

SESSION 4

The Endurance of Our Hope

GETTING STARTED

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Use the following activity to introduce the idea of endurance. **In advance**, locate a Hacky Sack. Display it to your group, and invite two or three volunteers to try their skill at Hacky Sack. Consider having a small prize for the final person remaining in the game. Ask, “Why do people enjoy testing their ability to endure?” Allow time for discussion. Explain that today’s session will look at the importance of endurance in our walk with Christ. *(Note: Paddleball or any game that tests a person’s endurance will also work.)*

DISCUSS: When have you needed endurance to complete a task or goal?

RECAP (PAGE 31): 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 other Christians, 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 God’s promises, even when my feelings were overwhelming me or my mind was flooded with fear and doubt. Throughout the treatments, I claimed promises from Scripture. 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’s 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.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 32. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

THE POINT: We can endure SUFFERING because of our HOPE in Christ.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Throughout his letter, Peter sought to encourage the believers in Asia Minor to stay faithful in the face of persecution. Over and over he pointed to their hope in Christ as motivation for staying faithful and included specific actions that God expects of His obedient children. Beginning in 1 Peter 2:13 he addressed believers’ behavior in several areas of everyday life before turning back to a more general appeal regarding how Christians should live.

RECAP (PAGE 32): Throughout his letter, Peter provided encouragement to Christians who were suffering and facing persecution. His message was straightforward: remain faithful. Peter’s words called the Christians to live distinctive lifestyles that brought honor to God.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 3:8-12 on page 32.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 32: **We’re called to LOVE even those who intend evil toward us.**

RECAP (PAGE 32): 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.

- ▶ **Unity.** The command to “be like-minded” (v. 8) isn’t referring to minute details but rather to having unity on major points of faith.
- ▶ **Mutual concern.** To be “sympathetic” (v. 8) means to feel with others and suffer together.
- ▶ **Love.** Peter employed the Greek word *philadelphos* to convey the Christians’ responsibility to love one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.
- ▶ **Compassion.** The church should be a place of compassion where we err on the side of grace and do too much rather than not enough.
- ▶ **Humility.** Peter knew Christians must have a realistic impression of themselves.
- ▶ **Forgiveness.** An unforgiving spirit will disrupt fellowship, destroy joy, and ultimately send roots of bitterness deep into the heart.

DISCUSS: Which piece of practical advice from these verses stands out to you most? Why? *[ALTERNATE: What are some practical ways we can turn away from evil on a daily basis?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 3:13-14 on page 33.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 33: **Our hope in Christ CARRIES US through any circumstances.**

RECAP (PAGE 33): 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. In fact, we’re 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. We may experience times of unjust suffering because we stood up for what’s right. Nonetheless, when our hope is rooted in Christ, enduring through such undeserved trials can strengthen us to face other troubling times.

DISCUSS: How has your hope in Christ helped you endure suffering? *[ALTERNATE: In what ways have you seen people suffer as a result of their faith in Christ?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 3:15-17 on page 33.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 33: **FAITHFULNESS in suffering is an opportunity to point to the hope we have in Christ.**

RECAP (PAGE 33): 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” (v. 15). The conjunction *but* contrasts fear and intimidation with holiness and readiness.

DISCUSS: How can we honor Christ in our interactions with those who cause us pain, conflict, or rejection? [*ALTERNATE: How can our lives demonstrate to others that Christ is Lord?*]

DISCUSS: When has suffering given you an opportunity to point others to Jesus?

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity, **Steadfast Hope**, on page 33, on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

Steadfast Hope: Consider the following statement, and place a mark on the scale below.

When suffering comes, I go to God’s Word and place my hope securely in Christ.



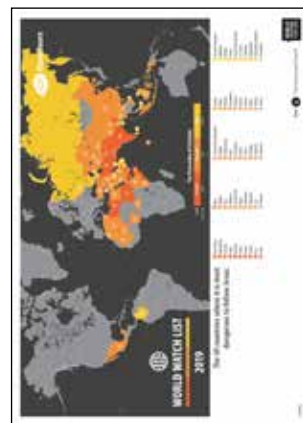
What promise from Scripture can you lean on when challenging circumstances arise?

LIVE IT OUT

LEADER PACK: In advance, make copies of **Pack Item #4, “The Persecuted Church”** handout, and distribute them to your group members. Use this resource to discuss countries today where significant numbers of Christians experience persecution. Invite group members to choose a different country each week to lift up in prayer.

SAY: “How will you endure suffering because of the hope you have in Christ?”

GUIDE: Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 34. Call on volunteers to share (1) which of these statements is something they want to pursue further, or (2) ways this study will transform their prayer lives this week.



- ▶ **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.

GUIDE: Invite each person to gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender this week for a deeper discussion, using **Talk It Out** (page 34) to guide their discussion. Encourage group members to spend time each day in God’s Word with the devotions found in the **Daily Study** section (pages 35–38).

PRAY: Close your Bible study time with prayer.

DIG DEEPER

Use the commentary below as you prepare to lead the session.

[VERSE 8]: After spending time on how Christians should reflect Christ in their various roles (1 Peter 2:13–3:7), Peter resumed a more general approach (“all of you”) in terms of how believers should conduct themselves, using five adjectives. The first adjective (*homophron*) is “like-minded,” which as a command could be translated literally as “think alike.” Peter was not urging absolute uniformity of thought but a general agreement on core doctrines and appropriate conduct both within and outside of the church setting. “Sympathetic” translates the second adjective. Paul’s urging in Romans 12:15 most likely captures the meaning of the term: “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.”

The command “love one another” comes from the Greek adjective (*philadelphos*) for “loving one’s brother.” This kind of love should be the rule, not the exception, for Christian brothers and sisters. “Compassionate” comes from a Greek term (*eusplagchnos*) sometimes translated “tenderhearted.” One who is compassionate is sensitive to the needs and opinions of others. The last descriptive word is “humble.” Part of being humble entails considering others to be more important than yourself (Philippians 2:3).

[VERSE 9]: While Peter urged his readers to demonstrate these five traits, he called on them to go even further. Not only should they love and care for one another, they should also avoid responding to evil acts and words with the same kind of evil behavior (see Matthew 5:38; Romans 12:17). Rather than trying to return the hurt, believers should make a habit of blessing others.

[VERSES 10-12]: To reinforce his instruction for his readers to demonstrate Christlike behavior despite their trials, in verses 10-12 Peter quoted Psalm 34:12-16. The theme of the psalm reflects Peter’s overall theme: God is always faithful to care for the righteous (those who fear Him) who endure suffering. Note the psalm’s repeated examples of how God rescues those who fear Him and provides for them (Psalm 34:4,6-10,15,17-20,22). The psalmist encouraged his readers to “turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it.” Peter also reminded his readers that God is always watching over the righteous and listening to their prayers.

[VERSE 14]: Peter explained that if they “suffer for righteousness” they are blessed. Peter did not mean that believers should rejoice for the suffering itself. He was viewing suffering through the words he had heard Jesus speak (Matthew 5:10-12). Yes, Jesus said, His faithful disciples will be blessed when they are maligned or persecuted, but the blessing He promised would be waiting for them in heaven (v. 12; see Revelation 21:3-4).

[VERSES 15-16]: In verse 14 Peter challenged his readers not to be afraid or intimidated by those who opposed them. Instead of fearing other people, they were to “regard Christ the Lord,” the one to whom they owed and gave their highest allegiance. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah sent by God to be the Savior of the world (John 3:16). Christ is the English translation for the Greek *Christos*, “anointed one.” The corresponding Hebrew term is *Mashiach*, “Messiah.” Jesus is Lord, fully man but also fully God, and He deserves our reverential fear and absolute obedience.

Once these believers were devoted to good (1 Peter 3:11,13) and committed to honoring Jesus as Lord, then they would be “ready ... to give a defense ... for the hope” in which they trusted. Peter wasn’t calling on the believers to argue with unbelievers but rather to focus on and be able to explain the hope that was theirs in Christ. Peter urged his readers to always be prepared to explain what they believed about the meaning and purpose of life. Peter didn’t intend that they should be prepared to answer every possible question an unbeliever might ask, but they should be able to provide a reasonable and clear explanation about why they followed Jesus “at any time” and “to anyone who asks you.”

Peter then added three additional guidelines on how believers were to share their hope. Believers should give their defense and reason with gentleness, respect, and a clear conscience.

[VERSE 17]: Peter referred to the persecution his audience endured for Christ’s sake as being God’s will. This implies that all such suffering for being a Christian is under God’s control. God permits such suffering, and will both give Christians the strength to endure it. Another point to notice is that this is a specific kind of suffering—persecution for being a believer in Christ.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at

BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra