

1 Peter, Teacher's Guide

Week 5: Following Christ in Suffering

1Peter 2:18–25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

First Peter 2:18–25 moves from honorable living in society to the hardest case of all: how a Christian is to bear unjust suffering. What is doctrinally at stake here rises to the very heart of the gospel. Peter sets the example of Christ's patient suffering before us, and then, in verses 24–25, he opens up the meaning of the cross itself: substitutionary atonement ("he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree"), the purpose of the cross to free us from sin for righteousness, healing by His wounds, and the return of straying sheep to the Shepherd of their souls. The teacher must handle two things with care: the call to follow Christ's example in suffering, and the deeper truth that Christ's suffering was not merely exemplary but redemptive, accomplishing what we never could. The passage leans heavily on Isaiah 53, and the teacher should be ready to show how Jesus fulfills the suffering Servant.

This passage is also intensely formational, because it touches a nerve everyone feels: the experience of being treated unfairly. Peter calls believers to a response that contradicts every natural instinct, not reviling in return, not threatening, but entrusting themselves to the God who judges justly. The teacher's task is to help students see that the cross is both the ground of their salvation and the pattern for their conduct, and to press them toward concrete change in how they handle insult, injustice, and the daily temptation to retaliate.

Keep both targets in view. Students should leave with a clearer grasp of what Jesus accomplished on the cross and a deeper worship of the Shepherd who bore their sins, and they should leave with a specific resolve about a relationship or situation where they have been wronged. The disciple we are forming is someone who, having been healed by the wounds of Christ, can absorb injustice without bitterness and entrust every wrong to the just Judge.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter says that to endure unjust suffering for doing good "is a gracious thing in the sight of God," and that "to this you have been called" (vv. 19–21). What does it teach us about God and the Christian life that bearing unjust suffering patiently is something He calls us to and finds gracious?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter addresses household servants directly, but the principle reaches every believer who suffers unjustly. He says that to bear up under unjust treatment, "mindful of God," is "a gracious

thing,” literally, it finds favor, with God. This is a startling claim. Patient endurance of undeserved suffering is not merely tolerated by God; it is beautiful to Him.

Be careful to state what Peter is not saying. He is not calling injustice good, not telling people to enjoy abuse, and not forbidding all lawful means of seeking relief or protection. Elsewhere Scripture upholds justice and protects the vulnerable. Peter is addressing the specific question of how a Christian bears suffering they cannot presently escape, and he is saying that enduring it for the sake of doing good, with one’s eyes on God, pleases Him.

Explain why this is so. God Himself, in Christ, bore unjust suffering, so a believer who endures the same is walking in step with the very character of God revealed at the cross. To suffer for doing good and to entrust the outcome to God is to imitate Christ, and what reflects Christ is always pleasing to the Father. This is why Peter immediately turns to Jesus as the pattern.

Note the words “to this you have been called.” Suffering for doing good is not an unfortunate accident of the Christian life but part of the calling itself. This reframes hardship for students: when they suffer unjustly for following Christ, they have not stepped outside God’s will but into the path their Lord walked. Seeing this helps students grow in a faith that does not collapse the moment life becomes unfair.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Patient endurance of unjust suffering as pleasing to God
- The distinction between blessing injustice and bearing it faithfully
- Suffering for doing good as part of the Christian calling
- Endurance that imitates the character of God revealed at the cross
- Reframing unjust suffering as the path Christ Himself walked

Discussion Prompts

- Why does God find the patient endurance of unjust suffering “gracious”?
- How is Peter’s teaching different from saying injustice does not matter?
- How does it change a hardship to see it as part of your calling rather than an accident?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter distinguishes between suffering for doing wrong and suffering for doing good (v. 20). When you face hardship or criticism, how good are you at telling the difference between deserved consequences and unjust suffering? Where might you be calling something “persecution” when it is really the result of your own fault?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter draws a sharp line: there is no credit in enduring a beating you deserve for doing wrong, but there is grace in enduring suffering you did not deserve. This question asks students to grow in the honesty required to tell the two apart in their own lives.

Help students see how easily we blur this line. When we face consequences for our own foolishness, laziness, sharp tongue, or sin, it is tempting to recast ourselves as victims, to call deserved consequences “persecution” and feel righteous about them. Genuine maturity begins with owning what is actually our fault. Only suffering that is truly undeserved falls under Peter’s commendation.

Move toward self-examination without breeding either false guilt or self-pity. Invite students to consider a recent hardship and ask honestly: is this the fruit of my own conduct, or am I suffering for doing good? The first calls for repentance; the second calls for patient endurance. Learning to distinguish them is a mark of growth in Christ and saves us from a great deal of self-deception.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between deserved consequences and unjust suffering
- The temptation to recast our own fault as persecution
- Owning what is genuinely our responsibility as the start of maturity
- Repentance for deserved suffering, endurance for undeserved suffering

Discussion Prompts

- How well do you tell the difference between deserved consequences and unjust suffering?
- Where might you be calling something persecution when it is really your own fault?
- Why is honesty about our own responsibility a mark of spiritual maturity?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter says that Christ “left you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (v. 21), and describes how Jesus responded to suffering (vv. 22–23). In what sense is the suffering of Christ an example for us, and what are the specific steps Peter calls us to follow?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter says Christ left us “an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” The word translated example pictured a writing pattern that a child traced to learn to form letters. Christ’s way of suffering is the pattern over which we trace our own conduct.

Lay out the specific steps Peter names from Isaiah 53. First, Jesus “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth.” He was genuinely innocent, the only truly undeserved sufferer

in history. Second, “when he was reviled, he did not revile in return.” He absorbed insult without firing back. Third, “when he suffered, he did not threaten.” He did not use intimidation or vengeance. Fourth, He “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” He handed His cause to the Father. These four steps form the pattern for the believer under unjust treatment.

Stress that this is an example we are genuinely called to follow, not an ideal too lofty for ordinary life. In our offices, homes, and churches, we constantly face smaller versions of what Jesus faced: the cutting remark, the unfair blame, the misuse of authority. Peter says, trace your response over His. Do not revile back. Do not threaten. Entrust it to God.

At the same time, prepare students for the next question by noting a crucial limit to the word “example.” Peter is about to say that Christ’s suffering was far more than an example; it was the atoning death by which we are saved. We can imitate His patience, but we can never imitate His sin-bearing. Holding the example and the atonement together keeps us from reducing the cross to mere moral instruction, and it helps students grow in both worship and obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ’s suffering as a pattern to be traced (the writing-copy image)
- The four steps: sinlessness, no reviling in return, no threatening, entrusting to God (Isaiah 53)
- The example applied to everyday experiences of unfair treatment
- The example as real and followable, not an unreachable ideal
- The example held together with the atonement, not reducing the cross to moral instruction

Discussion Prompts

- What are the specific steps of Christ’s example that Peter calls us to follow?
- Where in daily life do you face smaller versions of the injustice Jesus faced?
- Why must we hold Christ’s example together with what only He could accomplish?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter says that when Jesus was reviled, “he did not revile in return” (v. 23). Reviling, returning insult for insult, is one of the easiest sins to excuse. Where are you most tempted to fire back with sharp words, sarcasm, or retaliation? What would following in Jesus’ steps look like there?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question isolates one step of Christ’s example, refusing to revile in return, because it is so common and so easily excused. To revile is to answer insult with insult, to return a verbal blow

for a verbal blow. In a culture of sharp comebacks and online cruelty, this sin often passes for cleverness or even courage.

Help students recognize their own particular form of reviling. For one it is the cutting sarcasm that wins the argument but wounds the person. For another it is the muttered last word, the contemptuous tone, the takedown typed and posted. For another it is the slow, cold retaliation of withdrawal and silence. Reviling wears many costumes, and we rarely call our own version sin.

Move toward concrete imitation of Christ. Following in His steps here might mean a deliberate decision not to answer an insult, a soft answer that turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1), a pause before replying, or a choice to bless rather than curse those who mistreat us (Romans 12:14). Invite students to name the relationship or setting where they are most tempted to fire back, and one step toward responding as Jesus did. This is real growth in Christlikeness.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reviling (returning insult for insult) as a commonly excused sin
- The many disguises of retaliation: sarcasm, contempt, cold withdrawal
- The soft answer and blessing instead of cursing (Proverbs 15:1; Romans 12:14)
- Imitating Christ in the concrete moment of being insulted

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you most tempted to fire back with sharp words or retaliation?
- What disguises does reviling wear in your own life?
- What would following in Jesus' steps look like the next time you are insulted?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter says Jesus “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (v. 23). What does it mean to entrust ourselves to God as the just Judge, and how does confidence in God’s perfect justice free us from the need to avenge ourselves?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter says Jesus “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” The verb suggests an ongoing handing over, again and again, throughout His suffering. Jesus did not defend Himself, retaliate, or take matters into His own hands, because He trusted the Father to judge rightly in the end.

Explain the theology underneath this. Because God is the perfectly just Judge who sees everything and will set all things right, the believer does not have to be judge, jury, and avenger.

Scripture is explicit: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (Romans 12:19). When we entrust a wrong to God, we are not saying it does not matter; we are saying it matters so much that we leave it in the hands of the only One competent to handle it perfectly.

Show how this frees us. The need to even the score is exhausting and corrosive; it ties us to the person who wronged us and poisons our own soul. Entrusting the matter to God breaks that chain. We can let go of the grievance, not because justice is unimportant, but because we trust a Judge who will not let injustice stand forever. This is the secret of Christ’s composure under fire, and it can become ours.

Help students grow in faith by connecting this to real trust in God’s character. We retaliate when we secretly doubt that God will act. We can release a wrong when we truly believe He is just and faithful. Learning to entrust ourselves to the just Judge is therefore an exercise of deep faith, and a path to genuine freedom.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as the perfectly just Judge who will set all things right
- Vengeance belonging to God, not to us (Romans 12:19)
- Entrusting wrongs to God as taking them seriously, not dismissing them
- Freedom from the corrosive need to even the score
- Releasing wrongs as an exercise of real trust in God’s character

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to entrust yourself to God as the just Judge?
- How does confidence in God’s justice free you from the need to retaliate?
- Why is letting go of a wrong an act of faith rather than weakness?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus did not threaten or retaliate but handed His cause over to the Father (v. 23). When you are wronged, do you tend to nurse the grievance, plot how to even the score, or replay it endlessly? What would it actually look like, this week, to entrust a specific wrong to the God who judges justly?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses the truth of verse 23 into the student’s own grievances. It is one thing to admire Christ entrusting Himself to the Father; it is another to do it with the specific wrong that keeps us awake at night.

Help students name their characteristic response to being wronged. Some nurse the grievance, keeping it warm and revisiting it. Some plot, rehearsing how they will even the score or win the next encounter. Some replay the offense endlessly, letting it steal their peace. Each of these is the opposite of entrusting the matter to God; each keeps the wrong in our own clenched hands.

Move toward a concrete act of entrusting. This might mean a deliberate prayer that hands a specific person and offense over to God, a decision to stop rehearsing the story, a choice to forgive as we have been forgiven, or a step toward reconciliation where that is possible. The aim is one real situation this week in which the student practices what Jesus did, releasing the wrong to the God who judges justly. This is where the passage becomes transformational.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Common sinful responses to being wronged: nursing, plotting, replaying
- Entrusting a specific wrong to God as a deliberate act
- Forgiveness flowing from having been forgiven
- The peace that comes from releasing a grievance to God

Discussion Prompts

- When you are wronged, do you tend to nurse it, plot, or replay it?
- What specific wrong do you most need to entrust to God right now?
- What would entrusting it to the just Judge actually look like this week?

Question 7

Student Question:

At the center of the passage Peter declares, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed” (v. 24). What does this teach about what Jesus actually accomplished on the cross, and why is it essential that His suffering was far more than an example for us to copy?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and it must be handled with both clarity and reverence. Having held up Christ as our example, Peter now declares what makes that example infinitely more than an example: “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.” This is the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, that on the cross Jesus took upon Himself the sins of His people and bore the judgment they deserved.

Unpack the language. “He himself bore our sins” means Jesus carried the guilt and penalty of sins that were not His own. He was sinless (v. 22), so the sins He bore were ours. “In his body on the tree” points to the physical reality of the cross, with “tree” echoing the Old Testament curse on one hanged on a tree (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13). Jesus became a curse for us. This

is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53: “he was wounded for our transgressions; the chastisement that brought us peace was upon him.” The teacher should let this land with full weight: our sins, His body, His tree.

Explain why it is essential that the cross was more than an example. If Jesus merely modeled patient suffering, we would have inspiration but no salvation, a pattern to copy but no remedy for our guilt. A drowning person does not need an example of swimming; they need a rescuer. Peter says Christ did not just show us how to suffer; He suffered in our place, paying a debt we could not pay. The example flows out of the atonement, not the other way around.

Draw out the twofold result Peter names. First, the cross was “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.” The purpose of the atonement is not only pardon but transformation, a real death to sin’s rule and a new life of righteousness. Second, “by his wounds you have been healed.” The deepest healing is the healing of our sin-sick souls, our broken relationship with God restored through the wounds of Christ. Make sure students see that this healing is spiritual and eternal, not a guarantee of bodily ease.

Finally, connect the atonement to how a person receives it, so the gospel is clear. The healing Christ purchased becomes ours as we respond to Him in faith, repentance, confession, and baptism into His death and resurrection (Romans 6:3–4; Acts 2:38), and then walk in the new life His cross makes possible. Helping students rest in what Christ accomplished, and live in light of it, is the formational center of the whole study.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Substitutionary atonement: Christ bearing our sins in our place (Isaiah 53:4–6)
- The sinless Christ bearing sins that were ours, not His
- “The tree” and Christ becoming a curse for us (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13)
- The cross as more than an example: rescue, not mere inspiration
- The twofold purpose: dying to sin, living to righteousness, and healing of the soul
- Receiving the atonement through faith, repentance, confession, and baptism (Romans 6:3–4; Acts 2:38)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Christ “bore our sins in his body on the tree”?
- Why is it essential that the cross was more than an example for us to copy?
- What is the “healing” Peter says we receive by the wounds of Christ?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter says Christ bore our sins “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (v. 24). The cross was not only to forgive us but to change us. Where in your life are you still living to sin rather than to righteousness, treating the cross as a pardon but not as a power for new life?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question takes the second half of verse 24, “that we might die to sin and live to righteousness,” and presses it into the student’s daily life. The cross was not only to cancel our guilt but to break sin’s grip and launch a new life. A gospel that forgives but never transforms is only half the gospel Peter preaches.

Help students examine where they treat the cross as pardon without power. Many believers genuinely trust Christ for forgiveness while quietly tolerating a sin they have made peace with, an old habit, a private indulgence, a pattern of speech or thought they assume will never change. Peter says the cross aimed at exactly these areas: that we might die to sin, not merely be excused for it.

Move toward a concrete death and a concrete new life. Dying to sin is not passive; it involves decisive turning, putting off the old and putting on the new (compare Colossians 3:5–10). Invite students to name one area where they have been living to sin rather than to righteousness, and one step of obedience that treats the cross as power for change, not just pardon for failure. This is where the atonement becomes transformation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as power for transformation, not only pardon for guilt
- Dying to sin and living to righteousness as the purpose of the atonement
- The danger of making peace with a tolerated sin
- Decisive putting off and putting on in the Christian life (Colossians 3:5–10)

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you still living to sin rather than to righteousness?
- What sin have you quietly made peace with, assuming it will never change?
- What would it look like to treat the cross as power for new life this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter ends, “For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (v. 25). What does this image of straying sheep returning to their Shepherd teach about our condition apart from Christ and about who Jesus is to His people now?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter closes with a tender and searching image from Isaiah 53:6: “All we like sheep have gone astray.” He says, “you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” In two short phrases he describes both our condition apart from Christ and the One to whom we have returned.

Draw out the picture of straying sheep. Sheep do not stray with grand rebellion; they wander, head down, one tuft of grass at a time, until they are lost and in danger. It is a humbling and accurate picture of the human condition apart from God. We did not always run from God dramatically; often we simply drifted, following our own appetites until we were lost. This guards against both self-righteousness (we were genuinely straying) and despair (sheep can be found).

Then exalt the Shepherd. Jesus is “the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.” He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11), who seeks the one that wanders, who now watches over and guards the souls of His people. The word translated Overseer speaks of His loving, vigilant care. To return to Him is to come home to the One who made us, bought us, and keeps us.

Help students grow in faith by locating themselves in this verse. Every Christian was once a straying sheep, and the return was the work of the Shepherd who came after us through the cross. This is a verse to rest in. Whatever unjust suffering they bear, whatever wrongs they must entrust to God, they do so under the watchful care of the Shepherd of their souls, who has already proven His love by bearing their sins.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The human condition apart from Christ pictured as straying sheep (Isaiah 53:6)
- Straying as drifting after our own appetites, not only open rebellion
- Jesus as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11)
- Christ as the Overseer who guards and watches over the souls of His people
- The believer’s return to the Shepherd as the Shepherd’s own work of grace

Discussion Prompts

- Why is straying sheep such an accurate picture of our condition apart from Christ?
- What does it mean that Jesus is the Shepherd and Overseer of your soul right now?
- How does resting in the Shepherd’s care help you bear unjust suffering?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across the whole passage. Peter calls us to endure unjust suffering as Christ did, points us to the cross where Jesus bore our sins, and names Him the Shepherd of our souls. Name one

specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from 1 Peter 2:18–25 you most need to carry into this week?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the whole passage. Peter has called believers to endure unjust suffering as a gracious thing before God (vv. 19–20), to follow the example of Christ who did not revile or threaten but entrusted Himself to the Father (vv. 21–23), to rest in the cross where Christ bore their sins and healed them (v. 24), and to live as sheep who have returned to the Shepherd of their souls (v. 25). The question asks each student to name one specific way Christ is forming them through these verses.

Resist generalities. Walk students back through the movement of the passage: the unjust suffering they are bearing, the reviling they are tempted to return, the wrong they need to entrust to God, the area where they are living to sin rather than righteousness, the comfort of the Shepherd's care. Invite each person to name the single point that lands most directly on their life.

Close by returning to the cross. The call to suffer like Christ is only bearable because Christ first suffered for us. Encourage students to carry one truth from this passage into the week, to return to it, and to act on it, fixing their eyes on the Shepherd who bore their sins and now watches over their souls.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as both the ground of salvation and the pattern for suffering
- Following Christ's example flowing out of His atoning work
- Entrusting wrongs to God as an expression of faith
- Self-examination leading to one concrete step

Discussion Prompts

- Which truth from this passage lands most directly on your life right now?
- What one concrete step can you take before we meet again?
- How can this group support and pray for you in that specific step?