

# BIBLE TEACHING AND WORSHIP GUIDE



## FOR THE HOME-BASED CHURCH

Produced Weekly

*Be Willing to Share Christ's Sufferings*  
1 Peter 4:12-19

Copy this sheet for the Gathering Time, Bible Study, and Worship Experience leaders for the next meeting of the church.

## Leaders' Responsibilities:

**Important:** Each person who will be leading one of the three parts of a session during a series of sessions needs to have access to the "Introduction" article found at the beginning of each series (Bible Teaching #...). The weekly session "Background" located in the Teacher Preparation is much more specific to that day's study.

1. **The Gathering Time Leader** will gather all of the people together and help them prepare their minds and hearts for a wonderful worship experience before God. His/her responsibility is to introduce the congregation to the theme (content) and the Scripture that will be central to their worship experience for the day.

2. **The Bible Study Leader** will then help the people understand what the Scriptures have to say and teach us about the content of the study for the day. He/she will guide the people to make a general application of the study (ie: How does this Bible study apply to people today?)

3. **The Worship Time Leader** has the responsibility to use the theme and Scriptures to guide the congregation to make personal commitments to God's will for each one in regard to the study for the day. He/she will use others to lead in the music, taking the offering, ministry moment comments, and other activities and parts of the **Worship Time** that can aid in participatory worship.

## Prior to this Coming Session:

**Gathering Time Leader:**

**Bible Study Leader:**

**Worship Time Leader:**

## **Music Sources:**

**Refiner's Fire**, *The Worship Hymnal* #592; CCLI #426298

**Sanctuary**, *The Worship Hymnal* #588; CCLI #24140

**The Old Rugged Cross**, *The Worship Hymnal* #230; CCLI #19722 Public Domain

**The Power of the Cross (Oh, to See the Dawn)**, *The Worship Hymnal* # 232 ; CCLI #4490766

**I Have Decided to Follow Jesus**, *The Worship Hymnal* #434; CLI # 5077724 or 2151540

# 1

Copy this section for the Gathering Time leader.

**Gathering Time:** (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

## ***Be Willing to Share Christ's Sufferings***

### **Focal Text**

1 Peter 4:12-19

### **Background**

1 Peter 4:12-19

### **Main Idea**

Christians are to be willing to suffer on Christ's behalf, recognizing that God will be victorious and will be faithful to care for them.

### **Question to Explore**

What price are you willing to pay to serve Christ?

### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the church to commit themselves to greater willingness to serve Christ no matter the cost.

### **Gathering together:**

Sing **Refiner's Fire**, *The Worship Hymnal* #592; CCLI #426298

### **First thoughts:**

Many believers in the world today are experiencing great times of testing. Christian believers who have worshipped for generations in some countries are under severe persecution.

Other believers face trials such as failing health; financial obstacles, discouragements in family relationships. It is easy in such times to turn away from earlier commitments to follow Christ. We are called today to commit ourselves to greater willingness to serve Christ no matter the cost.

### **Closing the Gathering Time:**

Take time at this point to mention items of prayer concern for the church, announcements of ministry or activities, and anything else that needs to be shared with or by the congregation. Pray for these needs. Remember to praise God in prayer.

Break time! Take five minutes between sessions. Encourage children to use the washroom so that they won't need to leave during the Bible Study time.

Distribute youth/adult Bible study outlines or paper for note-taking, if available.

Also hand out the activity sheets for preschool and younger children to use during Bible Study and/or worship.

# 2

Copy this section for the Bible Study leader.

**Note to the Bible Study Leader:** Suggested teaching time for the Bible study should be about 35 minutes. Use the “Teacher Preparation” for your personal study during the week before the session. Use the “Bible Study Plan” for the actual session.

## Teacher Preparation

### *Be Willing to Share Christ's Sufferings*

#### **Focal Text**

1 Peter 4:12-19

#### **Background**

1 Peter 4:12-19

#### **Main Idea**

Christians are to be willing to suffer on Christ's behalf, recognizing that God will be victorious and will be faithful to care for them.

#### **Question to Explore**

What price are you willing to pay to serve Christ?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the church to commit themselves to greater willingness to serve Christ no matter the cost.

#### **Introduction to your personal study:**

Meditate on the following poem:

#### **THE REFINER'S FIRE**

He sat by a fire of seven-fold heat,  
As He watched by the precious ore,  
And closer He bent with a searching gaze  
As He heated it more and more.

He knew He had ore that could stand the test,  
And He wanted the finest gold

To mold a crown for the King to wear,  
Set with gems with a price untold.

So He laid our gold in the burning fire,  
Though we fain would have said Him, "Nay"  
And He watched the dross that we had not seen  
As it melted and passed away.

And the gold grew brighter and yet more bright;  
But our eyes were dim with tears,  
We saw but the fire --- not the Master's hand ---  
And questioned with anxious fears.

Yet our gold shone out with a richer glow,  
As it mirrored a form above  
That bent o'er the fire, though unseen by us,  
With a look of ineffable love.

Can we think that it pleased His loving heart  
To cause us a moment's pain?  
Ah, no! But He saw through the present cross  
The bliss of eternal gain.

So He waited there with a watchful eye,  
With a love that is strong and sure,  
And His gold did not suffer a bit more heat  
Than was needed to make it pure.

Author unknown – sometimes attributed to A.F. Ingler

## **Background:**

Please ask for and read the information contained in the "**Introduction**" article found at the beginning of this series (Bible Teaching #....) of Bible Study and Worship sessions. Whoever downloaded this session for you should have that material for you, as well.

## **Focusing on the Meaning:**

As you read these verses it is clear that Peter believed that suffering was inevitable for the Christian. Jesus suffered. Peter suffered. The churches would suffer.

The following is the thesis statement for this passage from a sermon by Kelly Grant entitled "Surviving Your Suffering". "Emerging from the myriad problems and hardships in life with an increased faith is possible for the Christian only when he or she understands the overriding plan of God and the purpose He has for all who are committed to Him in sincerity." Patience and maturity only come through the fire.

***“And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us”*** (Romans 5:3-5, King James Version).

Peter keeps coming back to the plan of God as he encourages the churches in Asia Minor. He is sovereign and all is under His supervision. This chapter of Peter deals principally with the manner in which the believers should bear their trials. He encourages them to a holy life in the midst of their persecutions. His overriding thought is for them to keep their eyes on Jesus.

You may have heard this, “I want to get what is coming to me.” When that is spoken it means, in most cases, “I want the good that is due me”. However, as we look at the passage for study today we might find ourselves saying “I want to get what is coming to me whether it is suffering or rejoicing.”

Peter’s letter is not about evangelizing the lost in a traditional sense. It is a letter of encouragement to those being tested by trials and tribulations. Steadfastness in the lives of the believers will be their witness to the pagan world around them. This passage is the conclusion of the themes begun in 3:13 which are persecutions, Christ’s sufferings, Christian duty, Christ’s second coming, and divine faith.

“He would have them pure and harmless, patient and submissive; faithful in the performance of their duties, and confidently looking forward to the time when they should be delivered”.<sup>1</sup>

Barnes writes that Peter exhorts believers to the following things in Chapter four:

Be armed with the same mind as Christ.

The end time is at hand.

Have mutual love one to another.

Be serious and loyal in everything undertaken.

Do not think the trials are strange.

The righteous will be saved with difficulty and the unrighteous will be destroyed.

Commit their souls to the Creator.

V. 12. ***“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”*** Some

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<sup>1</sup> “Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament”



translations have “Beloved” rather than “Dear Friends”. That may be a better translation. The word translated “beloved” is a common pastoral word conveying tenderness, compassion, affection, and care.<sup>2</sup> They are to trust God who tenderly and compassionately loves them.

The original text leads to a conclusion that there were some who were caught unaware and surprised by the circumstances in which they found themselves. Some were surprised because they were insulted, hated, or even tortured for their faith. It is not in character with what they thought would happen when they received Christ. As you ponder this idea think to yourself, “Is there someone I know who has been disillusioned by thinking this way?”

There was a time when Peter thought it strange that Christ would have to suffer. At one point in the garden of Gethsemane he drew his sword to defend Christ. In the thirty some odd years since that time Peter learned that suffering was to be a part of the Christian’s life.

Now Peter informs the churches that what is happening to them should not be a surprise. It is a test of their Christian character and faith. It is part of the refining process mentioned earlier. Neither should we think that it is something strange. All believers will experience either the same or something similar in their walk with God.

Do not be caught off guard by Satan. He is looking to trip up the faith of every believer by using trials and tribulations to discourage. Peter’s point is that God is using these trials and tribulations to strengthen their faith. Be aware of the contrast.

Warren Wiersbe in his book on 1<sup>st</sup> Peter entitled **Be Hopeful** says that the persecution that was coming upon them was not from people around them, but from the government above them.

F. B. Meyer, in his exposition of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, **Tried by Fire** wrote the following:

“Along this way the Master went. --- From the moment of his birth, when Herod sought to slay Him, to the last moment of his life, He was a lily among thorns, a silent lamb among strangers. His brethren hated Him, and could not speak peaceably to Him. Those whom He came to gather, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wing, refused Him with contempt and reproach, and finally wounded Him to death. There never was such a union in hatred as that which encircled Jesus as with a ring of forked flame, when He went to the cross. Ah, blessed One, Prince in the realm of misery, as in all other spheres, Thou has endured the contradiction of sinners against Thyself, till reproach broke Thy heart; and it is not for us to choose a happier pathway, or an easier lot, lest we should seem not to belong to Thee or to bear Thy name.”

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, “The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter”, Moody Publishers, Chicago, II, 2004, p. 249.

James wrote ***“Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations; Knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing”*** (James 1:2-4, American Standard Version).

If we try to bypass the suffering then we will bypass the glory. Whatever befalls a believer is to be faced with faith.

V. 13. ***“But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.”*** The fiery ordeal you are going through is so you will participate in the sufferings of Christ. You will be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. The tense of rejoice in the Greek text is continuous action, “keep on rejoicing”.

Once again Peter reminds his readers of the coming of Christ. That theme was a solid rock to the early church. It has been said, “It’s going to get a lot worse before it gets any better”. The suffering of the church will be fellowship with Christ as indicated by the word “participate”.

“Our present experience as we suffer for Christ’s sake is similar to a pregnant woman who feels discomfort and even pain as she anticipates her due date. When she gives birth, however, joy at the delivery of her child replaces the pain that she felt during her pregnancy. Similarly we groan now, but the hope of future joy should encourage us to hang on (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:17-18).<sup>3</sup>

***“Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you”*** (Matthew 5:11-12). Peter is passing on the teaching he had personally learned from Jesus.

The Christian’s eternal reward is related to his/her earthly suffering. Suffering reveals one’s faithfulness to Jesus.<sup>4</sup>

V. 14. ***“If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.”*** If you are insulted because you bear the name of Christ consider yourselves blessed. “The Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” Another way of putting it is that you are fortunate. Nothing that the world does to a believer will ever change or diminish one’s blessedness.

The church reflects the character and principles of Christ. Those antagonistic to believers are able to see those principles in their daily walk. It is exactly what Christ wants from believers. As one’s self recedes, Christ becomes more prominent. The purpose of God is for the believer to become conformed to the image of Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> “Notes on 1<sup>st</sup> Peter”, Dr. Thomas L. Constable, 2012 ed.

<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, p. 251.

V. 15. ***“If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.”*** There are sufferings that are not consistent with Christ’s sufferings or with the character of a Christian.<sup>5</sup> Suffering should not be for a crime. Do not murder and do not steal are among the Ten Commandments. You should not suffer even for meddling in the affairs of others. Take no comfort in suffering for sin as contrasted with comfort for suffering for your faith.

V. 16. ***“However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.”*** As a Christian do not be ashamed of suffering for Christ. Praise God that you have the opportunity to bear the name of Jesus. The judgment that will be for the lost will not touch those who have placed their trust in Christ as Lord.

John MacArthur entitles this section “Evaluate Suffering”. Suffering comes in various forms and from various sources. Suffering for Christ is blessed. Suffering for crimes is due process. Each believer is to evaluate suffering in light of his relationship to Christ.

V. 17. ***“For it is time for judgment to begin with God’s household”.*** Judgment or the fiery trials coming upon the populace will begin with Christians. It begins with the church, the household of God. The believers will suffer now. This suffering is not judgment for salvation for that is already accomplished. This is judgment designed for the testing of their works. Christians are admonished in this letter and elsewhere to be careful to do good works.

Remember that Jesus came under judgment and condemnation. If He was treated thus, then it should not be surprising that His followers will be treated the same. After all, they are being prepared for their heavenly home. ***“. . . and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?”*** The judgement of unbelievers is going to be much worse because they did not heed the gospel. They do not have the hope or the help that Christians will have when Christ returns.

What is happening must be set in the context of the end times. God is in control. What is happening is not an accident or a coincidence.

V. 18. ***“And, ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner’”.*** This is a quote from Proverbs 11:31.

“Judgment’ is the act of judging. God will judge people by his standards of what is right and wrong. Then he will reward or punish each person. It is not easy to live a Christian life. God wants Christians to be pure. He allows them to have troubles. Those troubles test their trust in God and make it more pure. But many people do not trust Jesus or obey him. Their lives are full of what is bad. They are wicked people. If they do not accept Jesus it will be awful for them when God comes to judge them. God will not

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<sup>5</sup> Arno Clement Gaebelain, “The First Epistle of Peter”.

forgive them. In Matthew 18:9 Jesus says they will go to 'the fire of hell'. This describes a terrible fate.<sup>6</sup> Hell is not something Christians wish upon those whose differ from them; it is the eternal separation from God which will come to those who do not know him as Saviour.

V. 19. ***“So then, those who suffer according to God’s will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good”***. The word translated “commit” is a banker’s term and it refers to a deposit in the bank for safe keeping. The bottom line is that believers should continue to do good committing themselves to a faithful God who will bring it all to a completion. There is no one else who can keep them as God can. The treasure of a believer is deposited in heaven.

Suffering is not an excuse for anyone to stop doing good works. The Greek word for Creator is only used here to describe God’s work. Peter reminds them of His power in the midst of their trials so they will not lose hope. The idea here is that there should be constant well doing.

Peter keeps the power of God foremost in the minds of his readers. Suffering should not be what they dwell on more than the loyalty of God to their well-being.

Oswald Chambers in his devotional book **My Utmost for His Highest** writes “To choose to suffer means that there is something wrong; to choose God’s will even if it means suffering is a very different thing. No healthy saint ever chooses suffering; he chooses God’ will, as Jesus did, whether it means suffering or not.”<sup>7</sup>

## **Your Goal as the Leader of this Bible Study:**

To lead the church to commit themselves to greater willingness to serve Christ no matter the cost.

## **For Personal Reflection:**

**What have I learned from this study?**

**What personal experience does this lesson bring to mind?**

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<sup>6</sup> Helen Pocock, “More Precious Than Gold”, An easy English commentary on 1 Peter.

<sup>7</sup> Oswald Chambers, “My Utmost for His Highest”, Evangelical Christian Publishing Association, USA, August 10.

**What is one action I will take this week to apply this Scripture passage to my life?**

## **Bible Study Plan** (Suggested time: 35 minutes)

### ***Be Willing to Share Christ's Sufferings***

Regroup the church after the Gathering Time and break by singing a chorus that young children can relate to—or another praise chorus if your congregation does not have children. Children who go to their own Bible teaching session should stay with the group until after this song. Have the preschoolers and children accompany the hymn with rhythm sticks, maracas, bells, etc.

**Begin by helping the group locate the *Focal Text* in their Bibles. Also, share with them the *Main Idea* to be learned from the Scriptures, and the *Questions to be Explored* by the group.**

#### **Focal Text**

1 Peter 4:12-19

#### **Background**

1 Peter 4:12-19

#### **Main Idea**

Christians are to be willing to suffer on Christ's behalf, recognizing that God will be victorious and will be faithful to care for them.

#### **Question to Explore**

What price are you willing to pay to serve Christ?

#### **Teaching Aim**

To lead the church to commit themselves to greater willingness to serve Christ no matter the cost.

#### **Connect with Life:**

Read the following story to the class as an introduction.

#### **IDENTIFIES WITH OUR SUFFERING**

His name was Joseph Damien, and you've probably heard his story before, but it bears repeating. A Belgian priest, he was sent in 1873 to minister to lepers in Hawaii. As soon as he arrived on Molokai, he began trying to build friendships with the residents of the leper colony, but they rejected him. He poured himself into this ministry, building a

small chapel and holding worship services. But hardly anyone responded. After 12 long years, he gave up. While standing on the pier about to board the ship that would take him back to Belgium, he looked down at his hands. The white spots he saw could mean only one thing. He had contracted leprosy. So instead of going home, he returned to his work in the leper colony.

The news of the missionary's disease spread through the community within hours, and soon the lepers --- hundreds of them --- had gathered outside his hut. They understood his pain and despair. The following Sunday when Damien arrived at the chapel, the small building was filled to overflowing. That was the beginning of a long and fruitful ministry.

What made the difference? Now the lepers knew that he understood their condition. There was no question about whether he cared or not.

In the same way, we have a God who has identified with our situation. Though without sin, our Savior experienced all the pain and frustration of earthly existence in order to bring us life.<sup>8</sup>

## **Guide the Study:**

Say: When the lepers knew Damian was one of them and could sympathize with them they were better able to handle their suffering. This is not a lesson about how to evangelize the lost. It is a lesson of encouragement for Christians of any gender or age who are experiencing suffering for the cause of Christ. It is a call to stand up and be counted. It is a call to remember who you are and by whose Name you are called.

### **I. Suffering Is a Positive Experience (vs. 12-14).**

Have a member read the three verses.

Tell the group. Suffering should not come as a surprise to any Christian. Be aware of the possibility of suffering at any time. Christ was persecuted and said that His followers would be also (Matthew 5:11-12).

Ask: Why do you think that some Christians believe that suffering should not be a part of a Christian's experience?

Individually share times when suffering was experienced.

Ask: Were you surprised?

Tell the class what you did? How did you cope with the suffering?

Say: Satan is out there looking for a Christian who is attempting to go it alone. Stay in the group. A lone believer is much more susceptible to Satan's lies.

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<sup>8</sup> Sermon Central Illustrations.

Ask: How is it possible for Peter to make the statement found in verse 12? (He had gone from the doubter to the defender in thirty years.)

Ask: Is Peter telling them it is going to get worse before it gets better?

Ask: How many times have you been insulted because you are a Christian?

Define insulted for the class. It is to be defamed, taunted, chided, or have it thrown back in your teeth.

Remind the class that the Spirit of God rests upon someone who has been insulted for Christ's sake.

An interesting question to ponder is this: If we are not suffering, are we doing what we should be doing?

Share: Peter was careful to point out to the churches that he is not talking about suffering for criminal acts or things brought upon one's self.

Repeat to the class one of the principle themes: Christ is coming back for each and every believer. (See John 14:1-3).

## **II. Suffering is a Time for Self Examination (vs. 15-18).**

Ask someone to read the passage before discussing it.

Seek answers: Have you ever asked yourself why you are being persecuted? When have you been persecuted? Why?

Question: If people make remarks about you because you have committed a crime, is that the kind of persecution Peter is concerned with?

Follow up: Should a Christian be ashamed of criminal conduct? Should he be ashamed for being Christ-like and persecuted?

Think about this: Is God judging His children now? (They were going through "fiery trials").

Ask: What is going to happen to the lost? (It is going to be much worse.)

If it is going to be worse for the lost, what should you and I be doing about it?

Tell the class: Matthew 28:19-20 tells to go and make disciples and baptize them and then teach them what Jesus taught. We have to be intentional in doing that. Just saying we are responsible and then forgetting it or not making plans to carry it out will not do. The very verses say that Jesus authorized it to be done.



Say to the group: Just because witness is hard or may not be within our comfort zone is no excuse for not doing it.

A thought for each of us to remember is: Jesus empowers us. Each believer has the power of the Holy Spirit within

### **Encourage Application:**

Finish the lesson with v. 19. The leader should read it aloud to the class.

Remind the class: When all is said and done the believers in Asia Minor, just as believers today, should commit and submit themselves to God the Creator of us all.

Have a time for commitment and prayer. Make an initial commitment or renew your commitment to Jesus.

If you have two or more youth, this is the time to give them the **Youth!!! Take Ten** page and allow them to move away from the adults and apply the lesson by and for themselves.

**Take a five minute break to separate the Bible Study and Worship Time.** Children may need to use the washroom again before worship.

# Youth!!! Take Ten

## Bible Study Application for Youth

You may wish to move away from the adults for the final five to ten minutes of the Bible study and help each other as youth to apply the lesson to your own needs.

### ***Be Willing to Share Christ's Sufferings*** 1 Peter 4:12-19

**A youth will lead the following activity and comments.** No adults need to be present. If possible, teens should take turns in leading the application time.

What do you think it means to be willing to share Christ's sufferings?

Can a young believer suffer for his/her faith?

Do Christians you know experience suffering?

What should you do to support a friend, a fellow believer, who is going through suffering?

**Worship Time** (Suggested time: 30 minutes)***Be Willing to Share Christ's Sufferings*****1 Peter 4:12-19****Beginning the Service:**

Choose to sing one or more of the following:

**Sanctuary**, *The Worship Hymnal* #588; CCLI #24140

**The Old Rugged Cross**, *The Worship Hymnal* #230; CCLI #19722 Public Domain

**The Power of the Cross (Oh, to See the Dawn)**, *The Worship Hymnal* # 232 ; CCLI #4490766

**Offering:****Praying for the World:**

The M people of the Amazon Basin number only about 1,000 in population, but that does little to diminish the fact that they are unreached for Christ. A strong people with a bloody and war-filled history, they have commonly relied upon violence and force when interacting with their tribal neighbours. The M people were also heavily involved in the rubber industry until its collapse in the 1930s. This involvement almost destroyed them and heavily eroded their community and cultural bonds. Today, they are a prominent voice for indigenous rights. The M people place their faith in shamans who serve a fearful spirit world. They do not know their true Creator and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

**Sharing Guide:**

**This sharing guide is written to assist the person who directs the worship time to reemphasize the teaching for the day and help guide the congregation to respond to God's call and will for their lives in regard to the scripture studied. The leader may choose to follow the guide closely. Or, he or she may wish to only use it to give direction and a concept for preparing an original message. The leader is free to choose other ways to communicate and share the concepts presented here.**

## What to Do and What Not to Do

### Introduction

During your Bible study time the emphasis was upon the suffering believers' experience because they are believers. Few men of this century have understood better the inevitability of suffering than Dietrich Bonhoeffer. He seems never to have wavered in his Christian antagonism to the Nazi regime, although it meant for him imprisonment, the threat of torture, danger to his own family and finally death. He was executed by the direct order of Heinrich Himmler in April 1945 in the Flossenburg concentration camp, only a few days before it was liberated. It was the fulfillment of what he had always believed and taught: "Suffering, then, is the badge of true discipleship. The disciple is not above his master. Following Christ means passive suffering because we have to suffer. That is why Luther reckoned suffering among the marks of the true Church, and one of the memoranda drawn up in preparation for the Augsburg Confession similarly defines the Church as the community of those 'who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake' . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ, and it is therefore not at all surprising that Christians should be called upon to suffer. In fact, it is a joy, and a token of his grace."<sup>9</sup>

We are a long way from 1945, but the words he spoke and the thoughts he had are still relevant for believers today. In this passage Peter begins with words expressing his desire to connect with them. He writes to "dear friends". He writes to churches that are close to his heart. As he wraps up his letter he gives four important instructions to the churches.

First of all, **don't be surprised** at what is happening to you. Do not act as if it is something strange that is happening to you. It has happened before not only to you, but also to those who preceded you. You have become a part of God's people and the world hates you for it. You have become as different to the world as daylight is to dark. As Christ was persecuted so will you.

Persecution is **not something for which you should be ashamed**. Think of it as a test God is placing upon you. Get ready to pass the test. At the graduation your faith will shine like refined gold. If you remember this then you will want to take the test and pass it. You will want to make it to the end.

If you commit a crime and are punished, then so be it. That is what the law demands and that is what you will get. Do not compare the two kinds of suffering.

There once was a farmer who interviewed some prospective workers. He especially liked one of the young men as he seemed joyful and able. He asked the man "What makes you think you can have the job?" The man answered, "I can sleep well when the

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<sup>9</sup> John R.W. Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture: The message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 53.

wind blows!” The farmer thought the answer was very strange, but he liked the man so he hired him.

Not long after a violent storm came in the night. It blew right over the farm. The farmer woke up and ran outside afraid for the damage there would be to his barns and stables if the doors were not closed properly or to his animals if they were not tied up properly. To his amazement he found everything in order and there was no damage.

He found the young man sleeping peacefully on a pile of hay in the barn. It was then that he understood what the young man had meant when he said, “I can sleep well when the wind blows.” He was fully prepared when the storms came and even when the master came to check on him! He was not put to shame.

Getting one’s house in order and thus being ready for Christ’s return should be a goal of every believer. No one wants to be caught unawares at the return of Christ. That, indeed, would be shameful.

Be sure and **commit your life to God.** Let go and let God have your life so God can use it for His glory. It is a total commitment with nothing held back.

The church has always been called to give its all. It is the church that stands as a beacon of light in a dark and sinful world.

Therefore, it is the church that will continue what Christ began. All that the church does is supposed to be under the heading of “**good works**”. By being visible and vocal the church proclaims the Gospel until Jesus returns. Peter admonishes the churches not to forget to continue in good works even when under severe persecution.

A major theme in the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is the return of Christ. For Peter and the churches in Asia Minor it was an imminent event. Just because 2000 years later He has not come does not change that. His return is always imminent.

Therefore, do not be surprised. Do not be ashamed. Do commit your all to Him. Do continue the good works that Christ began.

### **Call to Commitment:**

There has never been a time when somewhere in the world believers were not facing persecution. It would be overwhelming without Christ as one’s Saviour and Lord. As we finish today think carefully. Has there been a time in your life when you asked Christ to forgive your sins and become your Saviour? If not, this can be the day.

If you are a believer and are not growing in your faith, then commit yourself to repentance and change. Drifting along or maintaining the status quo is not an option in the Christian life.

## **Concluding the Service:**

Sing **I Have Decided to Follow Jesus**, *The Worship Hymnal* #434; CLI # 5077724 or 2151540