

SESSION 4

READY FAITH



When have you chosen to endure difficulty for a future benefit?

QUESTION #1

#BSFLready

THE POINT

Suffering brings opportunities to point to Jesus.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Beep! Beep! Beep! The alarm goes off before dawn, and you drag yourself out of bed. You get dressed and work your way through a few warm-up exercises, then set off down the road and watch the sunrise while you jog. When you feel like you can't run another step, you push harder so you can make it just a little further than last time.

Why do we do that to ourselves? Why do so many people willingly choose the pain of physical exercise day after day after day? The answer is that we're aiming for a long-term payoff. Specifically, we're working toward a stronger body and better health.

The same principle is true when it comes to enduring suffering as a follower of Christ. No one chooses to suffer for being a Christian; it just comes our way. But we can choose to discover a benefit—an opportunity—that arises out of difficult and painful circumstances.

In the Book of 1 Peter, we discover that a great opportunity comes our way when we stand with Jesus even in the midst of difficulty or persecution.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

1 Peter 3:13-16; 4:1-2 (HCSB)

3:13 And who will harm you if you are deeply committed to what is good?

14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear or be disturbed,

15 but honor the Messiah as Lord in your hearts. Always be ready to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you.

16 However, do this with gentleness and respect, keeping your conscience clear, so that when you are accused, those who denounce your Christian life will be put to shame.

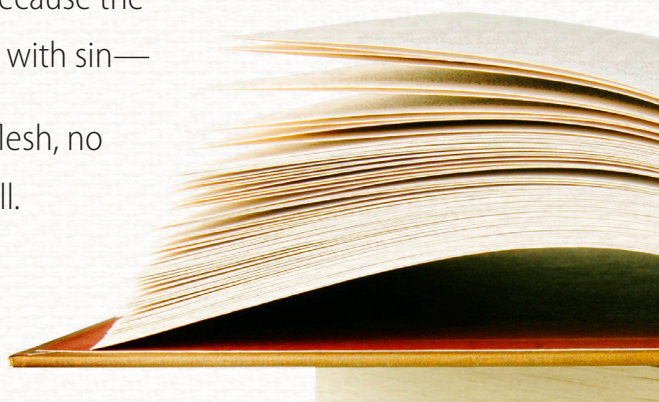
4:1 Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, equip yourselves also with the same resolve—because the one who suffered in the flesh has finished with sin—

2 in order to live the remaining time in the flesh, no longer for human desires, but for God's will.

Key Words

Suffer (v. 14)—In the New Testament, the Greek term indicates suffering due to righteousness. New Testament writers used it of the suffering of both Jesus and Christians.

Blessed (v. 14)—A state of happiness caused by participation in the kingdom of God and the favor of God upon one's life.



How would you answer Peter's question in verse 13?

QUESTION #2

Why is there a strong connection between suffering and sharing faith?

QUESTION #3

1 Peter 3:13-14

At the time of Jesus' death, Peter was a trembling, fleeing disciple. He was a far different man years later when he wrote the epistle we refer to as 1 Peter. He was willing to suffer persecution and harm in this life because he had come to understand there is more to living than *just* this present life. He was a witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and that event changed everything. It meant that, though he may suffer greatly here on earth, he had a future hope to come—a future in which he would experience the reward of having faithfully trusted God.

I have an apologetics ministry through which I have debated many issues on the subject of the existence of God. I have sometimes been the target of inflammatory reactions and remarks. Some of these attacks I can ignore. Other attacks, however, I have to take more seriously. At one point, I had to ask my family if they were willing to risk the physical harm that could come to any of us because of my ministry. We had to face head-on what we really believed—and what we were willing to sacrifice for that belief.

The same was true of Peter. Over and over again, he had to determine what he really believed:

- ▶ When Jesus called on him to step out of the boat and onto the water.
- ▶ When he was confronted about being a follower of Jesus.
- ▶ When he experienced the risen Jesus face-to-face.
- ▶ When he ministered in an area hostile to his faith.

It's time to come to terms with what you actually believe. If this life is all there is—if nothing else exists after this—then it makes sense that we would fear losing life or losing control of any part of it. But a righteous God does exist who knows all things and rightly judges all things. Therefore, your suffering will not escape His notice. He comforts and rewards those who suffer unjustly.



STANDING STRONG

Who in your life has been especially dedicated to standing for his or her beliefs?

What have you learned from his or her example?

1 Peter 3:15-16

Peter commanded believers to be prepared to make a defense for the reason for the hope within us. The word translated “reason” is the Greek term *apologia*, from which we get the English word *apology*. This kind of apology doesn’t mean saying you’re sorry. Rather, it’s the kind of statement lawyers give in court. It’s a thoughtful, well-reasoned explanation of a specific conclusion.

As part of his command to honor the Messiah as Lord, Peter included some detailed instructions: be able to give anyone a thoughtful, well-reasoned explanation of why you have hope in Jesus Christ. Since you are making Christ Lord in your life, you should be able to understand—and explain—why you believe He is the Lord.

I had a hard time discussing with people *what* I believed before I understood better *why* I personally believe it. I was intimidated, afraid someone might ask of me an answer for which I was unprepared. My typical way of handling this problem was simply to avoid engaging with people about my belief in God. However, after I began to understand my reasons for believing in God, I became much less intimidated to speak to others.

Peter wrote this command to Christians who might physically suffer for giving a defense of the reason for their hope. The early Christians were faced with the very real possibility of suffering insult and injury for sharing what they believed. Peter encouraged them to use this time as a testimony for their hope in Jesus. What a powerful testimony that would be: to stand in the face of persecution and still provide a reasoned defense for belief in Jesus as the risen Lord!

Peter added a caution to those who make such a defense: do it with gentleness and respect. By doing so, people who condemn or insult you for your beliefs will bring shame upon themselves for how they handled you and your arguments.

What does it look like to share the gospel with gentleness, respect, and a clear conscience?

QUESTION #4



1 Peter 4:1-2

Much of my travel involves flying. Recently, I've noticed how easily people get put out by inconveniences: long lines, crowded flights, and so on. Unfortunately, Christians can also feel put out by inconveniences in their church and community. These believers make a spectacle of themselves through grumbling.

In contrast, Peter informs us to “equip” ourselves to suffer as Christ suffered. We should be mentally and spiritually prepared for the kind of suffering that goes far beyond the minor inconveniences of life.

What can you do to prepare yourself for suffering?

1. Become a follower of the One who suffered in the flesh for our sins.
2. Adjust your attitude to match the One who suffered in the flesh. We should expect to suffer, not act put out by every inconvenience.
3. Instead of focusing on your desires rooted in the physical pleasures of this life, focus on living in the freedom you've been given from sin.

As Christians, let's be realistic about our call to suffer. We should expect it. And when suffering happens, whether it is an inconvenience or a time of great trial, the world around us should notice something unusual in our response. **God can use everything that happens in our lives—successes and failures alike—to point others to the salvation and hope found in Jesus alone.**

How do we equip ourselves now to suffer well, as Jesus did?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

What steps can you take to live well even in suffering?

- ▶ **Own your testimony.** Make an apology for your relationship with Jesus Christ. Be ready to share what you believe and why you believe it.
- ▶ **Study up.** Read a book on Christian apologetics in order to become more familiar with the arguments in support of Christian doctrine and the Christian faith.
- ▶ **Make a public statement.** Don't believe the falsehood that faith is a private matter. Take a step this week to publicly declare your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.



You've chosen to run the race as a follower of Jesus Christ, which means you've also chosen to experience difficult circumstances. Stay strong. Keep running. And remember to use those difficult circumstances as a way to point to Christ until your race is over.

Love Laid Down



It all happened so fast. At the beginning of 2010, Chad Arnold was a healthy 38-year-old with a wife and two kids. Then the liver condition he'd been living with relatively symptom-free since his early 20s suddenly became more aggressive. He went from swimming laps during his lunch hour several days a week to being told that he needed a liver transplant in order to survive. Mere months later his brother, Ryan, 34, donated 60 percent of his liver to Chad in a fairly routine surgery. Then, four days after surgery, Ryan died from complications, leaving behind a wife and three young children.



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My group's prayer requests

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My thoughts