

Showing Christ in Times of Trials

SESSION IN A SENTENCE: Jesus gives His people eternal life, purpose, and hope so they can maintain joy in trials as they seek to display faith in Christ that will draw others to Him.

BACKGROUND PASSAGE: 1 Peter 1:1–3:7

The first day of school for a preschooler or kindergartener is a big deal. Whether it's a bigger deal for the parents or the child, well, it's sometimes hard to tell. This teary-eyed milestone is possibly the first time a child leaves the comfort zone of home and/or parents. Knowing the opportunities for learning and the risks of social rejection this new environment will bring, wise parents will try to prepare their child as much as possible for potential rejection by assuring them that the family is the child's safe place where they are known, loved, and accepted.

Thankfully, in Peter's first epistle, God's people are reminded that in Christ we have a safe place of acceptance and hope, even as we suffer through trials that result from the world's rejection. In response to this rejection, Christians are to do good to those who may oppose them because believers worship the one true God revealed in Jesus.



What is your normal pattern when responding to trials in your life?

Group Time

Point 1: God's people hope in an imperishable treasure (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵ You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

The resurrection of Jesus is not just a noteworthy historic event—it is the “why” for the believer's hope. Jesus' resurrection assures us of God's great mercy to save sinners, which is why Jesus died in the first place. Furthermore, God secures the believer with a living hope—a sure hope for resurrection and eternal life—in the midst of any circumstance that would try to breed hopelessness. Because our living Savior King reigns forever, God's people can be happy and steady.



How should Christ's resurrection change our perspective on suffering?

The Christians Peter wrote to had experienced some opposition for their faith in Christ. But Peter encouraged them to focus not on what could be lost but rather on what is to be gained—a perfect inheritance that can never fade away, namely, our salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 4-5). Human beings, devices, or plans cannot affect this treasure, nor can they keep you from it because the all-powerful God is guarding you until your faith is made sight at the final resurrection with Jesus' second coming.

Life After Death: When a Christian dies, he or she immediately is with the _____. This is what some people call an intermediate state, given that the final state for believers takes place at the future _____.

Point 2: God's people rejoice knowing trials are temporary and purposeful (1 Pet. 1:6-9).

⁶ You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials ⁷ so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Believers *will* face trials when following Jesus—a surefire guarantee from Jesus Himself (John 16:33). God's people *will* experience the grief of living in a fallen world opposed to Christ. Though we *will* endure fiery trials of all sorts that remind us of what appears to be our approaching doom, we can worship God in the midst of them because they serve a dual purpose: **to purify the faith of Jesus' followers** and **to prepare believers for the fulfillment of their hope—the coming of Christ.**



How do you see the current trials in your life working to refine your faith?

The difference between a believer and a non-believer is not whether or not suffering exists in their lives. Both groups will experience suffering, but the believer can endure and grow in his or her faith. Why? Because the believer's assurance is wrapped up in a person—a believer's love, faith, and joy are wrapped up in **Christ Himself**. We have confidence that He will save our souls, even if our world as we know it is perishing.



Voices from Church History

"It is because of Christ that our suffering is not useless. It is part of the total plan of God who has chosen to redeem the world through the pathway of suffering."¹

—R. C. Sproul (1939-2017)



When suffering is near and joy seems far off, how can God's people be reminded to keep pressing toward the goal of their faith?

Point 3: God's people honor and do good to those in authority (1 Pet. 2:11-17).

¹¹ Dear friends, I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. ¹² Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so that when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day he visits.

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority ¹⁴ or to governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do what is evil and to praise those who do what is good. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence the ignorance of foolish people by doing good. ¹⁶ Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but as God's slaves. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

As strangers and outsiders living in this world, God's people will be hated and attacked purely for our association with Christ. Yet in the midst of the hate-induced passions of our present-day culture, we are called to abstain from the temptation of pursuing sinful desires in the process, particularly the sinful desire to vengefully combat our persecutors. Instead, we are called to behave with goodness and honor toward those who don't know God and dishonor us as a result, and hopefully they too to see Christ in faith.

Evangelism: The Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the preaching of the gospel to all nations. It is the _____ of every child of God to seek constantly to win the lost to Christ by _____ witness undergirded by a Christian _____.

How are believers to honor Christ in their conduct? One way is to submit to human authorities, not because a person has earned it or is worthy of such submission but *because* of the Lord. We are to submit as unto the Lord by doing good and refusing to do evil, even at the cost of persecution. The example of the Christian's goodness, which ultimately reflects our good God and Savior, Jesus Christ, should silence the ignorance of the foolish who would find fault with the Christian and hopefully lead them to the wisdom of God found in Christ.



How have you seen good works done in Christ's name help point people to Christ in faith?

Daily Study

Day 1: Read 1 Peter 1:1-5

Peter addressed his letter to a very specific audience: believers described as chosen people and also exiled people. In a world where those who are chosen, elected, and selected often reap the benefits of preferential treatment and due honor, it may seem odd that Peter associated being chosen with living as exiles. The word *exile* denotes that someone is an outsider and consequently doesn't belong. Exiles are strangers, foreigners living away from their homeland. How is it that those who are esteemed are also marginalized? Well, we must properly identify where the Christian's home is in order to the answer that question.

In a sense, Peter's audience had been dispersed from their earthly homeland, and therefore were earthly exiles. But Scripture is clear that a Christian's home is not on this earth. In fact, the Christian's inheritance is being kept in heaven (v. 4). It only makes sense that the Christian's homeland is in heaven with Christ, who will one day bring heaven to earth (see Rev. 21), where they will receive "preferential" treatment for eternity. It makes sense, then, why these Christians, whom God chose in Christ to be a part of His family, were deemed exiles on earth. Earth, as it exists during this age, wasn't their home, and these Christians who were dispersed due to persecution knew this full well, as they were readily hated, rejected, and despised because of their faith.

We too venture through this foreign land, but we have a choice: Do we treat it as home and, in doing so, receive our preferential treatment and due honor here? Or do we face momentary pain and rejection on earth because of Jesus' name in order to receive praise, glory, and honor when Christ is revealed to all (1 Pet. 1:7)?



How do you treat this current world as your ultimate home?

Voices from the Church

"Just as people receive their ethnic identity, their citizenship, their socioeconomic class, and their innate potentialities from their biological parents, Christians have a new identity and a new citizenship that redefines their relationship with society and transforms their identity and character."³

—Karen H. Jobes

Day 2: Read 1 Peter 1:6-12

Have you ever experienced the impact of a car accident, prolonged turbulence on a plane, or any moment in which you feel as if your life is flashing before your eyes? These moments are sobering and at times terrifying, but interestingly enough, though they can feel like forever, they do eventually pass.

The pain of trials and heartache can also feel never-ending in the moments we are enduring them. However, Peter referred to the various trials we will endure in this lifetime as a “short time” (v. 6), realistically speaking. That’s because his perspective of “time” was relative to our eternal future, a state, by definition, that never comes to an end. This does not belittle the pain we go through, but instead, it gives us a proper lens to look through to encourage our hearts in the midst of pain that can feel like it will last forever. Take heart, trouble won’t last, but Christ will.



Do you regularly view trials with eternity in mind? How can you improve in this area?

Day 3: Read 1 Peter 1:13-25

In the face of God’s holiness, we as people have always been confronted with the reminder that we’re not holy, as we’ve been tainted by sin (see Ex. 33:18-20; 2 Sam. 6:6-8). Yet the God who is holy was gracious enough to interject His Son, who is holy, into human history in order to bridge the holiness gap between an unholy people and a holy God. Praise God that our holy Savior paid our sin penalty by dying a criminal’s death so that we may share in His holiness as blood-washed saints.

Understanding this helps us better grasp verses 13-25. We are called to follow God’s example of holiness intentionally with our conduct, seeking to live blamelessly as foreigners on earth. In doing so, we please the Lord (Heb. 12:14).



How will the weight of holiness affect your behavior?

Day 4: Read 1 Peter 2:1-17

For the Christ follower, we are called to get rid of a whole bunch of evil in our lives—all of it, in fact. (v. 1). How is it that we have the capacity to do these things? It is solely by the power of God’s Holy Spirit working in us through God’s Word, enabling us to fight sin and love God.

We cannot possibly live the life that God has called us to as His “chosen race,” “royal priesthood,” and “holy nation” if we refuse to abide in His Word (v. 9). It is by His Word that we are able to “grow up into [our] salvation” (v. 2). May the faithfulness of His Word compel us to desire the pure spiritual milk available to us. May we “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps. 34:8).



Why is it imperative to be anchored in God’s Word on a daily basis, especially before struggles commence in your life?

Day 5: Read 1 Peter 2:18–3:7

The topic of submission in our culture is often met with scoffs, reluctance, and, at times, contempt. For many, it is seen as an antiquated concept.

However, Christ, existing in the form of God, did not consider equality with God as something to be exploited, and He Himself submitted to His Father (Phil. 2:5-7). In radical obedience, He laid down His life for the sake of people who wouldn’t dare reciprocate the favor, even if they could. Christ—the only *good* person who ever suffered—never committed sin, refused to insult those who insulted Him, and refrained from threatening His persecutors (1 Pet. 2:22-23).

This is the example of humble obedience and submission the Christian is to follow. If we are not humble enough follow in the footsteps of our Savior’s humiliation and suffering, let us dare not aspire, then, to follow Christ in His glory.



How should seeing Christ’s willingness to submit and suffer affect your willingness to do the same?

