

## 4 | The Endurance of Our Hope



### THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

No one signs up for pain, sorrow, disappointment, betrayal, or rejection, but they still 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.

# GROUP TIME



**THE POINT:** We can endure \_\_\_\_\_ because of our \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ.

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.

**1 Peter 3:8-12** <sup>8</sup> Finally, all of you be like-minded and sympathetic, love one another, and be compassionate and humble, <sup>9</sup> not paying back evil for evil or insult for insult but, on the contrary, giving a blessing, since you were called for this, so that you may inherit a blessing. <sup>10</sup> For the one who wants to love life and to see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit, <sup>11</sup> and let him turn away from evil and do what is good. Let him seek peace and pursue it, <sup>12</sup> because the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do what is evil.

**We're called to \_\_\_\_\_ even those who intend evil toward us.**

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.

**1 Peter 3:13-14** <sup>13</sup> Who then will harm you if you are devoted to what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be intimidated,

**Our hope in Christ \_\_\_\_\_ through any circumstances.**

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 are 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 is right. Nonetheless, when our hope is rooted in Christ, enduring through such undeserved trials can strengthen us to face other troubling times.

**1 Peter 3:15-17** <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> Yet do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that when you are accused, those who disparage your good conduct in Christ will be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

\_\_\_\_\_ in suffering is an opportunity to point to the hope we have in Christ.

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.

## 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**

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How will you endure suffering because of the hope you have in Christ?

- ▶ **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.

**TALK IT OUT**

**Want to go a step further? Gather with two or three Christ-followers of the same gender. Read 1 Peter 3:8-17, then use the following summary and questions for a deeper discussion.**

Most people don’t enjoy pain, conflict, or rejection, but these things happen to all of us. Christians aren’t immune; in fact, living a life of obedience to Christ can result in just such rejection and suffering. Thankfully, we don’t face suffering alone. Christ is with us, and our sure and certain hope in Him will sustain us. The hope we exhibit in the face of such suffering points to the One in whom we place our hope.

*When has your faith in Christ enabled you to endure a hard season?*

*What did you learn from that experience? How can our lives demonstrate to others that Christ is Lord?*

*How can we honor Christ in our interactions with those who cause us pain or conflict?*

## DAY 1: Exchange your fears for fear of the Lord.

### Read 1 Peter 3:8-12.

Peter encouraged his readers to constantly display Christlike behavior despite their trials. To reinforce his point, in verses 10-12 Peter quoted Psalm 34:12-16. The psalmist based his encouragement to trust God on a common human desire—to live a long and happy life (vv. 10,12). Because we live on this side of Jesus’ resurrection and His victory over death, we know that the true quality of our lives depends on God’s eternal blessings and not on just the temporal ones. Still, there’s no guarantee that Christians will live either long or happy lives in this world. In fact, believers will experience persecution and suffering in this life. However, we can rejoice in the fact that we will experience great peace and joy in the eternal life to come!

The psalmist offered his readers specific guidance on how to exchange their fears for the fear of the Lord (v. 11). He first urged God’s people to guard against speaking words that were evil or full of “deceit” (v. 10). The psalmist’s second encouragement was more general: to simply reject every kind of evil and replace it with “what is good” (v. 11). We’re to be intentional about avoiding contentious behavior. God is always watching over the righteous and listening to their prayers. However, the Lord turns His face away from “those who do what is evil” (v. 12). Peter used these words to spur on his readers to remain faithful and obedient despite their trials.

*When is it difficult to speak with love, compassion, and humility?*

*Ask God for His help as you seek to live out this verse.*

*“I sought the LORD, and he answered me  
and rescued me from all my fears.”*

PSALM 34:4

## DAY 2: Knowing Christ enables us to endure difficulties.

### Read 1 Peter 3:13.

I heard my mentor, Vance Havner, preach about the way many Christians view the call to follow Christ. He said, “‘Lord’ is the most lifeless word in the Christian vocabulary. We have a cheap Christianity that does not cost us much. The shame and reproach of the old rugged cross means nothing more than a line in a hymnbook. ... At heart [Christianity] is the process by which God makes saints out of sinners. We are predestined to be conformed to the image of God’s Son.”

As Lord, Jesus has universal sovereign authority. Jesus’ lordship makes it possible for believers to walk in victory today. We’d certainly like to believe that choosing what is right would make the path smooth and easy before us, and we usually don’t face persecution because of right choices. However, we’re living in a world where, increasingly, people suffer for righteous living. Warren Wiersbe wrote: “We can harm ourselves if we fail to trust God. Generally speaking, people do not oppose us if we do good; but even if they do, it is better to suffer for righteousness’ sake than to compromise our testimony.”<sup>4</sup>

*Praise God for being greater than anything or anyone who might oppose you.*

## DAY 3: View challenges as opportunities to trust Christ.

### Read 1 Peter 3:14.

Suppose believers, in spite of doing good, did suffer for their faith. Peter assured them that in such suffering they “are blessed” (v. 14). Peter didn’t mean that believers should rejoice for the suffering itself. He was viewing suffering through the words he had heard Jesus speak in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:10-12). Yes, Jesus said, His faithful disciples will be blessed when they are persecuted, but the blessing He promised would be waiting for them in heaven (v. 12).

The apostles Paul and James both said that believers should rejoice when they face suffering and/or trials for their faith in Christ (Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4). They weren’t urging Jesus’ followers to rejoice because of the suffering itself but rather because of the good that God would cause to come through it. Both Paul and James assured believers that God would work through their suffering to enable them to grow in endurance and spiritual maturity. Paul added that these experiences would also strengthen their hope in God’s faithfulness to His promises.

*What difficulty are you currently experiencing? Ask God to use this season to deepen your trust in Him.*



## **DAY 4: Recognize Christ as Lord over all areas of your life.**

### **Read 1 Peter 3:15.**

Peter recognized that if believers would sanctify—or set apart—Christ as holy in their hearts, we wouldn't worry about what other people thought. We wouldn't be intimidated, but we would rather be a bold witness to the life-changing power of the gospel. We won't have readiness in our speech or actions if living holy and being set apart under the lordship of Christ aren't our priorities. The hope of Christ will never work its way out into our life and lips if it's not in our hearts first.

Paul admonished us: “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness” (Romans 6:12-13). These verses teach us that there is a time to decide, a time for action that matches our belief. If we believe Jesus is Lord, then our actions and attitudes should reflect that. It means we yield our personalities to Him. Our time becomes His time. Our money, plans, career, and relationships are no longer ours but His.

*Grab coffee or lunch today with a mature Christian friend. Ask this individual how they effectively yield all areas of life to the Lord.*



## DAY 5: Be ready to share about your hope in Christ.

### Read 1 Peter 3:16-17.

In 1 Peter 3:15, Christians are called to be ready to give a defense for the reason for our hope in Christ. We don't have to fumble around for words or shrink back in fear when asked about what we believe; we can stand confidently in the lordship of Christ because we have settled *who* we are and *whose* we are. Peter's words point to a connection between a person's lack of readiness to speak about the hope of the gospel and his acknowledgment of the Lord as holy. If we haven't set Christ apart as Lord—His rightful place—we can easily clam up or change the conversation!

Our readiness is gracefully tempered with both gentleness and respect. *Gentleness* may also be translated as *meekness* and speaks to grace that's been implanted in us. It's an attitude of humility that considers Christ and the other person more important than self. Our words should also be spoken with respect. The Greek word translated *respect* is where we get our English word *phobia*. This word signifies a reverential fear of God, which prompts us to choose our words carefully and to seek to honor Christ in all our dealings with other people. When we set apart Christ in our hearts as holy, we will also give a gentle, holy response when defending the hope that's ours because of Him.

*In the space below, write out your testimony in three sentences or less.*

*Be ready to share this today with someone who needs to hear about the hope you have in Christ.*

*“For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.”*

1 PETER 3:17