

The Books of 1 and 2 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 8: Sharing in Christ's Sufferings

1 Peter 4:12–19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 4:12–19 is the letter's most concentrated theology of Christian suffering, and the doctrinal stakes are pastoral as much as intellectual. Be ready to teach that suffering for Christ is normal rather than strange, that it is a genuine sharing in the sufferings of Christ, that it is to be distinguished sharply from suffering we bring on ourselves, and that God's judgment begins with the purifying of His own household before it falls on those who do not obey the gospel. Peter's phrase "the righteous is scarcely saved" underscores that salvation is preserved through fire and faithfulness, not through ease, which fits our understanding that the saved must endure to the end. The mention of those "who do not obey the gospel" reinforces that the gospel is something to be obeyed, not merely admired or mentally assented to.

Pastorally, this is one of the most important passages in the letter for the wounded. Nearly everyone in the class is carrying some fire, persecution, illness, loss, betrayal, anxiety, and the human heart instinctively reads suffering as abandonment. Peter reframes it as fellowship with Christ, as blessing, as the Spirit of glory resting upon us, and finally as an occasion to entrust the soul to a faithful Creator while doing good. The aim is to move students from surprise and self-pity to a settled, even joyful, trust that keeps doing good in the flames. Be careful and tender; do not minimize anyone's pain or imply all suffering is persecution. Hold together the comfort of shared suffering and the honesty that some suffering is hard, mysterious, and long.

So aim to leave students unsurprised by trials, unashamed of Christ, able to distinguish holy suffering from self-inflicted suffering, and above all able to do the one thing Peter commands at the end: to entrust their souls to God and keep doing good. The disciple we are forming has stopped asking only 'why me?' and has begun asking 'how, in this fire, can I trust my faithful Creator and keep doing good?'

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter says, "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you" (v. 12). What does this teach about how a Christian should expect and interpret suffering, and why is it important not to see trials as "strange"?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter confronts the universal assumption that suffering is abnormal: "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial... as though something strange were happening to you." The image of fire recalls the

refining of chapter 1; trials are a furnace, and a furnace is not a malfunction but a process with a purpose, “to test you.”

Explain why the expectation matters. Surprise compounds suffering. When we believe the Christian life should be smooth, every hardship feels like a betrayal and shakes our faith. When we expect trials as a normal part of following a crucified Lord, the same hardship, though still painful, does not unmoor us. Jesus told us plainly that in the world we would have tribulation (John 16:33).

Apply it gently. This is not a call to be grim or to invite suffering, but to be braced for it, so that when fire comes we are not toppled by shock. The believer who expects the furnace can walk into it steadied, knowing the God who allowed it has a refining purpose in it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering as normal for the Christian, not strange (John 16:33; Acts 14:22)
- Trials as a refining furnace with a testing purpose (1 Peter 1:6–7)
- Surprise as a multiplier of suffering
- Expectation as a steadying grace in the fire

Discussion Prompts

- Why do we so often assume suffering means something has gone wrong?
- How does expecting trials change the way you face them?
- What did Jesus promise about tribulation, and how does that help?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about your own reaction to hardship. When trials come, do you tend to feel that God has abandoned you or made a mistake? How would expecting trials as part of following Christ change the way you face the next one?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites honesty about the heart’s reflex in pain. Many sincere believers, in the moment of trial, secretly conclude that God has abandoned them or made a mistake. Naming that reflex is not faithlessness; it is the first step toward letting Peter’s truth correct it.

Help students see how a wrong expectation breeds a wrong interpretation. If we assumed the deal was comfort in exchange for faith, then every hardship reads as God breaking His word. Peter never made that deal. He promised fellowship with Christ, which includes fellowship in His sufferings, and glory on the other side.

Move toward a reframed response. Ask each student to recall their typical reaction to hardship and to consider how expecting trials, as Peter teaches, would change their next response, from 'God has failed me' to 'God is with me in this, refining me.' The facts of the trial may not change, but its meaning does.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart's reflex to read suffering as abandonment
- Wrong expectations breeding wrong interpretations of God
- The true promise: fellowship with Christ, including His sufferings, then glory
- Reframing the meaning of suffering even when the facts remain

Discussion Prompts

- When trials come, do you tend to feel God has abandoned you?
- What 'deal' have you secretly assumed God made with you?
- How would Peter's perspective change your next response to hardship?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter says to "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (v. 13). How can a Christian genuinely rejoice in suffering, and what does it mean that our suffering for Christ is actually a sharing in His sufferings?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter calls for joy, but be precise about what kind. He does not say rejoice in the pain itself, as if suffering were good; he says "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings." The joy is relational and forward-looking: joy at being drawn into fellowship with Christ, and joy in anticipation of the glory to be revealed.

Explain 'sharing Christ's sufferings.' When we suffer for belonging to Jesus, we are not suffering alone or randomly; we are participating in the very pattern of His life, walking the road He walked. There is a strange honor and intimacy in this. The marks of suffering for Christ are a fellowship with Him that comfort can never give (Philippians 3:10).

Show how the future fuels the present joy. Peter ties present rejoicing to future gladness "when his glory is revealed." The Christian rejoices in suffering the way a woman in labor can endure for the joy set before her, because the pain is purposeful and the outcome is glory. Help students locate their joy not in the flames but in the One they share them with and the glory they lead to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Rejoicing in shared fellowship with Christ, not in pain itself
- Suffering for Christ as participation in His own sufferings (Philippians 3:10)
- Future glory as the fuel for present joy (Romans 8:18)
- The honor and intimacy of fellowship in suffering

Discussion Prompts

- How can a Christian genuinely rejoice in suffering without pretending it does not hurt?
- What does it mean that your suffering is a 'sharing' in Christ's?
- How does the coming glory change how you carry present pain?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter says, "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed." Where have you experienced even small insults or rejection for following Jesus, and how does Peter's perspective reframe those moments?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question scales Peter's point down to the everyday. Few of us face prison for Christ, but most face small insults, an eye-roll, an exclusion, a reputation for being 'too religious,' a relationship cooled because we would not compromise. Peter says even these carry blessing when borne for the name of Christ.

Help students name their small fires honestly. The minor rejections often sting more than we admit, and we are tempted to avoid them by softening our witness or blending in. Peter reframes them: to be insulted for the name of Christ is to have 'the Spirit of glory and of God' resting upon us. The very moment of rejection is a moment of blessing.

Apply the reframing. Ask students to think of a recent small insult or rejection for their faith and to receive it through Peter's lens, not as a humiliation to be avoided but as a quiet badge of belonging to Jesus. This reframing turns shame into something almost like honor.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Even small rejections for Christ as occasions of blessing (Matthew 5:11)
- The Spirit of glory resting on those insulted for the name
- The temptation to avoid small fires by softening our witness
- Reframing rejection as a badge of belonging to Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you felt even small insults or rejection for following Jesus?
- How does Peter's perspective reframe those moments?

- Where are you tempted to soften your witness to avoid them?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter draws a sharp line: suffer for the name of Christ, but “let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler” (vv. 15–16). Why is it so important to distinguish suffering for righteousness from suffering we bring on ourselves, and how can we tell the difference honestly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter draws a firm boundary: “Let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler.” Not all suffering is holy. Some hardship is the just consequence of our own sin or folly, and that kind calls for repentance, not a martyr’s halo. Peter even names the ‘meddler,’ the busybody, warning that some Christian ‘suffering’ is really the fallout of our own intrusive, contentious behavior.

Teach students to discern honestly. It is easy to baptize self-inflicted trouble as persecution. When we suffer relational fallout, ask: am I suffering because I belong to Christ and would not deny Him, or because I was harsh, dishonest, lazy, or meddlesome? The answer determines whether the right response is rejoicing or repentance.

Guard the dignity of true suffering for Christ. The point of the boundary is not to make us suspicious of all suffering but to keep the honor of suffering for the name from being cheapened by self-inflicted wounds. Suffering ‘as a Christian,’ purely because of our faithfulness to Jesus, is the suffering Peter celebrates.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sharp distinction between holy suffering and self-inflicted suffering
- Self-inflicted suffering calling for repentance, not rejoicing
- The warning against the meddler and busybody (1 Timothy 5:13)
- Honest self-examination about the true cause of our hardship

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it so important to distinguish suffering for Christ from suffering we cause?
- How can you honestly tell the difference in your own life?
- Have you ever mistaken self-inflicted trouble for persecution?

Question 6

Student Question:

Peter says that if you suffer “as a Christian,” you should “not be ashamed, but glorify God in that name” (v. 16). Is there an area where you feel quietly ashamed of being identified with Christ? What would it look like to glorify God in that very situation instead?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question addresses a subtle modern temptation: quiet shame at being identified with Christ. Peter says if you suffer ‘as a Christian,’ do ‘not be ashamed, but glorify God in that name.’ The name once used as an insult becomes a name to glory in.

Help students locate their hidden shame. It may surface at work, among skeptical friends, on social media, in a family that mocks faith. We rarely deny Christ outright; we more often go quiet, change the subject, let people assume we are like everyone else. That silence is a soft form of shame.

Move toward glorifying God in that very place. Ask each student to name the setting where they feel most tempted to hide their identity with Christ, and one way they could instead honor Him there, not obnoxiously, but openly, refusing to be ashamed of the name that saves them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The call to be unashamed of identification with Christ (Romans 1:16; Mark 8:38)
- Silence and blending in as soft forms of shame
- Glorifying God in the very name once used as insult
- Open, humble confession of Christ in hostile settings

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you feel quietly ashamed of being identified with Christ?
- How does going silent function as a soft form of shame?
- How could you glorify God in that very setting this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter says, “It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God,” and asks what the outcome will be for those who do not obey the gospel (vv. 17–18). What does it mean that judgment “begins” with God’s own people, and what does this teach about God’s purifying work in the church and the seriousness of obeying the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson. Peter says, “It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.” God’s purifying judgment starts with His own people. The fiery trials the

church endures are part of God's refining work, cleansing and strengthening His household before the final reckoning falls on the world.

Draw out the sobering logic of verse 17: "If it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel?" If God refines His beloved children through fire, the prospect for those who reject the gospel is far more serious. Note the phrase 'obey the gospel.' The gospel is not merely a message to be believed in the abstract; it is a call to be obeyed, by faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, and a life of faithfulness. Those who refuse that obedience face a fearful judgment.

Hold together purification and assurance. For the faithful, this judgment that begins with us is not condemnation but refining; the same fire that would destroy the disobedient purifies the obedient. God disciplines those He loves (Hebrews 12:5–11). The trials are evidence not that God has rejected us but that He is treating us as sons, preparing a purified people for Himself.

Apply it to the church's self-understanding. A congregation under pressure should not conclude that God is against it but that God is refining it, beginning His purifying work with His own household. This reframes hardship in the church as part of God's loving, purposeful preparation of a people fit for glory.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's purifying judgment beginning with His own household (Ezekiel 9:6; Hebrews 12:5–11)
- Trials as God's refining discipline of those He loves, not condemnation
- The gospel as something to be obeyed, not merely believed in the abstract (2 Thessalonians 1:8)
- The fearful outcome for those who reject the gospel
- Hardship in the church reframed as God preparing a purified people

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that judgment 'begins' with God's own people?
- How is God's refining of the church an act of love rather than rejection?
- Why does Peter speak of 'obeying' the gospel rather than just believing it?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter says "the righteous is scarcely saved" (v. 18), and elsewhere that we are saved through fire rather than around it. Where are you tempted to expect the Christian life to be easy or comfortable, and how does the reality of being "saved through fire" reshape your expectations?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter quotes Proverbs: “If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly?” The word ‘scarcely’ does not mean salvation is uncertain or that God is reluctant; it means the righteous are saved through difficulty, through fire, not around it. Salvation is sure in Christ, but the road home runs through hardship.

Confront the comfort assumption directly. Many believers, shaped by a culture of ease, half-expect the Christian life to be smooth, and are disillusioned when it is not. Peter, and the whole New Testament, teaches the opposite: through many tribulations we enter the kingdom (Acts 14:22). The narrow road is not the easy road.

Help students reset their expectations. Ask where they have quietly expected the Christian life to be comfortable, and how the reality of being ‘saved through fire’ reshapes that expectation, not into grim resignation, but into a sober, hopeful realism that is not shattered when the road gets hard.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The righteous saved through fire, not around it (Acts 14:22)
- ‘Scarcely saved’ as saved through difficulty, not uncertain salvation
- The narrow road as the hard road (Matthew 7:13–14)
- Resetting expectations from comfort to sober, hopeful realism

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you expect the Christian life to be easy or comfortable?
- How does being ‘saved through fire’ reshape that expectation?
- How can you hold realism about hardship together with hope?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter concludes, “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (v. 19). What does it mean to “entrust” your soul to God, why does Peter call Him a “faithful Creator,” and how does continuing to “do good” fit together with entrusting ourselves to God in the middle of suffering?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal and pastoral climax of the lesson, and one of the most beautiful commands in Scripture: “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” Three things deserve careful attention. First, the verb ‘entrust.’ It is a banking term, to deposit something valuable with someone trustworthy for safekeeping. In suffering we hand our very souls over to God’s keeping, releasing our white-knuckled grip and placing the most precious thing we have in the safest hands there are.

Second, the title 'faithful Creator.' Peter could have called God many things; he chooses 'faithful Creator' deliberately. As Creator, God made us and knows us; nothing about our suffering is unknown to Him, and He has the power to sustain what He made. As faithful, He keeps His promises; He will not lose what is entrusted to Him. To suffer well, we need to know both that God is able (Creator) and that God is dependable (faithful). The same hands that made us will hold us.

Third, the phrase 'while doing good.' Entrusting our souls to God is not passive resignation that stops living; it is an active trust that keeps doing good in the middle of the fire. Suffering tempts us to turn inward, to grow bitter, to stop serving and loving. Peter says the opposite: keep doing good. The proof that we have truly entrusted our souls to God is that we are freed from self-protection to go on loving and serving even while we hurt.

Bring it home tenderly, because someone in the room is in the fire right now. Peter does not promise the flames will end soon or explain why they came. He gives something better than an explanation: a faithful Creator to whom the soul can be entrusted, and a path of doing good to walk while we wait. Invite each student to name their hardest burden and, in that very place, to entrust their soul to God and take one step of doing good.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Entrusting the soul to God as a deliberate act of committing what is precious to safe keeping (Luke 23:46; 2 Timothy 1:12)
- God as both 'Creator' (able) and 'faithful' (dependable), the ground of trust in suffering
- Active trust that keeps 'doing good,' not passive resignation
- Suffering according to God's will, received from His hand rather than fate's
- The freedom from self-protection that allows the sufferer to keep loving and serving

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to 'entrust' your soul to God in the middle of suffering?
- Why does Peter call God a 'faithful Creator' here, and how does each word help?
- How does continuing to 'do good' prove that we have truly entrusted our souls to Him?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Peter moves from not being surprised by trials, to rejoicing in shared suffering, to suffering rightly, to judgment beginning with God's people, to entrusting our souls to a faithful Creator. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you through these verses. What single truth from 1 Peter 4:12–19 do you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather the threads. Peter has moved from not being surprised by trials, through rejoicing in shared suffering and suffering rightly, to judgment beginning with God's household, and finally to entrusting the soul to a faithful Creator while doing good. The whole passage trains us how to burn without being consumed.

Press for one concrete point of formation, with tenderness toward whoever is suffering most. Ask each student to name the single truth they most need and one place it will land this week, especially in the hardest thing they are carrying.

Close on the final command. Whatever fire you are in, entrust your soul to your faithful Creator and keep doing good. Send students out steadied by the One whose hands both made them and will hold them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The integration of suffering, joy, holiness, and trust
- Christian suffering as fellowship with Christ leading to glory
- Entrusting the soul to God as the heart of faithful endurance

Discussion Prompts

- Which single truth from this passage do you most need this week?
- Where do you sense Jesus forming you through 1 Peter 4:12-19?
- What is the hardest thing you will entrust to your faithful Creator this week?