

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR THE WEEK OF OCTOBER 15-21

Message Title: SUFFERING FOR THE SAKE OF CHRIST

Message Text: 1 PETER 4:12-19

Before Your Small Group Meeting:

- Watch Pastor John's Message
- Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1.). What was the most significant thought that Pastor John shared this morning that resonated with you?
- 2.). In what ways are you suffering? What are the causes of this suffering? Can you truly say you are suffering for the sake of Christ? or have you brought suffering on yourself with conduct that is not Christlike?
- 3.). 1 Peter 4:19 says, "Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." Why should you trust God in the midst of your suffering? How do you continue to do good amid your suffering?

FOR FURTHER STUDY

Commentary on 1 Peter 4:12-19

4:12. Four times this section uses the words **suffering** or **suffer**, and this verse talks about **the painful trial**. This phrase could be read as “the painful trial that burns among you.” The original readers would hear this as martyrdom by being burned at the stake. It could describe the fact that followers of Jesus in the city of Rome (where Peter wrote this letter) were being dragged from their families, dipped in tar, and used as living torches to light the gardens of Nero. At the very least, Peter described experiences of pain comparable to the pain of being burned with fire, though his definition of these trials remains deliberately vague.

Verse 14 does hint at one specific type of persecution: being **insulted because of the name of Christ**. “Insulted” refers to being slandered by someone. It describes the dismantling of a person’s character with false information. This reminds us of James’s words: “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (Jas. 3:6)

Believers must not **be surprised** when things like this assault their lives. *Surprised* means to be “astonished, upset, and bewildered.” It does not refer, however, to the very normal and short-term surprise or shock that an individual experiences in the face of this kind of pain. The present tense of the verb suggests a continuing attitude of bewilderment and astonishment at what is happening in the believer’s life.

Hidden in the word *surprised* is not only the thought of being bewildered over time, but also the idea of becoming resentful and bitter about the circumstances. Long-term bewilderment often leads to long-term bitterness, but believers should not view suffering as something **strange** or foreign. Our sufferings are not accidental, nor are they interfering with God’s purposes for our lives. In fact, these sufferings are part of his purpose.

This insight is suggested by the phrase **painful trial**. This expression contains the picture of a refining fire or a testing process that produces a positive result. The fires of suffering are designed by God to purify and strengthen the lives of his followers.

4:13. Again, the believer should not be surprised at this. Our suffering is the same kind of thing that Christ received, and therefore, in some sense, suffering is an indication of the believers’ identification with Christ. Believers **participate in the suffering of Christ**. *Participate* is taken from the familiar word *koinoneo*, “to share or fellowship with someone.” How does this work? Think of it this way: Your closest friends are those with whom you have suffered and hurt. As you stumble and crawl through pain together, you grow together as friends.

The same thing happens in our spiritual lives. As we view our persecutions as suffering for Christ and with Christ, we love him more deeply and trust him more completely. As this occurs, we are able to rejoice in the midst of our pain. Our present-tense joy will be turned into super joy when the pain is gone at the return of Jesus Christ (**when his glory is revealed**). This kind of joy should not be surprising, but in fact it should be expected. However, it is the present tense rejoicing that comes as a surprise.

Joy in suffering is not a trick of the mind. Rejoicing in pain has nothing to do with deriving pleasure from being mistreated in some way. Suffering has meaning as it puts us into deeper fellowship

with Jesus Christ. As this occurs, our level of trust in his wisdom and care in our lives increases so that we are able to rejoice. Joy, in its most sublime meaning, is a deep confidence that God is in control of every area of our lives, even the painful places. The fullness of joy comes from a deep sense of the presence of God in a person's life. Joy occurs when our pain drives us to depend upon God.

4:14. This verse mentions a specific kind of suffering: **if you are insulted because of the name of Christ.** *Insulted* means "to be abused or slandered." It pictures unjustified denunciations being hurled against the believer. For sensitive people, "there is often more bitterness (in such attacks) than in the loss of goods, or in the torments or agonies of the body" (Hiebert, quoting John Calvin, 268).

The Christian who suffers these kinds of abuses is uniquely blessed of God because **the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.** This refers to the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit within those who are believers in Jesus Christ. "Rests" indicates that the Holy Spirit is within the believer continually to refresh and to strengthen. At any moment we can draw on the Spirit of God. Especially in moments of crisis and suffering, God's Spirit is available to strengthen and refresh the believer.

4:15. This verse offers a disclaimer or clarification regarding the suffering Christian's experience. Believers should not rejoice in certain kinds of pain and suffering and should not consider themselves blessed to be a part of such suffering. In these cases even the staunchest believer should not look for the refreshment and strength of the Holy Spirit. Those sufferings are detailed with four descriptive phrases. **Murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal** form one group and should be taken literally. They refer to breaking the laws of society and suffering the consequences of those actions. When that happens, the believer is not to say, "I am suffering for Jesus' sake or for the sake of righteousness." You are not. You are suffering because you broke the law.

The fourth term may be the real concern: **meddler.** This refers to Christians who stick their noses into situations where they have no business. Words like "agitator," "disrupter," or "troublemaker" give the proper sense of the term *meddler*. By interfering in the lives of others, a meddler disrupts the peace and harmony of the local church and community.

Everyone has had experience with such meddlesome people. They stick their nose in, get caught, and get called on the carpet. Invariably they respond, "They are just picking on me because I am a Christian," or, "I am just suffering for the Lord." Scripture says, "Call it whatever you want, but you are not suffering on behalf of Jesus Christ; you are suffering because of your own meddling behavior." If you are behaving this way, stop your negative behavior.

4:16. Legitimate suffering for the name of Christ is again mentioned in this verse in direct contrast to the behavior pattern described in the previous verse. **Christian** appears only three times in the New Testament, but in each case it identifies the true followers of Jesus. Peter connected this name with true and valuable suffering. Some readers were suffering because of their faithful identification with Jesus Christ through their lifestyle choices or their verbal testimony. Faithfulness to Christ will produce suffering and persecution. The reverse also seems to be true: a lack of persecution in a believer's life may suggest a less-than-faithful lifestyle and testimony.

4:17-18. These two verses, although somewhat connected to verse 16, are better understood in their connection to the entire paragraph, beginning with verse 12. For the believer in Jesus Christ, trials and sufferings can have a positive impact. They have a refining and purifying purpose. Verse 17 develops this idea by suggesting that trials, in the form of persecution, have redemptive value

for the believer, even when seen as the judgment of God in the life of the believer. One commentator puts it in these words: "The effect of persecution is to show up in the church those who really believe and are prepared to stand firm and those who do not really believe and so fall away when under trial. This judgment also purifies the true believers, encouraging them not to commit shameful acts" (Marshall, 156).

A quotation from Proverbs 11:31 reinforces this point from the perspective of the unbeliever. Unbelievers, unlike the followers of Christ, are not a part of the refining judgment of God. The judgment they face is judicial; it takes the form of punishment. When Jesus Christ returns, they will face the fire of his anger in judgment.

4:19. This is not the destination of the believer who receives quick reassurance of his or her connection to God in this verse. In this one verse the teaching of the entire letter of 1 Peter could be summarized. Believers do not suffer accidentally or because of irresistible forces of blind fate. Rather, they suffer according to God's will. This should be enough for his followers to **commit themselves** to God. *Commit* means "to entrust yourself for safe keeping." Believers are in good hands, not with a human insurance agency, but with an all-loving and faithful God who has cared for us from the beginning. He asks us to commit ourselves **to [our] faithful Creator.**

The combination of "faithful" and "Creator" reminds us of God's love and power, even in the midst of suffering and pain. God created the world, and he has faithfully ordered it and sustained it since the creation. Because we know that he is faithful, we can count on him to fulfill his promises to us. If he can oversee the forces of nature, certainly he can see us through the trials we face.

The committed believer can obey the final injunction of this paragraph: **and continue to do good.** This means doing those things God views as good. The believers to whom Peter addressed these words had not rejected their Christian faith. They had not stopped living out their faith. Perhaps they were beginning to feel weary and to weaken in their resolve. They needed encouragement to depend on God's care and the will to keep on keeping on.¹

¹ Walls, D., & Anders, M. (1999). [*I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*](#) (Vol. 11, pp. 74–77). Broadman & Holman Publishers.