

Faith Under Fire

Lesson 6: The Fellowship of His Sufferings -- 1 Peter 4:12-19

Peter writes to Christians who are starting to feel the heat. Not yet the full furnace of empire-wide persecution, but the slander, the suspicion, the social cost of belonging to Jesus in a world that did not want Him. They were being insulted for the name of Christ, treated as troublemakers, watching their reputations and sometimes their livelihoods erode. And many of them were surprised by it, as if something strange were happening, as if faithfulness were supposed to shield them from the world's hostility. Peter writes to tell them, kindly but firmly, that they have misread the situation.

"Beloved," he 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." The surprise itself is part of the problem. When we expect the Christian life to be smooth, every hardship feels like a malfunction, a sign that something has gone wrong with our faith or with God. Peter pulls the rug out from under that expectation. The fiery trial is not strange. It is, in a fallen world that crucified its Lord, exactly what a follower of Jesus should expect. Naming it ahead of time robs it of half its power to unsettle us.

But Peter does far more than brace them for hardship. He hands them a stunning reframe: "rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings." The word he uses speaks of fellowship, partnership, communion. When we suffer for following Jesus, we are not abandoned by Him; we are joined to Him, sharing in the very experience that defined His life on earth. The suffering becomes a strange kind of intimacy, a fellowship with the Man of Sorrows, and a sign not that we have left the path but that we are walking it. There is even glory in it, Peter says, for the Spirit of glory rests on those who are reproached for the name of Christ.

Then Peter gives them a way to walk through the fire. He draws a careful line between suffering for doing wrong, which brings shame, and suffering as a Christian, which brings no shame but glorifies God. And he ends with one of the most steady instructions in all of Scripture for the suffering believer: "let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good." Keep doing good. Keep your hands open. And place your very soul into the keeping of a Creator who is faithful. This lesson invites us to stop being surprised by the fire, to discover the fellowship hidden inside it, and to entrust ourselves, in the middle of it, to the One who never fails.

Group Discussion: Peter tells suffering Christians not to be "surprised" by their trials, which suggests that surprise itself can make suffering harder to bear. Why do you think so many believers are caught off guard by hardship and hostility, and how might simply expecting it, the way Peter urges, change the way we walk through it?

Personal Reflection: Peter says that when we suffer for following Christ, we are actually sharing in His sufferings, entering a kind of fellowship with Him. Have you ever experienced a closeness to Jesus in a season of suffering that you did not find in easier times? What might it mean to look for His fellowship inside your trials rather than only His rescue from them?

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?

5. 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?
6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Philippians 3:10, that I may know Him and the fellowship of His sufferings; Acts 5:41, the apostles rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name; Matthew 5:11-12, blessed are you when reviled for Christ's sake, for great is your reward; 2 Timothy 1:12, I know whom I have believed and am convinced He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him; Romans 8:17, we are heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him that we may also be glorified with Him.