

Faith Under Fire, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 6: The Fellowship of His Sufferings

1 Peter 4:12-19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal heart of this lesson is the fellowship of Christ's sufferings: the New Testament teaching that suffering for the name of Christ is not a sign of abandonment but a real participation in the sufferings of Jesus, carrying with it the presence of the Spirit and the promise of glory. Your aim is to dismantle the surprise that makes suffering doubly hard, the unspoken assumption that faithful Christians should be exempt from hostility, and to replace it with Peter's settled expectation that the fiery trial is normal in a world that crucified the Lord. This connects to the framework of Lesson 1: the world hated the Master, and it will not spare the servants (John 15:18-20).

Two distinctions need careful teaching. First, Peter sharply separates suffering for wrongdoing, which brings shame, from suffering "as a Christian," which glorifies God. Help your students own honestly that not all their suffering is righteous suffering; some is the consequence of their own sin or folly, and the gospel calls them both to take responsibility for that and to suffer well only for the right reasons. Second, Peter's command to "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good" holds together divine faithfulness and human responsibility: we commit ourselves to God and we keep actively doing good. This keeps God's care fully consistent with our continued obedience, guarding against any passive fatalism.

Formationally, this lesson aims to reorient how your students experience their trials. Rather than seeking only escape, they are invited to seek the fellowship of Christ within the fire, and rather than withdrawing in bitterness, to keep their hands open in active goodness while entrusting their very souls to a faithful Creator. Aim to send them home unsurprised by hardship, drawn nearer to Christ through it, and steadied by the keeping power of the God who made them and will not fail them.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter tells believers not to be surprised at the "fiery trial," as though something strange were happening (v. 12). Why does he treat suffering as a normal and even expected part of the Christian life rather than an aberration, and how does this confront the assumption that faithfulness should protect us from hardship?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the tenderness of the address, “Beloved,” and then the bracing content. Peter does not want his readers blindsided. He calls the trial “fiery” and says it has come “to test you,” yet insists it is not “something strange.” The strangeness is in our expectations, not in the suffering itself.

Explain the theology underneath. In a fallen world that rejected and crucified Christ, the followers of Christ should expect a share of the same hostility. Jesus said as much (John 15:18-20). To be surprised by suffering is to have absorbed, somewhere, the false promise that faith insulates us from the world’s enmity.

Show how surprise compounds suffering. When we believe hardship is abnormal for a Christian, every trial carries a second blow: not only does it hurt, but it makes us question whether God or our faith has failed. Peter removes that second blow by normalizing the trial in advance.

Apply this as a quiet revolution in expectation. The believer who expects the fiery trial is not made cynical or grim; they are made steady. They can meet hardship without the disorienting shock that says, “this should not be happening,” because they have been told, lovingly, that it will.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering is a normal, expected part of the Christian life, not an aberration (1 Peter 4:12)
- In a world that crucified Christ, His followers should expect a share of hostility (John 15:18-20)
- Surprise compounds suffering by adding doubt about God and our faith to the pain itself
- Expecting the fiery trial produces steadiness, not cynicism

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Peter insist that the fiery trial is not “something strange”?
- How does being surprised by suffering make it harder to bear?
- What false promise might be underneath our surprise when hardship comes?

Question 2

Student Question:

Think about your own expectations. When trouble comes, is your first reaction “something has gone wrong” or “this is part of following Jesus in a fallen world”? How might surrendering the expectation of an easy life actually make your trials easier to bear?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question asks students to examine their reflexive interpretation of trouble. The instinctive thought, “something has gone wrong,” reveals an underlying expectation of ease. Peter would have them think instead, “this is part of following Jesus here.”

Help students see that this is not resignation but realism. Surrendering the expectation of an easy life does not mean expecting the worst; it means no longer being thrown by hardship as if it disproved God's love. The realistic believer suffers without the added vertigo of betrayed expectations.

Trace how the shift eases the trial. Half the weight of suffering is often the meaning we assign it. Reassign the meaning, from "God has abandoned me" to "I am walking the road Jesus walked," and the same hardship becomes more bearable.

Invite a concrete reframing of a present difficulty. Encourage students to consciously name a current trial as part of following Jesus in a fallen world, and to notice how that naming changes their experience of it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our reflexive interpretation of trouble reveals our underlying expectations
- Surrendering the expectation of ease is realism, not pessimism
- Much of suffering's weight is the meaning we assign it
- Reframing a trial as part of following Jesus eases the added vertigo of betrayed expectations

Discussion Prompts

- When trouble comes, is your first thought "something is wrong" or "this is part of following Jesus"?
- How might surrendering the expectation of an easy life make your trials easier to bear?
- What current trial could you consciously reframe as part of walking Jesus' road?

Question 3

Student Question:

Peter says to "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings" (v. 13), using the language of fellowship and partnership. What does it mean that our suffering for Christ joins us to Him rather than separates us from Him, and how does this transform the meaning of the suffering itself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is a doctrinally rich question. Peter says to "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings," and the verb for sharing is one of fellowship, partnership, communion (the same root as *koinonia*). When we suffer for Christ, we are not cast off from Him; we are joined to Him in the defining experience of His earthly life.

Explain the reversal this works. We naturally read suffering as evidence of separation from God, of being forsaken. Peter reads suffering for Christ as evidence of union with God, of being joined to Jesus. The very thing we feared meant abandonment becomes a mark of intimacy.

Connect this to Paul's longing in Philippians 3:10 to know Christ and "the fellowship of his sufferings." There is a knowledge of Jesus available only to those who suffer with Him, a closeness forged in shared affliction that ease cannot produce. The Man of Sorrows is uniquely near to the sorrowing.

This transforms the meaning of the suffering itself. It is no longer merely something to be endured or escaped; it becomes a place of communion with Christ, even a strange occasion for joy. The joy is not in the pain but in the partnership, in discovering that we are not suffering alone but with and like our Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Suffering for Christ is a real participation in Christ's sufferings, using the language of fellowship (1 Peter 4:13)
- Suffering for Christ is a mark of union with Him, not evidence of abandonment
- There is a knowledge of Christ available only in shared suffering (Philippians 3:10)
- The suffering becomes a place of communion with Christ, even an occasion for joy

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that suffering for Christ joins us to Him rather than separates us?
- How does the language of fellowship change the meaning of your suffering?
- What might it mean that the Man of Sorrows is uniquely near to those who sorrow?

Question 4

Student Question:

Where are you currently looking only for rescue from a trial, when Christ may be offering you fellowship within it? What would change this week if you sought His nearness in the suffering rather than only His removal of it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question presses the fellowship theme into practice. Our default in trial is to pray almost exclusively for rescue, for the trouble to end. Peter opens another possibility: to seek Christ's fellowship within the trouble, not only His removal of it.

Help students see that seeking rescue is not wrong; Jesus Himself prayed for the cup to pass. But if rescue is all we seek, we may miss the communion God offers in the meantime. The trial can become a place to know Christ, not merely a problem to be solved.

Invite the both/and. We can ask for deliverance and seek His nearness, holding the request with open hands while pursuing the fellowship that is available now, before any deliverance comes. Often the nearness is the deeper gift.

Ask for a concrete practice this week, perhaps a deliberate turning toward Christ in the middle of a hardship to seek His presence, His comfort, His companionship, rather than only His intervention.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Our default is to seek only rescue from a trial, missing the fellowship offered within it
- Seeking deliverance is not wrong, but it need not be all we seek (Mark 14:36)
- Holding the request for rescue with open hands while pursuing Christ's nearness now
- The nearness of Christ in suffering is often the deeper gift

Discussion Prompts

- Where are you seeking only rescue from a trial when Christ may be offering fellowship within it?
- What is the difference between praying for deliverance and seeking Christ's nearness in the suffering?
- What would seeking His presence in a current trial look like this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Peter says that "if you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you" (v. 14). Why does Peter connect reproach for Christ with blessing and with the presence of the Spirit, and how does this overturn the world's, and often our own, assumptions about what a blessed life looks like?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verse 14 makes a startling claim: "If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you." Reproach for Christ is linked not to divine displeasure but to blessing and to the resting presence of the Spirit.

Explain the echo of Isaiah and of Jesus' beatitude (Matthew 5:11-12). The world reads insult as shame and curse; the gospel reads insult for Christ's sake as honor and blessing. Peter is not glorifying abuse; he is revealing that those who bear reproach for Jesus stand in a long line of the prophets and share the Spirit's special nearness.

The image of the Spirit "resting" on the reproached believer is tender and weighty. It recalls the glory-cloud that rested on the tabernacle. The very ones the world pushes to the margins are the ones on whom God's glory settles. This overturns every worldly measure of a blessed life.

Apply this to our own assumptions. We instinctively equate blessing with approval, comfort, and rising status. Peter equates it, here, with bearing Christ's reproach and carrying the Spirit's

presence. The blessed life is not the applauded life but the faithful one, and God's nearness is often most palpable precisely where the world's esteem is thinnest.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reproach for Christ is linked to blessing and the resting presence of the Spirit (1 Peter 4:14)
- This echoes Jesus' beatitude on the persecuted (Matthew 5:11-12)
- The Spirit of glory rests on those the world pushes to the margins for Christ's sake
- The blessed life is the faithful life, not the applauded or comfortable one

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Peter connect reproach for Christ with blessing and the Spirit's presence?
- How does this overturn the world's, and our own, picture of a blessed life?
- What does the image of the Spirit "resting" on the reproached believer convey to you?

Question 6

Student Question:

Recall a time when following Christ cost you something socially, a relationship strained, a reputation questioned, a moment of being left out or looked down on. How might Peter's words reframe that cost not as a loss to resent but as a fellowship to embrace?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question makes the blessing of reproach concrete and personal. Most believers can recall a moment when following Christ cost them socially: a friendship cooled, a reputation questioned, an exclusion felt, a stand that made them the odd one out.

Help students revisit such a moment through Peter's lens. At the time it likely felt like pure loss, something to resent or regret. Peter invites a reinterpretation: that cost, borne for Christ, was a share in His reproach and an occasion of blessing.

Be careful and pastoral here. The goal is not to manufacture persecution or to wear minor slights as badges of honor, but to recognize that genuine social cost for faithfulness is fellowship with Christ, not evidence that we have failed.

Invite students to release the resentment and receive the fellowship. What would it mean to look back on that cost not with bitterness but with a quiet sense that they were, in that moment, walking with Jesus and bearing a little of what He bore?

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Following Christ often carries genuine social cost: strained relationships, questioned reputation, exclusion

- Such cost, borne for Christ, is a share in His reproach rather than mere loss
- Avoiding the opposite error of manufacturing persecution or wearing slights as badges
- Releasing resentment to receive the fellowship of Christ's reproach

Discussion Prompts

- When has following Christ cost you something socially, and how did it feel at the time?
- How might Peter's words reframe that cost as fellowship rather than loss?
- What would it mean to look back on that cost without bitterness?

Question 7

Student Question:

Peter draws a careful line: there is suffering that comes from doing wrong, which brings shame, and suffering "as a Christian," which is no cause for shame but glorifies God (vv. 15-16). Why is this distinction important, and how do we make sure that when we suffer, it is genuinely for righteousness and not for our own foolishness or sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Verses 15-16 draw an essential line. Peter says, "let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler," but "if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed." There is suffering that is the just consequence of wrongdoing, and there is suffering that comes simply from belonging to Christ. They are not the same.

Explain why the distinction matters. Not all suffering is righteous suffering. We sometimes bring trouble on ourselves through sin, foolishness, or meddling, and then are tempted to wrap it in the dignity of persecution. Peter forbids that self-deception. The blessing belongs to those who suffer for Christ, not to those suffering for their own faults.

This calls for honest self-examination. Before claiming the comfort of "suffering for Jesus," we must ask whether our suffering actually flows from faithfulness or from our own choices. Owning the difference is a mark of integrity and a guard against self-pity dressed up as martyrdom.

At the same time, Peter lifts shame off the one who truly suffers as a Christian. The world means the name "Christian" as an insult; Peter says wear it without shame, for in it God is glorified. The believer suffering for righteousness can hold their head up, neither pretending nor cowering.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Peter distinguishes suffering for wrongdoing (which brings shame) from suffering as a Christian (which glorifies God) (1 Peter 4:15-16)
- Not all suffering is righteous suffering; some flows from our own sin or folly
- Honest self-examination guards against dressing self-inflicted trouble as persecution

- The believer who truly suffers for Christ may bear the name without shame

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it important to distinguish suffering for wrongdoing from suffering as a Christian?
- How can we tell whether our suffering is for righteousness or for our own folly?
- What does it mean to bear the name “Christian” without shame when the world means it as an insult?

Question 8

Student Question:

Be honest about whether some of your suffering has actually come from your own choices rather than from faithfulness to Christ. How can you take responsibility for the suffering you have caused yourself while still receiving God’s grace, and learn to suffer well only for the right reasons?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question invites honest ownership. Some of the suffering in our lives is genuinely self-inflicted, the fruit of our own sin, rashness, or meddling, and pretending otherwise keeps us from both repentance and growth.

Help students take responsibility without sliding into shame. The gospel makes honest self-assessment safe: we can admit that a hardship is our own fault precisely because we stand in grace, not condemnation. Owning our part is the doorway to repentance and change, not to self-loathing.

Distinguish the two responses appropriate to the two kinds of suffering. For suffering we caused, the path is repentance and amends; for suffering borne for Christ, the path is rejoicing and entrusting. Confusing them, treating self-inflicted trouble as persecution or treating righteous suffering as deserved punishment, distorts the Christian life.

Invite a concrete step toward suffering well only for the right reasons: perhaps confessing a self-inflicted hardship and making it right, while learning to receive God’s grace rather than wallow in shame.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Some of our suffering is self-inflicted, the fruit of sin, rashness, or meddling
- The gospel makes honest self-assessment safe; we own our part from grace, not condemnation
- Repentance and amends fit self-caused suffering; rejoicing and entrusting fit righteous suffering
- Receiving grace rather than wallowing in shame for self-inflicted trouble

Discussion Prompts

- Has some of your suffering actually come from your own choices rather than faithfulness?
- How can you take responsibility for self-inflicted trouble without collapsing into shame?
- What is the difference between the right response to self-caused suffering and to righteous suffering?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter closes by urging those who suffer according to God's will to "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good" (v. 19). Notice the two commands held together: entrust your soul, and keep doing good. Why does Peter ground this entrusting in God being a faithful Creator, and how does active goodness, rather than bitter withdrawal, become the path through suffering?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it gathers the lesson's pastoral weight. Verse 19: "let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." Two commands are held together, and the ground is God's faithful character as Creator.

Unpack "entrust." The word is a banking term, to deposit something for safekeeping. Peter tells suffering believers to deposit the most precious thing they have, their very souls, into God's keeping. This is the deepest act of trust: not merely asking God to fix the circumstance, but placing oneself wholly into His hands.

Explain why the ground is God as "faithful Creator." The One who made us is able to keep us; the One who gave us being is faithful to sustain it. We entrust ourselves not to a stranger or a tyrant but to our Maker, whose faithfulness is the bedrock of the deposit. He will not lose what we commit to Him (compare 2 Timothy 1:12).

Now stress the second command, "while doing good," because it guards against passive fatalism. Entrusting our souls to God is not a withdrawal from action; it is to be done in the very midst of active goodness. Suffering tempts us to bitterness and retreat; Peter charges us to keep our hands open, to keep blessing, serving, and doing right even as we suffer. This keeps God's care fully consistent with our continued obedience: we rest in His faithfulness and we keep working His will.

Land the pastoral comfort. To the believer overwhelmed by a trial, Peter says: you do not have to hold yourself together; entrust your soul to your faithful Creator. And you do not have to curdle into bitterness; keep doing good. These two together, entrusting and doing good, are the well-worn path through suffering that countless saints have walked before us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Peter charges suffering believers to entrust their souls to God for safekeeping (1 Peter 4:19)
- To entrust the soul is the deepest act of trust: placing oneself, not just one's circumstances, into God's hands
- The ground of the entrusting is God as faithful Creator, able and faithful to keep what we commit (2 Timothy 1:12)
- "While doing good" guards against passive fatalism; we rest in God and keep working His will
- God's faithful care is fully consistent with our continued obedience and active goodness
- Entrusting and doing good together form the well-worn path through suffering

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to entrust your very soul, and not just your circumstances, to God?
- Why does Peter ground this entrusting in God being a faithful Creator?
- How does "while doing good" keep us from bitter withdrawal in suffering?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across 1 Peter 4:12-19 as a whole, the call not to be surprised, the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, the blessing of reproach, and the charge to entrust the soul while doing good. Name one specific trial in which you can begin to entrust your soul to your faithful Creator this week, and one good deed you will keep doing rather than withdrawing in bitterness.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone gathers the whole passage and turns it toward practice. Retrace Peter's movement: do not be surprised, rejoice in the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, count reproach for Christ a blessing, suffer only for righteousness, and entrust your soul to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Invite students to name one specific trial in which they can begin, this week, to entrust their souls to their faithful Creator. The act of entrusting is concrete: a deliberate placing of themselves into God's keeping, perhaps in prayer, naming the trial and the God to whom they commit it.

Then ask for one good deed they will keep doing rather than withdrawing in bitterness. Suffering's pull is toward retreat and resentment; Peter's path is toward open-handed goodness. Naming a specific good to keep doing keeps the second command from staying abstract.

End on the faithfulness of God. Whatever the fire, the Creator who made them is faithful and will keep what they commit to Him. Send your students out unsurprised, drawn near to Christ, and steadied by the keeping power of a faithful God.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Retracing Peter's path: no surprise, fellowship in suffering, blessing in reproach, righteous suffering, entrusting while doing good
- Entrusting the soul to a faithful Creator as a concrete act of prayer and trust
- Naming a specific good deed to keep doing rather than withdrawing in bitterness
- Resting in the keeping power of the faithful Creator through the fire

Discussion Prompts

- In what specific trial can you begin to entrust your soul to your faithful Creator this week?
- What is one good deed you will keep doing rather than withdrawing in bitterness?
- How does God's faithfulness as your Creator steady you for the fire ahead?