

SESSION 5

The Joy Arising from Our Hope

GETTING STARTED

DISCUSS: What images come to mind when you hear the word *joy*?

RECAP (PAGE 39): 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.

GUIDE: Direct attention to **The Point** on page 40. Invite group members to fill in the blanks.

THE POINT: SUFFERING for Christ can deepen our WALK with Him.

STUDY THE BIBLE

GIVE BIBLICAL CONTEXT: Peter’s theme throughout his first epistle was to encourage believers in Asia Minor who were suffering persecution to remain faithful to Jesus regardless of the cost. The apostle often reminded them of the blessedness of their status in Christ (1 Peter 1:1-12; 2:4-10). He blended a reminder of their blessings with a call to maintain high standards of morality and holiness and emphasized the rewards of such conduct.

RECAP (PAGE 40): 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.

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 4:1-2 on page 40.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 40: **In the face of suffering, THINK LIKE Christ.**

RECAP (PAGE 40): 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).

DISCUSS: What obstacles tend to keep us from thinking like Christ? *[ALTERNATE: How can we arm ourselves with the same attitude as Christ in the face of suffering?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 4:12-14 on page 40.

GUIDE: Direct your group’s attention to the following heading on page 40: **In the face of suffering, REJOICE IN Christ.**

RECAP (PAGES 40–41): 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.

DO: Divide group members into subgroups of three or four people each. Invite subgroups to complete the activity, **Living for Christ**, on page 41, together. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses.

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.

DISCUSS: When have you experienced joy in the middle of suffering? *[ALTERNATE: Why is hope a necessary element for rejoicing in the midst of suffering?]*

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Peter 4:15-19 on page 41.

GUIDE: Direct your group's attention to the following heading on page 41: **In the face of suffering, GIVE GLORY to God.**

RECAP (PAGE 41): 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 Him deepen your walk with Him. Let God mold you more and more into Christlikeness. It will lead you to glorify God.

DISCUSS: When has your faith grown after a period of suffering? *[ALTERNATE: In what difficult circumstance do you need to praise God this week?]*

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

LIVE IT OUT

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, connect with group members a few days prior to your group gathering. Ask each group member to choose one Scripture passage that provides hope and strength during times of trial. Go around your group and invite group members to share their Scripture passages aloud. Make a list of all the passages. Then, send this list to your group members as a reminder that God can use our trials to grow our faith.

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

GUIDE: Direct group members to review the three bulleted statements under **Live It Out** on page 42. 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.

- ▶ **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.

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 42) 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 43–46).

PRAY: Close your Bible study time with prayer.

DIG DEEPER

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

[VERSE 1]: After reminding his readers of Jesus’ willingness to suffer for them, Peter challenged these believers to arm themselves with “the same understanding” (attitude). Clearly, Peter’s assumption was that these believers would have to suffer as Christ had suffered “in the flesh.” The Greek term (*sarx*) translated as “flesh” is sometimes used to refer to the human sinful nature (Romans 8:1-8; Galatians 5:17,19-21); however, here it refers to Jesus’ suffering in His physical body during His crucifixion.

Peter was encouraging these believers to be prepared for that situation. The phrase “is finished with sin” is somewhat difficult to interpret. Yes, believers are freed from the guilt and slavery of sin (Romans 6:6-11). However, Peter did not mean that Christians would never sin again (1 John 1:8-10). So what did he mean? While before faith in Christ a person’s natural inclination was to sin, the believer’s inclination is now toward living a life of faithfulness to God.

[VERSE 2]: Peter then reminded his readers of the basic expectations of their call to follow Jesus. Jesus expects that His disciples dedicate their lives to God’s will and not to sinful human desires. Jesus stressed this point multiple times (Luke 9:23; 14:25-27).

What did Peter mean by “the remaining time in the flesh”? He could have meant the time before Jesus’ return from heaven (1 Peter 4:7). Peter could have also been referring to the time each believer had left before he or she died. He was calling on them to be faithful, to live good lives, and to be willing to suffer for the sake of Christ—to live out God’s will.

[VERSE 12]: Peter urged his readers not to be surprised by the suffering they were having to endure or to think that something unusual was happening to them. Peter referred to their suffering for their faith as “the fiery ordeal.” Although Peter could have been referring to actual persecution as the fiery ordeal, more likely he was associating the persecution of

believers with how fire was used to purify metals. He had used such an analogy earlier in his letter (1 Peter 1:6-7). God’s purpose for allowing His people to undergo such trials was to test them.

[VERSE 13]: Believers could rejoice that through enduring suffering for Christ they were being faithful to Jesus and His calling to always live in a manner worthy of the gospel they had received (Ephesians 4:1). These believers could also rejoice because this type of suffering develops Christian character and leads to spiritual maturity (Romans 5:3-4; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 1:6-7).

[VERSE 14]: Peter referred to the form of persecution his readers were most likely facing—verbal abuse (1 Peter 2:15; 3:16; 4:4). He noted that such abuse was “for the name of Christ.” When the apostles were arrested and beaten for telling others about Jesus, they rejoiced “that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name” (Acts 5:41). Of course, Luke meant the name of Jesus.

[VERSE 15]: While the believers would be blessed for suffering for the name of Christ (1 Peter 4:14), they should clearly have understood that they would not receive a blessing for either doing or suffering the consequences for evil, immoral deeds (3:17). Furthermore, such suffering does not glorify God. Peter cited four types of people as examples.

[VERSES 16-18]: Peter urged his readers not to be ashamed of suffering for being a Christian. Rather, Christians could bring glory to God by proudly accepting Christ’s name when they suffered for doing good (3:17).

[VERSE 19]: Peter again stated that the Christian’s suffering is “according to God’s will.” God won’t allow His children to suffer beyond what they are able to stand and will give them the strength to endure to the end (1 Peter 1:5; see John 10:28-30; Romans 8:28-39). Because this is true, believers can entrust themselves to God. The believers’ eternal inheritance is kept safe by God for them in heaven (1 Peter 1:3-4). Because God is their loving, sovereign, and faithful Creator, Christians can live with confident trust in and consistent obedience to God, even when it means suffering for being Christ’s disciples.



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