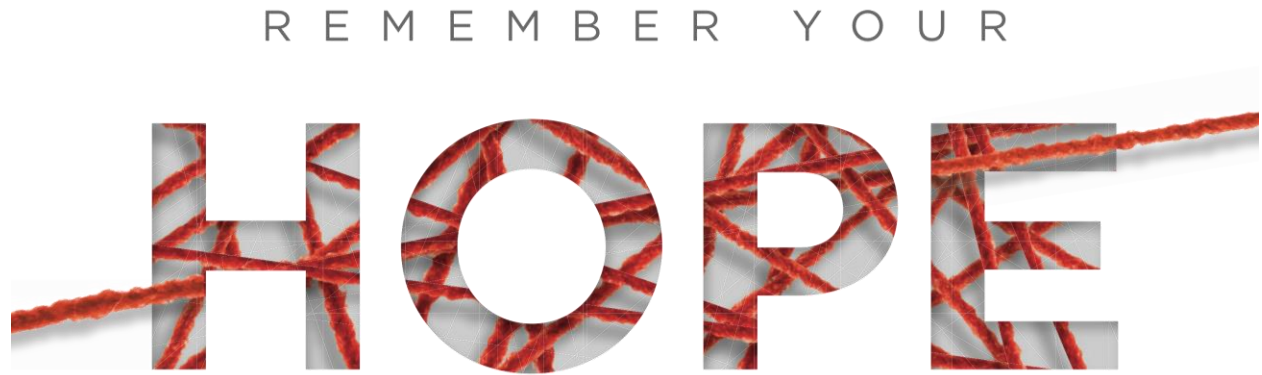


Lesson 8: 1 Peter 4:12–19

Hook



Main Point: If we suffer with Christ now, we will rejoice when He is glorified.

Option 1

Show the video “Joni Eareckson Tada Shares Her Story” (7:39 minutes):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VVXJ8GyLgt0>

Q: What about Joni’s story do you find to be most impactful?

Q: In the video, Joni quotes Jeremiah 29:11 and provides the surrounding biblical context. How does knowing the passage and understanding its context help us deal with the pain and suffering we may experience in life?

Option 2

In an article titled [“Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of My Diving Accident”](#) Joni Eareckson Tada shares a quote that she says has set the course for her life...

“God permits what He hates, to accomplish what He loves.”

Q: What biblical story(ies) or event(s) speak to the truthfulness of this quote?

Q: Looking back at your life, can anyone share a time where they have seen God at work through pain and suffering?

Book

Main Point: If we suffer with Christ now, we will rejoice when He is glorified.

Text Summary: Peter reiterates his overall theme – we should rejoice in our sufferings because if we are persecuted for Christ’s sake, then we are blessed. He points again to the future judgment day as their reason to hope. In that day, those who have been faithful to Christ will be vindicated and the ungodly will be punished.

1 Peter 4:12 [READ]

Talking Point 1: Our sufferings can be times of testing.

Q: In what ways can times of suffering test our faith? How can they refine us?

Peter returns to his main theme of suffering and persecution for Christ’s sake. Remember, his readers were being persecuted, and that persecution would only grow worse. Everything Peter has written so far has been supporting and building his case for this point – that times of suffering are actually times of great blessing if we have the right perspective. Peter starts by calling them “beloved” (v. 12), a pastoral term of endearment often used by Paul and John when they wrote to their churches they dearly loved. Using this term at this point in the letter reminds those people who are suffering that they are beloved by both God and Peter. This expresses all that he is about to say in God’s great love for them.

After Peter has talked a great deal about suffering and persecution, he tells them not to be surprised when they go through “fiery trials” (v. 12). Peter doesn’t sugarcoat what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. You *will* go through fiery trials. Not everything is going to be roses and unicorns just because you accepted Jesus. In fact, life may be much, much harder because you accepted Jesus. Jesus said the world would hate us because it hates Him (John 15:18–25). He said the cost of discipleship is high (Luke 14:25–33). The first believers all suffered persecution for their faith (Acts 8:1; Galatians 3:4, et. al.). Paul even wrote that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). This may be hard for us to relate to because we live in a country with religious freedom, but as we learned in lesson 4, there are many places around the world even today where this is very much a reality for believers. In some places, becoming a follower of Jesus could mean being rejected by your family, losing your job, being beaten or thrown into prison and even death. Though we may experience some teasing or social rejection by certain people or even experience struggles in the marketplace, we have nowhere near this threat of persecution in our daily lives. However, we can still take Peter’s message to these persecuted believers to heart when it comes to general sufferings as well as the difficulties of walking the Christian life in a hostile world.

First, Peter tells them not to be surprised when they go through fiery ordeals – *expect* it. Having realistic expectations is the first step to being able to handle suffering well. If we think that being a Christian means that everything will suddenly be perfect and easy in our lives, then we

may very easily lose our faith the first time something really hard happens in our Christian walk. But if we expect to encounter difficulty and suffering, we will be ready to face it head on. Perspective and attitude really do make a huge difference in how we handle difficult times. If we believe that “God wants to bless you” means we will only experience health and wealth in life, when we have hard things happen, we will think that God must not be real. Or that He must be a liar. But when we understand that the difficult things are *part of the blessing*, it will revolutionize the way we handle it.

This term “fiery trials” only appears here and in the Greek translation of Proverbs 27:21 and 17:3, referring to how the Lord “tests” our hearts by refining them like silver or gold. As we learned in Lesson 1, God uses our suffering to refine us, to make us more and more like Jesus. Each time we are refined, we become purer, and God, the refiner, can see His image more clearly in us.ⁱ As Paul wrote, suffering produces character – character that has been forged through difficulty (Romans 5:3–4). It is just like weightlifting. The *only* way to develop strong muscles is to break them down. Lifting weights tears your muscles down and then, during periods of rest, your muscles build themselves back up even stronger. So the term “no pain, no gain” is actually scientifically accurate.ⁱⁱ The same is true for our sufferings in life. The *only* way we can develop proven character is through suffering. If life were easy, we would never grow. This is the blessing of suffering.

Q: How has God used suffering in your life to make you stronger?

Q: What specific things can we do to learn and grow from our suffering rather than let it break us down or push us away from God?

Q: What does it mean that suffering is a “test”?

The Greek word for “test” refers to the testing of our fidelity, integrity, and virtue. In other words, it is a test to see whether we will remain faithful to God’s law or to choose evil. In this way, suffering is a test for believers to determine if we will choose evil and therefore turn our backs on God.ⁱⁱⁱ An example of this concept is found in the life of Job. Specifically, Job was tested to see whether he will still fear God in intense suffering or whether taking everything he has away from him will cause him to “curse God to His face” (Job 1:1–11). Job passes the test, even though his friends tempt him to turn his back on God. Even though his own wife says to him, “Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die.” (Job 2:9). Job looks straight into the face of his inexplicable suffering and says, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). When we suffer, will we trust God and stay faithful to Him through it (4:19)? Will we fix our eyes on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1–3) and the hope of eternal life with Him (1:3–4)? Or will we blame Him and refuse to walk in faith?

Q: Why is it hard to stay faithful to God and trust in Him when we are suffering?

Q: What real-life examples of faith through suffering have you seen in your life?

1 Peter 4:13–16 [READ]

Talking Point 2: If we are persecuted for Christ's sake, we are blessed.

Q: How can we actually *rejoice* when we are suffering? What kind of attitude/perspective change would that take?

Q: Why is being persecuted for Christ a blessing? Describe it in your own words.

Peter reiterates what he said at the beginning of his letter – if you are persecuted for the sake of Christ, that it is actually a blessing. He repeats it often because it's not a natural thought or feeling. No one thinks, "Wow, thank you so much for this suffering, God, this is great!" But when we think with a godly perspective, when we put on the mind of Christ, as Peter has been talking about, then we get it. That is why he states it again here. It's kind of like one of those persuasive essays you wrote in high school or college. You state your thesis at the beginning of the paper, then you spend time proving your point, then you say it again at the end, in the conclusion. Peter is repeating the same point he has made before and that Paul has made in his letters – sharing in Christ's sufferings means sharing in His glory (Philippians 3:10–11; Romans 8:17). If they put their hope in the eternal inheritance of God, they can actually see their sufferings as a something to rejoice in. The book of Acts says that the disciples "rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name [of Jesus]" (Acts 5:41). They rejoiced that God considered them worthy to suffer for His name! What a shift in perspective from what many of us would naturally think or feel about suffering.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." The prophets suffered greatly in their time. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. Micah was thrown in prison. Jeremiah was hated and ignored and even reviled. He was beaten and put in the stocks and then later thrown into an empty cistern and left to die, sinking deep into the mire. They were persecuted by their own people for speaking a truth from the Lord that the people didn't want to hear. Hebrews says that these prophets were "tortured ... endured mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the word. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated" (Hebrews 11:32–40). And yet, they stayed faithful to God because they were looking forward to their reward in the heavenly kingdom (Hebrews 11:13–16). They were persecuted, but the Spirit of God was upon them, just as Peter tells his readers (4:14), but they rejoiced in their sufferings because they were suffering for the work of the Lord. They were suffering to spread His Word. Just like Peter and Paul, the mission was more important than their own safety, than their own lives (Acts 20:24).

Peter makes sure to clarify here for his readers, that this blessing only comes if you are suffering *for doing good*. If you suffer for doing evil, that's a totally different story (4:15). But if

you are suffering for the sake of the Gospel, you should count yourself blessed, just as the disciples did. Joni Eareckson Tada wrote that when she was first paralyzed, she wanted to be healed more than anything. She even thought God should do it, believing a miracle like that would bring glory to His name. But then she read in 1 Peter about how suffering unites us to Christ and she realized that in her case, God wanted to use her paralysis as part of His strategy to further the Gospel. So now, she thanks God for her wheelchair. She thanks God for her suffering. And she has seen God use it to build His kingdom and His glory so much more than her healing ever would have done. God changed her perspective about her suffering and He changed her heart in it.^{iv} Just like Paul, with his thorn in the flesh. He prayed for it to be taken away, intensely, three times. But when God said no, he rejoiced in His suffering because God told him that God's power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). For Christ's sake, we can delight in weaknesses, hardships, persecutions and suffering. Why? Because they make us more like Jesus, and God can use them to further the Gospel to the world.^v

Q: Why does suffering like Christ make us more like Him? How is the power of God made perfect in weakness?

Q: How can changing our perspective on our suffering enable God to use it to bless us?

Q: How can understanding our suffering as blessing change the way we pray about it?

1 Peter 4:17–19

Talking Point 3: Entrust your salvation to the Lord, just focus on doing good.

Q: What will happen on the day of judgment? What does this tell us about trusting in God for our eternal security and not worrying about that day?

Q: Why does Peter keep focusing on this phrase, “doing good”? What does he mean by it?

Peter now moves to talking openly about the Day of Judgment to assure his readers that they can trust in their eternal security and focus on doing good. Peter contrasts what will happen to the “righteous” and the “wicked” on the Day of Judgment. There is no one “righteous” on his own merit (Psalm 14; Romans 3:10), for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Those who are declared “righteous” on Judgment Day are only “righteous” because they have *taken on* the righteousness of Christ. Paul writes in Romans that Jesus' righteousness has been “credited to our account” through faith (Romans 4:3, 23–25). The fancy theological term for that is “imputation” – God “imputes” His righteousness to us through faith in Jesus. Our faith unites us with Jesus and His righteousness, so that we are declared righteous on Judgment Day (justification) and we are made more and more righteous – more like Jesus – throughout our life (sanctification). So those who believe in Jesus are “the righteous” – not based on our own righteous works, but based on faith in Jesus.^{vi}

This is what Peter is referring to when he writes that the righteous are “scarcely saved.” This is reference to Proverbs 11:31, which reads slightly differently – “If the righteous is repaid on

earth, how much more the wicked and the sinner!” Remember, our Old Testament is translated into English from the original Hebrew while the NT writers used the Greek translation (the Septuagint), so the quotes of the OT in the NT will be a little different. In English this kind of sounds as if we aren’t really that righteous, but we all have just enough righteousness that we barely squeak by. That’s not what Peter means. In the original Greek, a more literal translation is “The righteous is saved with difficulty.”^{vii} This refers to Christ’s death on the Cross and the enormous suffering He endured to save us.^{viii}

Peter writes that judgment begins at the household of God. Here, this means the Church rather than the nation of Israel. Israel used to be the household of God, His children. But now, those of us who have faith in Christ have been adopted into His family as sons, with a full inheritance in His kingdom. Judgment will start with us; we will be declared righteous before God, but the ungodly will receive punishment. Peter is again focusing on the suffering of the righteous because of his audience – those who are enduring persecution for their faith. Again, he tells them they can be confident in their final inheritance in the kingdom. They have eternal security in their salvation (John 10:28–29; Ephesians 4:30), so while on earth, they can “entrust their souls to a faithful Creator” and focus on doing good. As we learned in lesson 1, our whole perspective and worldview is changed when we become a Christian. We live with an eternal perspective instead of a worldly, temporal one. Because we have eternal security, our only focus needs to be doing good while here on earth. Both doing good for others – good works which God has prepared us to do (Ephesians 2:10) and doing good for the kingdom of God – sharing the good news of Jesus with the world (Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8; Romans 10:14–17).

Q: Do you feel secure in your eternal salvation? Why or why not?

Q: What areas of your life do you need to adjust to have an eternal perspective?

Q: What things in your life do you need to adjust in order to focus *your whole life* on doing good for others and for the kingdom of God?

Q: Why is it hard to focus on doing good for others, for the world, and for God’s kingdom when you are suffering? If you could shift your focus to doing good, how would it change your attitude toward your suffering?

Took

Main Point: If we suffer with Christ now, we will rejoice when He is glorified.

TOOK

As mentioned in the lesson, after reading 1 Peter, Joni Eareckson Tada came to the realization that even though God did not heal her physically, He would use her suffering to further the Gospel. She thanks God for her wheelchair and her suffering because God has used it for His ultimate good. It was through this life-changing event that God changed her perspective on pain and suffering. In light of Joni's example, THINK, PRAY and ACT in the following ways ...

CHALLENGES

THINK: *How you can change your perspective in times of suffering?* In what ways do you need to look for the good God is doing in your times of suffering? How can God use your suffering for your own spiritual growth, to help other people, and to build the kingdom? How can understanding the way God uses your suffering change the way you pray about your suffering?

PRAY: *Pray for God to use your time of suffering for good.* Pray for God to use your suffering to change your heart and to help other people. Pray for God to strengthen you and refine you through times of struggle. Pray for your own spiritual growth and understanding and wisdom. Pray for the strength to focus on doing good for others while you are suffering.

ACT: *Do good.* Choose one way you can do good for someone else or for the kingdom of God this week. How can you show the love of Christ to one person who needs it this week? It can be a small act of kindness or a large, self-sacrificial act of generosity. Just don't let it be a "random" act of kindness, let it be intentional and prayerful.

ⁱ Henry Barnard, *Barnard's American Journal of Education, Vol. 9* (London, UK: F.C. Brownell, 1860), 475–7.

ⁱⁱ Jeff Behar, "Rest and Overtraining: What Does This Mean to Bodybuilders?" *Body Building*, Nov 14, 2018 - <http://www.bodybuilding.com/fun/behar2.htm>

ⁱⁱⁱ Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter, NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 164

^{iv} Joni Eareckson Tada, "Reflections on the 50th Anniversary of My Diving Accident" *The Gospel Coalition*, July 20, 2017.

^v John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 241.

^{vi} Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1994), 574.

^{vii} *Neste Aland Novum Testamentum Graece* (German Bible Society, 2012).

^{viii} John MacArthur, *1 Peter, MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 258