

INDUCTIVE LESSON FOUR

SUFFERING FOR GOOD

As we dig into our study of this week's passage, we immediately encounter what seems to be an oxymoron in verse 14: "Even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed." An oxymoron is an expression with two contradictory words such as *authentic counterfeit*, *icy hot*, or *mud bath*. Peter tells us we are blessed, or happy enough to be envied, according to the Amplified Bible, when we suffer. Peter's perspective on pain and suffering is not unique as we find virtually the same idea shared by Paul in Romans 5:3–5: "We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame" (NIV).

Reconciling suffering and blessing in the life of a believer can be a true challenge. To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, the problem of human pain and suffering is the most potent weapon in the atheist's arsenal. Rather than tackle suffering head-on, some within the fringes of Christianity have marginalized suffering in the life of a believer through Prosperity Theology—also called Health and Wealth Doctrine—which teaches that given enough faith and works, we will not endure suffering. Unfortunately this is not true biblically or in practice.

As I stood exhausted in the finish chute after completing a particularly grueling cross-country race, I looked back and read Romans 5:3–5 written on the back of the wooden banner hanging over the finish line. In a moment of clarity, it occurred to me that the difficulties of the course and the suffering I had experienced during the run only came into perspective and had meaning once I completed the race. Once we have completed our course on this earth, five minutes into eternity any "Why God?" questions we may have harbored will seem irrelevant.

Joni Eareckson Tada, a quadriplegic cancer survivor, provides insight when she writes, "Suffering provides the gym equipment on which my faith can be exercised."¹ It is through suffering that we learn of the sufficiency of Christ to meet our needs. Many of us can share that it was out of our darkest hour of despair that we have enjoyed our greatest dependence and deepest fellowship with our Savior.

Peter draws on an Old Testament image to provide assurance for his audience as he compares the account of the flood to the security of believers. Just as righteous Noah and his family were preserved in the ark from judgment, so we are preserved in Christ from the coming judgment.

When skiing or snowboarding late in the season, you often encounter hazard signs put up by the resort to warn of danger just below the snow surface. Verse 19 of chapter 3 and verse 6 of chapter 4 would merit such a hazard warning. Almost as many possible interpretations of these passages exist as there are commentators. Martin Luther said of this passage, "This is as strange a text and enigmatic a saying as there is anywhere in

the New Testament, so that I do not know exactly what St. Peter means.”² Fortunately the central message of our study comes through with clarity: “Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness you are blessed. And do not be afraid of their threats nor troubled but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts . . .”

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times.

Memory Verse

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. 1 Peter 3:15

Inductive Method Step 1: Observation

My Observations: In the left column, write down observations you make directly from the text. Things to look for:

What are the promises?

What are the commands?

What are the sources of conflict?

What are the cause/effect relationships?

What are the repeated words and ideas?

What do we know about who is speaking and who is receiving the message?

What comparisons and contrasts can you identify and what do they illustrate?

Do you have unanswered questions on part of the passage? (Share them with your group.)

Digging Deeper: In the right column, write down any additional observations you can add from other sources such as:

Other scriptures that apply (cross references)

Dictionaries for specific words (English or Greek dictionary)

Bible dictionaries for historical information

Commentaries (See the Tool Box at the end of the study for suggested sources.)

Parallel passages in other books. Accounts found in parallel passages, while very similar, often reveal small but critical details omitted by another author.

Inductive Method Step 2: Interpretation

Webster tells us that *interpret* means “to explain the meaning or make understandable.” What is the spiritual truth or lesson that God is trying to teach in this passage? Don’t isolate the passage but read into it and read out of it. Look for commands, imperatives, promises, or warnings. What is God saying to those people at that time? (You will share what God is saying to you in the next section.) State the spiritual truth or lesson in a single sentence.

Inductive Method Step 3: Application

This is where you purpose to do what God has taught you in your time with Him. It is through applying the Word that God changes lives. Application does not happen by osmosis but by intent. God enlightens us with His Word, we apply what we've learned with our wills, and the Holy Spirit empowers us to carry out these choices. The goal of all application is to glorify God by becoming more like Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for . . ."

Teaching: What did I learn?

Reproof: Where do I fall short? Why do I fall short?

Correction: What will I do about it?

Training in righteousness: How can I make this principle a consistent part of my life?

Study Text / Worksheet

Write down your observations, comments, or questions directly on the text as you go over it.

A Ready Defense

1 Peter 3:13–22

13 And who *is* he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are* blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be ready to give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For *it is* better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. 18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19 by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while *the* ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

My Observations

Digging Deeper

Interpretation:

Application:

Parallel Passage

When we read of Paul’s own account of his ministry, we can quickly see that he, like Peter, was no stranger to suffering. From this passage try to locate the cause, emotion, and eternal perspective on Paul’s trials.

Paul’s Sufferings

2 Corinthians 11:22–33

22 Are they Hebrews? So *am* I. Are they Israelites? So *am* I. Are they the seed of Abraham? So *am* I. 23 Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I *am* more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. 24 From the Jews five times I received forty *stripes* minus one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was

stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 *in* journeys often, *in* perils of waters, *in* perils of robbers, *in* perils of *my own* countrymen, *in* perils of the Gentiles, *in* perils in the city, *in* perils in the wilderness, *in* perils in the sea, *in* perils among false brethren; 27 in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness— 28 besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 29 Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn *with indignation*? 30 If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity. 31 The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. 32 In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; 33 but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.

My Observations

Digging Deeper

Interpretation:

Application:

Take Away / Summary

If one of your friends at work or a neighbor were to ask you what you did on Tuesday, you would tell them you went to a Bible study. The next question would likely be, “What did

you learn?" We often summarize an entire athletic contest or a movie in a few brief sentences and easily convey the essence of the event. Now apply these same skills to give a summary of the passage in a sentence or two. Then, in an additional sentence or two, describe what impact this passage will have on how you live.

Memory Verse

But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always *be* ready to *give* a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear. 1 Peter 3:15

Key Words/Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible.

Be Ready to Give a Defense (1 Peter 3:15)

Antitype (1 Peter 3:21)

Tool Box

Step 1: The Bible. Read the passage in a couple of different versions. If you are having trouble understanding a passage, choose a more dynamic version such as *New Living Translation* or *The Message*). To focus in on the exact meaning of a verse, choose a more literal translation such as *New American Standard Bible* or *New King James Version*.

Step 2: Study Tools. Use these to help you dig deeper. Background Information: 1) Unger’s Bible Dictionary 2) Bible Dictionaries online at biblestudytools.com and

