in Christ.
- ▶ **Memorize.** To remind yourself to think with the mind of Christ, memorize 1 Peter 4:1-2: "Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same understanding—because the one who suffers in the flesh is finished with sin—in order to live the remaining time in the flesh no longer for human desires, but for God's will."
- ▶ **Listen.** Talk with other Christians about their trials and suffering. Listen for the ways God has deepened their walk with Him because of what they have experienced. Offer prayer and encouragement as needed.

TALK IT OUT

Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read 1 Peter 4:1-2,12-19, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.

The Christian life is often portrayed in a positive manner, to the exclusion of any trials, difficulties, or sacrifices. Living for Christ can be hard. The Christian turns his or her back on the former way of life and embraces a new way of living in Christ. Unfortunately, non-believers often react with anger and rejection. Our hope in Christ not only carries us through such circumstances but gives us cause to rejoice and glory in Christ.

How does Peter describe how Christians are to arm themselves in 1 Peter 4:1-2?

What aspects of your spiritual life have been refined through suffering?

What Scripture passage do you lean on during trials and suffering?

DAY 1: Employ the proper mind-set.

Read 1 Peter 4:1-2.

Peter encouraged the early Christians to “arm” (v. 1) themselves with a proper view of suffering. We are no different. We fight battles first in the mind, not in the mere externals of our daily lives. Therefore, we must employ the proper mind-set. God has equipped us with “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16). When we face suffering with the mind of Christ, we see it through the “wide-angle” lens of God’s will and not the shortsighted lens of our discomfort, pain, or fear. Jesus viewed His life and suffering on earth through the eyes of eternity; He knew more was at stake than the momentary pain and suffering of His death on a cross. The eternal salvation of humanity hung in the balance, so with His mind firmly fixed on the will of His Father, Jesus accomplished God’s purpose.

Those who have this fixed determination in Christ are living a new life unto God and have left their previous life of sin. Don Kenyon wrote, “When that point comes in our commitment to Christ and His Kingdom that we take our place in the ranks of righteous men who boldly identify themselves with the goals of God, it should be fully apparent that our farewells have been said; our bridges have been burned behind us; the pleasures of sin have been forsaken.”⁶

Meditate on Christ’s crucifixion by reading one of the Gospel accounts: Matthew 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; or John 19. Ask God to help you keep your own suffering in perspective.

*“God’s people don’t live on explanations;
they live on promises.”*

WARREN WIERSBE

DAY 2: Choose to follow God in any circumstances.

Read 1 Peter 4:12-13.

Instead of being surprised by their suffering, Christians should rejoice. Why would people, even believers, rejoice because they were having to suffer? Peter gave them two reasons. The first was the privilege of getting to “share in the sufferings of Christ” (v. 13). Paul said that he had given up everything from his former way of life so that he could know Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:8). He wrote, “My goal is to know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings” (vv. 10-11). Paul’s goal was the same as Peter’s goal for his readers: believers could rejoice that through enduring suffering for Christ they were being faithful to Jesus. These believers could also rejoice because this type of suffering develops Christian character and leads to spiritual maturity.

The second reason why believers could rejoice when they suffer persecution for Christ’s sake is the joy that will be theirs when Jesus commends them and rewards them for their faithfulness, particularly for their endurance of suffering for Him. As Jesus told His disciples, “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” (Matthew 5:11-12).

In prayer, ask God to reveal any areas where you have been resisting His direction because you fear suffering. Say yes to what He is leading you to do.

DAY 3: Depend on God’s presence.

Read 1 Peter 4:14.

When we identify with Christ and share in His sufferings, we reveal His glory—and that’s definitely cause for celebration. Such suffering also brings us great satisfaction. “You are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you” (v. 14). The circumstances of suffering are no cause for happiness, but Christians can experience something far richer and permanent: the favor of God, a sense of being fully satisfied.

Spiros Zodhiates defined the Greek word *blessed* as “the state of the believer in Christ. The believer is indwelt by the Holy Spirit because of Christ and as a result should be fully satisfied no matter the circumstances.”⁷ Blessing and satisfaction come to us not because of our circumstances but because God is with us—and no circumstance can change that!

Take a few moments to be still in God’s presence. Use this time to listen to God and enjoy the peace He gives.

DAY 4: Don't be surprised if you face opposition for being a Christian.

Read 1 Peter 4:15-16.

The word “Christian” (v. 16) appears only two other times in the New Testament (Acts 11:26; 26:28). Apparently this term was originally only used by Gentile unbelievers in reference to followers of Christ. The Jews who opposed Jesus’ followers apparently called them “the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Gentiles may have used the name “Christian” to identify these individuals as followers of Jesus Christ and to distinguish them from the Jews. The Christians’ opponents may have also used the term to mock believers since their religion was so strange to Gentiles. Christians referred to themselves as “disciples” (Luke 6:17), “believers” (Acts 2:44), and “saints” (9:13). Peter urged his readers not to be ashamed of this label or to bring shame on it by suffering for doing wrong. Rather, Christians should bring glory to God by proudly accepting Christ’s name when they suffered for doing good.

Write 1 Peter 4:15-16 in your own words in the space below.



DAY 5: Ask God to use difficult circumstances to grow your faith.

Read 1 Peter 4:17-19.

Suffering can quickly turn our focus inward. We can become absorbed in our own issues, and the object of our affection becomes self. This is a form of pride that robs us of the joy and contentment Jesus offers, even in the midst of difficulty. But when we take on the mind-set of Christ and rejoice that we get to share in His sufferings, the glory is immeasurable because it's the work of God alone. Because we are frail human beings, who are we to face hardship head-on apart from Him? How can we point a finger of blame to the heavens when Jesus willingly suffered the most hideous, horrific, and humiliating death on a cross?

As Christians, suffering is part of our refining process. Earlier, Peter had written: "You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:6-7). When our faith is tested and proven genuine, Jesus is praised and honored.

Avoid the temptation to become bitter and self-absorbed when suffering comes. Instead, take your grief to God. Lean on Him. Allow Him to use the experience to refine your faith so that it would be deeper, stronger, and capable of withstanding any circumstance.

Memorize 1 Peter 1:6-7 as a reminder that trials can strengthen our faith and bring glory to God.

"You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials so that the proven character of your faith ... may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

1 PETER 1:6-7