

## SESSION 5

# The Joy Arising from Our Hope



### **QUESTION 1:**

*What are some things that bring great joy to you?*

## THE POINT

Suffering for Christ can deepen our walk with Him.

## THE PASSAGES

1 Peter 4:1-2,12-19

## 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.”<sup>1</sup>

Joni had joy in her walk with Christ. No matter how much suffering we face, God can use it to deepen our walk with Him.

## 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.**

**KEY WORDS:** **The flesh** (v. 1)—Though this term sometimes is used to refer to the human sinful nature (Rom. 8:1-8; Gal. 5:17,19-21), here it refers to Jesus' suffering in His physical body during His crucifixion.

A turning point for Joni Eareckson Tada came when, in the face of suffering, she began to think like Christ. She cried out for help and admitted her own weakness of unbelief, and she sought the Lord through the truth of His Word. 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 and glory in Christ.

The Christian life isn't a stroll through a grassy meadow; it is a battle. This life is all out war with our enemy, Satan. When faced with suffering, we must use the right weapon to fight these battles. We are to "arm" ourselves with Christ's mindset. This is the only place in Scripture we find this Greek word which means to equip oneself with a weapon. The weapon is our 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." Why in the world do we fight with this mindset? Think back to other passages of Scripture that teach about the war we are fighting.

**“For although we live in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh, since the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but are powerful through God for the demolition of strongholds. We demolish arguments and every proud thing that is raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we take every thought captive to obey Christ*” (2 Cor. 10:3-5, emphasis added).**

**“Finally, be strengthened by the Lord and by his vast strength. Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens. For this reason take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand” (Eph. 6:10-13).**

We fight the battle first in the mind, not in the mere externals of our daily lives. Therefore, we must fight a battle of the mind with the proper mindset. God has equipped us with the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:12-16). 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 and have left their previous life of sin. D. J. 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.”<sup>2</sup>

## QUESTION 2:

*How can we arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ in the face of suffering?*

**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.

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 as you share in the sufferings of Christ." 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 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. A.W. Tozer wrote:

**"Those first Christians trusted the sufferings of Christ and related their sufferings to His. ... Therefore, they rejoiced in the great honor that was done them in being permitted to suffer for Christ's sake and thus endure the pains of the Lord Jesus after Him."<sup>3</sup>**

When we're identified with Him 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." The Greek language used the word for *blessed* to note a state of happiness, but the New Testament writers gave it a far deeper meaning. The circumstances of suffering are no cause for happiness, but the believer can experience something far richer and permanent: the favor of God, a sense of being fully satisfied. Spiros Zodhiates defined the Greek word for *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."<sup>4</sup>

Blessing and satisfaction come to us, not because of our circumstances but because God is with us—and no circumstance can change that!

### QUESTION 3:

*What hinders us from rejoicing when times are difficult?*

## ENGAGE

An example of suffering I have experienced in the past:

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How did this suffering affect your relationship with God? Did it draw you closer to God or cause more distance between you and God?

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What primary lesson did you learn after this experience?

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## 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.**

Peter included a word of clarification, noting that suffering in this context is for righteousness' sake. A person should not 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. The shame that might be associated with our suffering is overwhelmed by a life that points glory back to God.

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 Pet. 1:6-7). When our faith is tested and proven genuine, Jesus is praised and honored.

Notice what Paul highlighted as his record of commendation when writing to the Corinthians:

**"Instead, as God's ministers, we commend ourselves in everything: by great endurance, by afflictions, by**

**hardships, by difficulties, by beatings, by imprisonments, by riots, by labors, by sleepless nights, by times of hunger, by purity, by knowledge, by patience, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God; through weapons of righteousness for the right hand and the left, through glory and dishonor, through slander and good report; regarded as deceivers, yet true; as unknown, yet recognized; as dying, yet see—we live; as being disciplined, yet not killed; as grieving, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet enriching many; as having nothing, yet possessing everything” (2 Corinthians 6:4-10).**

Paul recognized that although they may have lost everything this world could give, they gained what this world could not take away. And that was a cause for rejoicing.

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 mindset 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? Who are we to boast of our strength when suffering can strip us down to the weakest and most vulnerable expression of ourselves? 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?

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 do not need to fear it when it comes. As you endure, let Him deepen your walk with Him. Let God mold you more and more into Christlikeness. It will lead you to glorify God, and as others see Christ at work in you, it can be a cause for them to also glorify God.



## QUESTION 4:

*How does God's faithfulness cause believers to rejoice even in difficult circumstances?*

**DIGGING DEEPER****JUDGMENT AND REWARD**

In what manner will Christ-followers be judged? Will believers face the same scrutiny that unbelievers face? The New Testament testifies that “each of us will give an account of himself to God” (Rom. 14:12) and that “we must all appear before the tribunal of Christ, so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body, whether good or worthless” (2 Cor. 5:10). First Peter 4:12-19 underscores that judgment comes to believers as “God’s household.” Matthew 16:24-28 says Jesus will examine everyone, whether believer or unbeliever, “according to what he has done.”

Does this indicate that works are essential to salvation and that human performance can earn God’s favor? In a word, No.

When eager seekers asked Jesus what they could do to perform the

works of God, Jesus replied, “This is the work of God—that you believe in the one He has sent” (John 6:29). Although all individuals will be subject to God’s comprehensive examination, the fundamental act of justification by grace through faith makes the eternal and definitive difference for those who believe and rely upon Jesus. Believers are justified by faith as the New Testament asserts, but they are judged by their fruit. Although works are not meritorious for salvation, they are an evidence of salvation. The works of a believer that are most pleasing to God are those done in faith and with a conviction that there is no merit other than that which Christ alone accomplishes through us. Consequently, the New Testament does not even imply that salvation depends upon one’s service for God.

M. Dean Register, “Judgment and Rewards,” *Biblical Illustrator*, Spring, 2015, 71-74.

## QUESTION 5:

*When has your faith grown after a period of suffering?*

## LIVE IT OUT

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “Suffering ... is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master.”<sup>5</sup> How will you let God deepen your walk with Him through suffering?

- ▶ **Rejoice.** Choose gratitude instead of complaint. Voice a prayer of thanks to the Lord no matter what you are 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 believers 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.



### END NOTES

1 Joni Eareckson Tada, “A Deeper Healing,” <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/TM13-2/a-deeper-healing-joni-eareckson-tada>.

2 D. J. Kenyon, *He That Will Love Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications Inc., 1968), 270.

3 A. W. Tozer, *Living as a Christian: Teachings from First Peter* (Ventura, CA: Regal, 2009), 191-192.

4 Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Dictionary New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1992), 933-934.

5 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1979), 91.