

1 Peter 4:12-19

Week 7 - Christianity Isn't Easy Street

Learning Objectives

- Show that being a follower of Christ does not mean life will be easy
- Seek out how we can move to praise God when suffering happens

Pray for your time together.

1 Peter 4:12-19

¹² Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. ¹⁵ If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler. ¹⁶ However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. ¹⁷ For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

¹⁸ And, "If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?"

¹⁹ So then, those who suffer according to God's will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.

? In 64 a.d., Emperor Nero covered Christians in tar, lit them on fire, and used them as evening lights for parties. Here Peter tells his Christian readers to "not be surprised at the fiery ordeal." Why do you think Peter tells early Christians not to be surprised at their own suffering?

Possible Answer: If the Savior of the Universe suffered injustice, it is only natural that his followers suffer as well. The world does not share the same values as Christians, so we should not be surprised to encounter friction with those who do not share our values.

? In our culture, we don't have to fear being nailed to a cross. However, the crucifixion wasn't the only ordeal Christ faced. What were some of the other ways Christ suffered?

Possible Answers: Rejection, loneliness, humiliation, separation from the father, feeling the guilt and weight of bearing our sin.

? How have you (or someone you know) suffered for following Christ?

Possible Answers: Answers may vary based on personal experience, but could include ridicule for being a Christian, going through "storms" in life, being ostracized, feeling shame for what you believe, etc.

? How should knowing that we will suffer for Christ affect how we react to that suffering?

Possible Answers: We should not be caught off guard by suffering, but should have peace knowing that it is expected to happen. As we see God bring good in the midst of suffering, we learn to trust Him more fully. We often want to run from things that are hard, but when we experience suffering we should trust that God is using it for a greater purpose and His ultimate glory.

? Amid suffering, what are some practical actions we can take that will give us peace and encourage us to rejoice?

Possible Answers: Remember previous times of suffering and the strengthening of your relationship with God (see Hebrews 12:10-11), Remember your emotions or reactions during these times, Live in eager expectation of future glory (v.13). Remember that God is present with us, and His desire is that we would draw near to Him. It can be hard to praise God while suffering, but that is the goal.

? Verses 15-16 of this passage highlight a contrast between suffering because of the consequences of our sin and suffering because we follow Christ. What is the difference between these two types of suffering?

Possible Answers: Sin brings about consequences that have nothing to do with being a follower of Christ. Suffering because of our faith in Christ is not a result from sin, but it is still real suffering. Suffering as a result of sin should lead us to repentance. When we suffer for Christ we can have joy because we honor God through that kind of suffering and we know that God will vindicate our faithfulness in heaven.

? What do you think Peter means when he says we bear God's name in the midst of our suffering?

Possible Answers: People often wear a brand name or team jersey to affiliate with that icon/team. In a similar (but greater) sense, we represent Christ when we suffer as a Christian. Verse 16 should encourage believers, because we know that God knows what it is like to suffer, and He will be with us while we suffer.

? Why do you think this specific section was placed in a letter about anticipating suffering?

Possible Answers: Preparation in dealing with suffering and knowing all will suffer as a result of sin in this world. Encouragement to persevere, Christ is coming. Help make sense of our feeling of separation as Christians (v.4:7).

God's Will And Grace

God's will exists both in His sovereign plan and in His Word, the Bible (Isaiah 46:9-10, 1 Thess. 5:11-18, Hebrews 13:20-21). Peter shares that God's plan may include suffering for Christians. As hard as this may be, Christians should be encouraged (v. 16), knowing that their suffering is in accordance with God's will or plan (v. 19). There are multiple examples in Scripture of suffering for doing good (Jesus' death on the cross, Paul's persecution through beatings/imprisonment, Stephen being stoned, etc.).

? In verse 19, what does Peter mean when he says we may “suffer according to God’s will”?

Possible Answers: Suffering according to God’s will is from living as God would want us to instead of suffering as a result of your own sin (see v. 14-16 for examples of each). Even in the midst of evil, believers should honor their Creator by doing good, showing that they trust God with their entire lives.

? What is a good way to respond to Christian suffering in prayer?

Possible Answers: We as Christians know God is in control (see sidebar on God’s will including His sovereignty above) and that He is no stranger to suffering. As such, we can take comfort with a Father who cares (1 Peter 5:7). Further, if we are not in the midst of suffering, it should encourage us to be praying for Christians in other circumstances/cultures who may be experiencing suffering as Christians as well.

? How might that kind of prayer be different than your current prayer life? i.e. “Let me have a good day vs. Let God’s glory be revealed, no matter the cost to my comfort.”

For Discussion and Accountability

? Knowing you will likely suffer for Christ at some point, how can you better prepare for that?

? What can you do this week to help others who are suffering for Christ?