

The Cross of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 4: The Suffering Servant Fulfilled

1 Peter 2:21-25

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrine at stake in this lesson is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 in the actual death of Jesus, and the way Peter binds together the cross as substitution and the cross as example. Peter, an eyewitness of the suffering of Christ, takes the prophecy the class studied last week and applies it line by line to Jesus: he committed no sin, he bore our sins in his body on the tree, by his wounds you have been healed. Make sure the class sees that this is deliberate. The New Testament does not present the cross as a tragic surprise but as the fulfillment of God's long-announced plan, the suffering Servant come at last.

Hold the two dimensions of the passage in their proper order, because Peter does. The cross is an example: Christ suffered for us, leaving a pattern of how to endure unjust suffering without bitterness, retaliation, or despair, entrusting ourselves to God who judges justly. This is the immediate point in Peter's argument to suffering Christians. But the cross is first a sacrifice: he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. We could never follow his steps if he had not first carried our sins. Guard against the common error of reducing the cross to mere moral example. Peter makes substitution the foundation and imitation the fruit. Teach them in that order.

Aim at both comfort and transformation. Peter wrote to people in real pain, and he comforts them not by promising escape but by pointing to a Savior who suffered for them and walks ahead of them. The formational target is that students would find in the cross both a sacrifice that heals them and a pattern that shapes how they bear their own trials. Lead them to the tender image with which Peter closes: the straying sheep have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of their souls. The Lamb who was slain is the Shepherd who gathers. Send the class home grateful for the sins he carried and resolved to follow in his steps.

Question 1

Student Question:

Peter says, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (v. 21). What does it mean that Christ's suffering is both for us and an example to us, and why does Peter say that we were actually called to this kind of following?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with Peter's startling pastoral move. Writing to Christians suffering for their faith, he comforts them by pointing to the suffering of Christ: Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. The word for example is a vivid one; it pictures a

pattern traced out for a child to copy, letter by letter. Christ has gone before, and his footprints mark the path.

Clarify the double truth in the verse. Christ suffered for you, which is substitution, on our behalf and in our place. And he left an example, which is imitation, a pattern for us to follow. Peter does not choose between these; he sets them side by side. The same cross that saves us also shows us how to live.

Press the surprising phrase that we were called to this. Peter says following Christ in suffering is not an unfortunate accident of the Christian life but part of our calling. To follow a crucified Lord is to accept that the path of discipleship may pass through hardship, and that this is not a sign of God's absence but of our union with Christ.

Help the class see why this is comforting rather than discouraging. We do not suffer alone or aimlessly. The One who calls us to follow has walked the road first, and his steps are visible ahead of us. Suffering, for the Christian, is never a path Christ has not already traveled.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as both substitution (for you) and example (follow in his steps) (1 Peter 2:21)
- Following Christ in suffering as part of the Christian calling, not an accident
- Discipleship as walking in the footsteps of a crucified Lord (Luke 9:23)
- The comfort of a Savior who has gone before us on the road of suffering

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Christ's suffering is both for us and an example to us?
- Why does Peter say we were actually called to follow Christ in suffering?
- How is it a comfort that Christ has already walked the road ahead of us?

Question 2

Student Question:

Peter writes to believers who were suffering unjustly. When you face hardship or unfair treatment, do you tend to ask first how to escape it or how to follow Christ through it? What would change if you saw your suffering as a place to walk in his steps?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question meets people where they actually live, in the experience of hardship and unfair treatment. Our first instinct in suffering is almost always escape: how do I get out of this, end this, fix this. Peter does not forbid seeking relief, but he reframes the deeper question. The first question of faith is not how do I escape, but how do I follow Christ through this.

Help students feel the difference these two questions make. The escape question makes suffering purely an enemy to be defeated. The following question opens the possibility that God may be doing something in us through the very thing we want to flee, conforming us to the image of his Son. Suffering becomes not merely something to survive but a place to walk in his steps.

Be a careful pastor. This is not a call to seek out suffering or to deny that some suffering should be resisted and relieved. It is a call to bring faith to bear in the hardship we cannot avoid, asking what it would look like to follow Christ here, in this trial, with this person, under this pressure.

Aim at a shift in posture. Invite each student to bring a current hardship to mind and to ask, honestly, whether they have been treating it only as something to escape. Then ask what it would mean to see it, this week, as a place to follow in the steps of the Savior who suffered for them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Reframing suffering from escape to discipleship (Romans 8:28–29)
- Suffering as a means God uses to conform us to Christ (James 1:2–4)
- The difference between resisting avoidable harm and bearing unavoidable trial in faith
- Following Christ as the first question in hardship

Discussion Prompts

- When hardship comes, what is your honest first question, how to escape or how to follow?
- How might God be working in you through a trial you would rather avoid?
- What current hardship could you begin to see as a place to walk in Christ's steps?

Question 3

Student Question:

Quoting Isaiah, Peter says Jesus “committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth” (v. 22). Why is the sinlessness of Christ essential to what the cross accomplishes, and how does it tie this passage directly to the spotless Servant and the unblemished lamb of the sacrifices?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter grounds the saving power of the cross in the sinlessness of Christ, quoting Isaiah: he committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. This is not an incidental detail. The sinlessness of Jesus is essential to everything the cross accomplishes, and the class should see why.

Explain the logic. A sinner cannot bear the sins of others, because he must answer for his own. Only one with no sin of his own to pay for is free to carry the sins of others. Jesus, having committed no sin, owed nothing to justice on his own account, and so his death could be wholly

substitutionary, entirely for us. His perfect innocence is the very thing that qualifies him to be our substitute.

Tie this directly to the sacrificial system and to last week's study. The lamb offered in Israel's worship had to be without blemish; a defective animal was unacceptable. Isaiah's Servant had done no violence and spoken no deceit. Peter now says Jesus committed no sin. The unblemished lamb, the sinless Servant, and the spotless Christ are one and the same reality. Jesus is the lamb without blemish to whom every previous lamb pointed.

Draw out the assurance this gives. Because our substitute was sinless, his sacrifice is fully sufficient; there is no flaw in it, no shortfall to be made up by our own efforts. We rest not on a Savior who was merely better than us, but on one who was without sin entirely, perfectly qualified to bear what we could not.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sinlessness of Christ as essential to substitution (1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
- Only a sinless substitute can bear the sins of others without answering for his own
- Jesus as the unblemished lamb fulfilling the sacrificial requirement (1 Peter 1:18–19)
- The sufficiency of the sacrifice grounded in the perfection of the one offered
- The unity of the unblemished lamb, Isaiah's Servant, and the sinless Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Why must our substitute be sinless in order to bear our sins?
- How does the sinlessness of Jesus connect him to the unblemished lamb of sacrifice?
- What assurance do you draw from resting on a wholly sinless Savior?

Question 4

Student Question:

Peter says that when Jesus was reviled, "he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten" (v. 23). Where in your life are you most tempted to revile, threaten, or retaliate when wronged, and what would it look like this week to respond as Jesus did?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question takes Peter's description of Jesus, when reviled he did not revile in return, when he suffered he did not threaten, and presses it into the believer's relationships. Reviling and threatening are the natural weapons of the wounded ego. When attacked, we counterattack; when wronged, we want to wound back. Jesus shows another way.

Help students name the specific forms retaliation takes for them: the cutting word returned for a cutting word, the silent grudge, the veiled threat, the score quietly kept, the harsh email fired

back. The temptation is rarely to dramatic violence; it is to the small, daily reprisals that feel justified in the moment.

Show that the strength here is not weakness. Jesus was not passive or cowardly; he was the most powerful person who ever lived, and he chose not to retaliate. Non-retaliation that flows from trust in God is a mark of great strength, not weakness. It takes far more strength to absorb a wrong than to return it.

Aim at one concrete practice. Ask each student to identify a relationship or recurring situation where they tend to revile or retaliate, and to choose one specific way they will respond like Jesus this week, with a soft answer, a withheld retort, a refusal to keep score. This is the cross reshaping daily speech and temper.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Non-retaliation as the pattern of Christ (1 Peter 2:23; Matthew 5:38–48)
- The renunciation of returning evil for evil (Romans 12:17–21)
- Christlike restraint as strength, not weakness
- The transformation of speech and temper as fruit of the cross

Discussion Prompts

- What form does retaliation most often take for you, in word or attitude?
- Why is choosing not to retaliate a sign of strength rather than weakness?
- What is one specific way you will respond like Jesus when wronged this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus, when suffering, “continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly” (v. 23). How does entrusting ourselves to God free us from the need to defend or avenge ourselves, and what does this reveal about how Jesus endured the cross?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Peter reveals the secret of how Jesus endured: he continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. The verb is continuous; again and again, through every blow and accusation, Jesus handed his cause over to the Father. He did not defend himself, because he had committed himself to the One who would judge rightly in the end.

Explain how this entrusting frees us. When we are wronged, we feel an urgent need to set the record straight, to make sure justice is done, to defend our name. That burden is exhausting, and it often drives us to sin. Entrusting ourselves to God who judges justly lifts that burden. We do not have to be our own judge and avenger, because there is a Judge who sees all and will set everything right.

Show what this reveals about how Jesus bore the cross. He was not stoically gritting his teeth; he was actively trusting his Father. The cross was endured by faith, by a continual handing over of himself to the God who could be trusted even when everything looked like defeat. This is the same trust to which we are called.

Guard against misunderstanding. Entrusting our cause to God does not mean we never seek lawful justice or never speak truth. It means we surrender the desire for personal vengeance and the compulsion to vindicate ourselves, resting in the assurance that God will judge justly. This frees us to respond to wrong with patience rather than panic.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Entrusting ourselves to God who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23; Romans 12:19)
- Trust in God's righteous judgment as the means of enduring wrong
- The cross endured by faith, a continual handing over to the Father
- Freedom from self-vindication and the burden of being our own avenger

Discussion Prompts

- How does entrusting yourself to God free you from the need to defend or avenge yourself?
- What does it reveal that Jesus endured the cross by continually trusting his Father?
- What is the difference between seeking lawful justice and demanding personal vengeance?

Question 6

Student Question:

Think of a specific wrong you are still holding onto, a hurt you keep replaying or a score you want to settle. What would it mean for you, this week, to entrust that situation to the God who judges justly rather than carrying it yourself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question makes the entrusting concrete by asking students to name a specific wrong they are still carrying. Most of us have one, a hurt we replay, a betrayal we cannot release, a score we are quietly waiting to settle. Peter's words about Jesus invite us to do with our wrong what he did with his: hand it to the God who judges justly.

Help students see the cost of carrying a wrong ourselves. Unforgiveness and the hunger for vengeance are heavy burdens that poison the one who carries them more than the one who caused them. To entrust the matter to God is not to pretend it did not happen or that it did not hurt; it is to refuse to be its judge and to release it into the hands of the One who is.

Be gentle, especially where the wound is deep. Entrusting a serious wrong to God is often not a single act but a repeated one; like Jesus, we may have to keep entrusting it, again and again,

until the grip of bitterness loosens. Encourage patience with the process and reliance on God's grace.

Aim at one concrete release. Invite each student to name, at least to God, one situation they will deliberately entrust to him this week, choosing to lay down the role of avenger. This is among the most freeing things the cross teaches us to do.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Forgiveness and the release of vengeance as entrusting wrongs to God (Ephesians 4:31–32)
- The self-poisoning nature of nursed bitterness (Hebrews 12:15)
- Entrusting deep wrongs as often a repeated rather than a single act
- Freedom and healing found in laying down the role of avenger

Discussion Prompts

- What specific wrong are you still carrying that you keep replaying?
- What does it cost you to keep carrying it rather than entrusting it to God?
- What would it look like to deliberately entrust that situation to God 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). Explain how this verse moves from substitution (he bore our sins) to transformation (that we might die to sin), and why the cross aims not only to forgive us but to change us.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Here is the doctrinal center of the passage: 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. Walk the class carefully through the two movements in this single verse, because together they show the full aim of the cross.

The first movement is substitution: he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree. The language is sacrificial and personal. He himself, not another; our sins, not his own; in his body, a real and physical bearing; on the tree, the cross understood as the place of curse-bearing. This is the same truth Isaiah foretold, now declared as accomplished fact. Our sins were laid on him, and he carried them in his body to the cross.

The second movement is transformation: that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. The cross does not stop at forgiveness; it aims at a changed life. Christ bore our sins not only so that we would be pardoned but so that we would be freed from sin's grip, dying to its rule and

coming alive to obedience. Peter ties the purpose clause tightly to the sacrifice: the same death that pays for sin is meant to break sin's hold on us.

Make the connection explicit, because it is the heart of this whole study's pastoral aim. The cross forgives us and the cross changes us, and these are not two separate gifts but one. A grace that pardoned us without transforming us would be incomplete and is not the grace of the New Testament. The wounds that healed our guilt are also meant to heal our hearts, turning us from sin to righteousness. This is why Lesson 9 will speak of being crucified with Christ and Lesson 12 of taking up our cross daily; the change begins here.

Close on the tender phrase, by his wounds you have been healed. The deepest wound in the human race is sin, and the only medicine is the wounding of the sinless Savior. His stripes are the cure for ours. Let the class hear this as both forgiveness and the promise of real healing from sin's power.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Substitution: Christ bore our sins in his body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24; Isaiah 53:4-6)
- The cross aiming at transformation as well as forgiveness: that we might die to sin and live to righteousness
- Forgiveness and transformation as one unified gift of grace, not two separate ones
- Dying to sin and living to righteousness as the purpose of the atonement (Romans 6:1-11)
- Healing from the deepest wound, sin, through the wounds of Christ

Discussion Prompts

- How does this verse move from substitution to transformation?
- Why does the cross aim not only to forgive us but to change us?
- What does it mean to you that by his wounds you have been healed?

Question 8

Student Question:

Peter says the goal of Christ bearing our sins is that we would "die to sin and live to righteousness." Where is God calling you to die to a particular sin and come alive to a particular act of obedience, and how does the cross give you the power to do it?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-focused question applies the purpose clause of verse 24 directly: that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. The cross is not only something done for us; it is meant to do something in us. Peter calls every believer to a concrete dying and rising, away from particular sins and toward particular obedience.

Help students get specific. Dying to sin is rarely accomplished in the abstract; it happens in concrete decisions to put a particular sin to death, the resentment, the dishonesty, the lust, the pride, that has had its grip on us. And living to righteousness is equally concrete: a particular act of obedience, kindness, or service that comes alive in its place. Ask each person to name the one and the other.

Address the question of power, because this is where many despair. We cannot die to sin by sheer willpower. The power comes from the cross itself, from our union with the Christ who bore our sins and broke their hold. We die to sin not by trying harder in our own strength but by reckoning ourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus, and walking in the strength he supplies.

Aim at one concrete obedience for the week. Spiritual formation is specific. Invite each student to name one sin to die to and one act of righteousness to come alive to, and to take a single step in that direction this week, leaning on the power of the cross rather than on their own resolve.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Dying to sin and living to righteousness as concrete, not abstract (Colossians 3:5–10)
- The power for transformation coming from union with Christ, not willpower alone (Romans 6:11)
- Putting particular sins to death and putting on particular obedience
- Sanctification as the ongoing fruit of the cross in the believer's life

Discussion Prompts

- What particular sin is God calling you to die to right now?
- What particular act of righteousness is he calling you to come alive to in its place?
- Where do you most need to rely on the power of the cross rather than your own willpower?

Question 9

Student Question:

Peter closes by saying, "You were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (v. 25). Explain how Peter takes the straying sheep of Isaiah 53 and shows the cross bringing them home, and how this presents Jesus as both the Lamb who was slain and the Shepherd who gathers and guards his people. What does it mean that he is the Overseer of your soul?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block, and it brings the whole study of Isaiah 53 to a beautiful resolution. Peter writes: you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. Show the class how directly this picks up Isaiah 53:6, all we like

sheep have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. The wandering sheep of the prophecy now have a destination; the cross has brought them home.

Draw out the stunning double image of Jesus in this passage. He is the Lamb who was slain, the one who bore our sins in his body on the tree. And he is the Shepherd who gathers, the one to whom the straying sheep return. The Lamb and the Shepherd are the same person. He became the sacrifice in order to become the gatherer; he was slain as the Lamb so that he could shepherd us as our own. This is the gospel in a single picture: the slain Lamb is the living Shepherd.

Explain the rich word Overseer, sometimes translated guardian. It speaks of one who watches over, protects, and cares for. Jesus is not a distant shepherd who saves us and then leaves us to fend for ourselves; he is the Overseer of our souls, attentively guarding and guiding the very center of who we are. The same care that moved him to the cross moves him to keep watch over us now.

Make the homecoming personal. Every person in the class was once a straying sheep, going their own way, as Isaiah said. The cross is what turned the straying into returning. And the return is not merely to a system or a set of beliefs, but to a Person, the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. To be a Christian is to have come home to him.

Let this also frame the obedient response of the gospel. Returning to the Shepherd is not a vague feeling but a real coming, the coming that Scripture describes as believing, repenting, confessing, and being baptized into Christ, by which the straying sheep are joined to the Shepherd and his flock. Those already in Christ are called to keep following his voice and never to wander off again. The Shepherd who brought us home will keep us, as we keep listening to him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The straying sheep of Isaiah 53 brought home through the cross (1 Peter 2:25; Isaiah 53:6)
- Jesus as both the Lamb who was slain and the Shepherd who gathers (John 1:29; John 10:11)
- Christ as the Overseer and Guardian who watches over the believer's soul
- Returning to the Shepherd as returning to a Person, not merely a belief system
- The gospel response of believing, repenting, confessing, and baptism as the way the sheep return (Acts 2:38; John 10:27)

Discussion Prompts

- How does Peter show the cross bringing the straying sheep of Isaiah 53 home?
- What does it mean that Jesus is both the Lamb who was slain and the Shepherd who gathers?
- How does it comfort you that Jesus is the watchful Overseer of your very soul?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across 1 Peter 2:21–25 as a whole, where the Servant Isaiah foretold becomes the Savior and Shepherd who bore your sins. Name one specific way this passage deepens your gratitude for the sins he carried, and one concrete step you will take this week to follow in his steps.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone question gathers the lesson and calls for a personal response. Remind the class of the journey of these five verses: from the suffering Servant Isaiah foretold to the Savior who bore our sins in his body, from substitution to transformation, from straying sheep to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls. Prophecy and fulfillment, doctrine and daily life, have met in this passage.

Invite each student to name one specific way this passage deepens their gratitude for the sins he carried. For one it may be fresh wonder that the prophecy they studied last week came true in such detail; for another, the comfort of a Shepherd watching over their soul; for another, the relief that his wounds have healed theirs.

Then ask for one concrete step to follow in his steps this week, whether refusing to retaliate, entrusting a wrong to God, dying to a particular sin, or simply coming home more fully to the Shepherd. End by looking ahead: having seen what the cross is and whose it fulfills, the next lessons will unfold its riches one by one, beginning with redemption, being bought back at the price of his precious blood.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The cross as the fulfillment of prophecy, the meeting of doctrine and daily life
- Gratitude for substitution leading to a resolve to follow Christ's example
- Coming home to the Shepherd as the heart of the Christian life
- Following in Christ's steps as the grateful response to the sins he carried

Discussion Prompts

- How does this passage deepen your gratitude for the sins Christ carried?
- Which image moved you most, the Servant, the Savior, or the Shepherd, and why?
- What is one concrete step you will take this week to follow in his steps?