

Chosen Aliens: Know How to Suffer Well

What's the Big Idea?

God's people should know how to suffer well for the sake of righteousness.

What's the Problem?

Suffering takes us by surprise, so we don't know how to respond well to it. Sometimes it's hard to mesh with our understanding of Christianity because we're tempted to think that life in Christ means our problems go away.

What's our Response?

Trust God for the grace to see suffering for righteousness' sake as a blessing and as an opportunity to call attention to Jesus Christ.

Memorize

But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account of the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.

1 Peter 3:15

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

This passage is the first of three sections spanning to 1 Peter 4:19 that provides a Christian perspective on suffering. Peter aims to deliver his readers from the fear that often paralyzes their hearts in the face of suffering. He wants them to see the blessing of suffering for righteousness' sake and thus be prepared to enter into it in a way that honors God. Help your group to see their own fears regarding suffering for righteousness' sake. Trust God to open their eyes to the blessing of suffering for righteousness' sake as a part of his call.

Suffering Well for Righteousness' Sake-1 Peter 3:13-16

In most cases people don't take flak for doing what's good (verse 13). But sometimes we do suffer for the sake of righteousness—for the sake of Jesus and his kingdom. How should we view this? We naturally tend to see this as a bad thing, and it produces fear in our hearts because we don't want any more suffering in our lives than we already have. But Peter calls us to see suffering for righteousness' sake as a good thing and calls us not to fear in the face of it (verse 14).

One key to facing suffering without fear is setting apart Jesus as Lord in our hearts (verse 15). Yet so many other things vie for that place of lordship in our hearts. Particularly when we take heat for our faith, it's easy to let the opinion of others or a desire to avoid pain rule in our hearts. Trust God to surface in your own heart and in the hearts of your group members the things other than Jesus that can become "lord" in your hearts when you endure suffering. Point them to the singular worthiness of Christ being Lord in your heart.

The other key to facing suffering without fear is keeping a good conscience. God's Spirit gives us the power to live in a way that honors him. That puts to shame those who give us a hard time because of our righteous lives. Lead your group in considering to what extent you're keeping a good conscience in your daily life. Identify weak spots, and trust God to bring change in those areas so that he would be honored as you live in this world.

The Glory of Righteous Suffering-1 Peter 3:17-22

Peter makes an obvious point in verse 17: it's better to suffer for doing what's right than for doing what's wrong. This follows the example of Christ, who suffered for us in spite of his own innocence so that he could bring us to God (verse 18). Cast vision for your group to follow in Jesus' footsteps by suffering for doing what's right, drawing on the Spirit's power to do so.

In verses 19-20 Peter gives an example of suffering for doing what's right from the Old Testament. God commanded Noah to build an ark that God used to rescue Noah and his family from the judgment that God was about to bring on the world. But Noah faced ridicule from the people of his day as he obeyed God and built the ark. It's likely that these people are the "spirits now in prison" (verse 19) to whom Christ called for repentance through Noah (see 1 Peter 1:10-11, which talks about the Spirit of Christ speaking through Old Testament prophets like Noah).

In this section Peter makes some implied and explicit connections between Noah's day and ours: 1.) Just as Noah suffered for righteousness' sake, Christ's followers do. 2.) Just as the flood waters were the way Noah and his family floated to safety, baptism (i.e. faith in Christ) is the way we float to safety. 3.) Just as Noah and his family fled to the ark to escape God's judgment, we flee to Christ to escape God's judgment. But Peter is quick to note that baptism itself doesn't save us (i.e.: "not the removal of dirt from the flesh"). What saves us is the appeal to God for a good conscience through the resurrection of Christ (i.e.: faith in Christ).

Peter closes this section by reminding his readers of the glory of Jesus Christ. He "is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to him" (1 Peter 3:22). This means that Jesus reigns over everything in our lives, even the suffering we experience for righteousness' sake. Lead your group in worshipping Jesus for his power over all things. Call them to follow Noah's example of standing for righteousness in the face of suffering and fleeing to the refuge God provides us in Christ.

What Are the Questions?

Launch

Tell about a time you suffered for doing the right thing. How did your faith in God help you in the midst of this time?

Explore

Read 1 Peter 3:13-16

1. What do you think Peter's trying to say in verse 13?
2. What do you think it means to suffer for righteousness' sake?
3. Why do you think those who suffer for the sake of righteousness are blessed?
4. What does verse 14 say about the typical response to suffering for righteousness' sake?
5. What do you think it means to "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts" (verse 15)?
6. How does sanctifying Christ as Lord in your hearts contribute to suffering well for righteousness' sake?
7. How does "being ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you" contribute to suffering well for righteousness' sake?
8. Why is it important to act with gentleness and respect when giving an account of the hope we have in Christ?

Read 1 Peter 3:17-22

9. What is Peter's point in verse 17?
10. What does verse 18 say about how we align ourselves with Christ when we suffer for doing right?
11. Verses 19-20 talk about Christ speaking through Noah to the people who ridiculed him for following God, warning them to turn from their sin in order to escape God's judgment. How does Noah's example of suffering for righteousness' sake serve as an example for us?
12. In what way does Noah's escape from judgment through the flood waters correspond to baptism (i.e.: faith in Christ) saving Christ's followers?
13. How does verse 21 respond to the concern that baptism itself saves people from their sins?
14. How does verse 22 contribute to God's people suffering well for righteousness' sake?

Apply

15. What are your greatest fears or concerns as you think about the possibility of suffering for the sake of Christ and his kingdom?
16. How does sanctifying Christ as Lord in your heart speak to those fears and concerns?
17. Read verse 18 again. How does Christ's sacrifice on your behalf move you to want to suffer well for his name?
18. Verse 22 reminds us that Christ reigns over all things. What particular things do you need to remember that he reigns over in order to be ready to suffer well for his name?

What Are the Answers?

1. It's not the norm for people to suffer when they do the right thing.
2. It means enduring hardship for the sake of Christ and his kingdom.
3. Those who suffer for righteousness' sake are blessed because they're identifying themselves with Christ, who is seated in the highest place of honor in the universe (see 1 Peter 3:22).
4. We tend to be fearful and anxious when we suffer for righteousness' sake.
5. It means making a choice to have Jesus as the most important thing in your life.
6. It makes it a settled issue that a person is going to live for Jesus in the face of suffering, not comfort or others' approval.
7. It helps keep a person's eyes off self and realize that God ultimately wants to use our suffering for righteousness' sake to call attention to his worth.
8. Gentleness and respect honor those we talk to and pave the way for them to respond to God's truth.
9. It's better to suffer for doing right than to suffer for doing wrong.
10. Christ is the supreme example of suffering for doing what's right.
11. Just as God saved and vindicated Noah as he trusted in him, he also saves and vindicates us as we trust in Christ.
12. Just as the waters carried Noah and his family to safety in the ark, baptism (i.e.: faith in Christ) carries us to eternal safety.
13. It's not the removal of dirt from the flesh (i.e.: being baptized in water) that saves a person. It's the appeal to God through the resurrection of Christ for a good conscience, which is another way speaking faith in Jesus.
14. It reminds us that Jesus reigns over everything, even the suffering that he allows into our lives.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. Allow the group to discuss.
17. Allow the group to discuss.
18. Allow the group to discuss.