

Study 5

1 Peter 3v8-22 Jesus gives us courage to suffer for doing good, and not fear the world

The aim of **impact** is to make sure that as a whole CU and as groups of believers in every college, we are united in the gospel and in a desire to see people reached with that gospel. We do that by spending time in God's word.

Your role as an impact leader is vital, as the CU spend time together, to be reminded of the gospel, to support each other in gospel partnership, and be equipped by the gospel to go back out into college and university life, to live distinctively, and speak boldly for Jesus.

We're studying 1 Peter with those aims in mind: to be reminded of the gospel (Peter calls it 'the true grace of God' in 5v12), to support each other as we live 'as aliens and strangers in the world' (2v11), and to be equipped to 'live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (2v12), and 'always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have' (3v15). In particular, looking at 1 Peter will encourage us to expect suffering for following Jesus, and will spur us on to count it a blessing to be insulted for the name of Jesus.



Impact Group Time

We're aiming for Impact studies to fit into 1 hour max. That should give time to spend together being encouraged and challenged by God's word, and opportunity for the group to support each other in their evangelism, sharing and praying with each other about personal and college group evangelism. So here's how the timings might work:

40 mins Bible study *including* time to chat through implications

20 mins Pray in light of the passage. Chat & pray about how living & speaking for Jesus is going

Those timings within the hour will have to be a bit flexible – but the plan is that God's word will fuel discussion and prayer in the 2nd half of the impact group time. In the notes we're aiming to help you with that, making the opening discussion, and the applications evangelism focussed.

Leading your impact study

Remember the big context and theme of the letter. Peter is writing to young Christians who are facing hard times for following Jesus. He wants them to stand fast in the 'true grace of God' (5v12). On page 2 are a few **big questions** to help your groups unpack some of the riches of God's word in this passage. Don't worry if you don't get into all the detail, our aim is to be **encouraged and challenged by God's word** to want to **live for God more**, so that we'll be more up for **making Him known** to people. Use the **BigQ** questions to get people pulling ideas out of the passage, use the **Live** questions to help draw out the implications. You may need to add in some follow up questions to help people see how things fit together. The notes below should help (*lots this week sorry!*).

Some (hopefully helpful) notes.

3v8-12 In these verses, Peter both draws to a close his teaching since 2v11, and moves us on to the next section (focused on suffering). He starts 'Finally all of you', so after specific teaching to slaves, wives and husbands, we're now back to general principles for living the kind of good life Peter's been unpacking since 2v11-12. Again we see that it's going to be a life that's modeled on the Lord Jesus - v9 obviously reflecting the attitude of Jesus we saw in 2v23. Specifically in mind here, is the Christians attitude to brothers and sisters – the emphasis being on 'live in harmony with one another' and 'love as brothers'. How will Christians silence the ignorant watching world, and attract them to the gospel if they are filled with hatred and in-fighting among themselves. The way we relate to each other as Christians is a key and potent part of our witness, just as much as the submission to authorities on 2v13-17, or the enduring of unjust suffering we've already seen. This should have big implications for you as a group of Christian in college. How are you seen by outsiders? What do they make of the way you relate to others, perhaps particularly those from different churches. Do we treat all brothers with love, compassion and humility? v10-12 give us another angle on the 'good life'. It involves our tongue, and don't underestimate the impact of your godliness on your relationship with God. The person who is not living this life, including vv8-9 (so not loving brothers etc) is forgetting that it impacts on your relationship with God, v12.

3v13 poses what you'd think should be an easy question to answer. If we are living these kinds of good lives, 'Who is going to harm you?' The surprise answer is, as we've already seen from 2v19-21, is that the good life does lead to suffering. This suffering is at the hands of the watching non-Christian world – See 2v12, 15; [3v1 in terms of these lives being lived in front of un-believers] 3v16. A new theme is introduced here (which is actually teased up for us if we look at the quote in v10-12 in it's Psalm 34 context, see Ps 34v4, 7, 9, 11), that of fearing God, not the world.

3v13-17 Fearing God and not the world, is at least in part to be a motivation for living these good, distinct lives. If we don't fear God over the world, when we do start to get a hard time for being a Christian, we will give up, duck

our heads down and just blend in, rather than standing out! In v14, Peter quotes from Isaiah 8, the context being Israel tempted to fear Assyria attacking. Here, Peter is happy to do a straight swap, 'setting apart Christ as Lord', is the same as fearing the LORD almighty (Isaiah 8v13)! All around us people crave the approval of the world. Christians are to live for Jesus, craving His approval, valuing his opinion of us more than the worlds, fearing him and not what people might think, or say, or do. That might be easy when it's just the odd snigger now and then, but much harder when it does get physical. But how would we ever stand in the face of more severe persecution, if we're not willing to be insulted for the sake of following Jesus!? Maybe there is a reason we do not face more serious opposition, we just wouldn't stand. V15 makes a similarly challenging link, it's our suffering, for doing good, that will lead to people asking us to 'give the reason for the hope we have'. We often use this verse just in regard to people noticing our different lives, but it seems that it's specifically our hope in the face of persecution that makes us stand out especially, and get noticed by the watching world. Again, challenging to consider the links here, maybe if we suffered more, more people would hear and believe the gospel, and why don't we suffer, because we don't live distinctively enough to get the worlds back up. Another good question, is could we give the reason for our hope, as Peter says we should be able?

Just in case we get the wrong end of the stick, Peter reminds us of that the way we are to witness, v15-16, gently with respect, keeping a clear conscience. So just suffering for being bolshy, abrupt, direct and provocative for the sake of it, is not being called for here. It is exactly the opposite, by the godly, Christ-likeness of our lives, we expose the world, and it may result in gospel opportunities (Obviously this passage isn't the Bible's only teaching on evangelism, so sharing the great news about our hope in Jesus, isn't restricted to times when we're suffering and get asked. In fact, if we're not really suffering, the likelihood is you won't be asked!) Given this link, between our godly lives, suffering for it and evangelistic opportunities, Peter repeats, v17, that it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good. Like we saw in 2v21, to this we were called, following in the steps of Jesus (the pattern of suffering now, and glory later – see 1v11 & 5v10).

V18-22 Oh dear, looks like there isn't much time for this! Martin Luther thought they were the hardest verses in the Bible! The key is not get bogged down asking who are the spirits? When did Jesus go? Where/what is this prison? Etc. (although they are obviously valid questions, and you are allowed to chat about them – you might want to look up 4v6; 2 Peter2v4-5; Jude v6). The '*For*' at the start of v18 is key; Peter is going to tell us *why* it is better to suffer... *because*... and it's all about Jesus and his death, and the victory he wins by death over sin and judgement. There is a **repeated pattern** of **down** (to sin/judgement) and **up** to salvation, seen in i) Jesus death on the cross, Jesus preaching to the spirits, Noah's salvation in the ark through the judgement of the flood, our salvation pictured in baptism (down into the waters of death and judgement, up to new life), and Christ resurrection from the dead. Why is it better, a blessing even to suffer? That's the pattern of our salvation in Jesus, suffering now, glory later. As we suffer, we need to look to Jesus. We need to disconnect the link that says '*suffering = something is wrong*', and we need to see that through suffering, God has won our salvation by Jesus taking our sin and God's judgement for sin. (If you have more questions on that section, do feel free to email me! matt_graham@hotmail.co.uk)

THE STUDY (40MINS)

- **The Big Idea:** If we live good lives, Peter expects us to suffer, we won't do that if we fear the world, only if we set apart Christ as Lord. In our suffering we need to look to Jesus and his victory over sin and judgement.
- **Ponder (discussion question to kick off with):** What do you think your non-Christian mates think about the way Christians treat each other? Whose opinion matters most to you? Has anyone ever asked you 'to give the reason for the hope that you have'?

Big Questions for 2v13-3v7

Catch-up Q: What have we seen about the kind of good lives Peter wants us to live?

BigQ1: What else do we learn here about the kind of 'good lives Peter wants us to live? What are the surprises? Why don't we think like this?

Live: What are the implications for how we relate to each other as Christians in a CU context. What are the particular areas where we need to work hard to love each other as brothers, and show compassion and humility?

BigQ2: Why do you think we don't suffer very much? What would bring more suffering? What does this expose? What would you say to someone if they asked you 'to give the reason for the hope you have'?

Live: If Jesus' death encourages us to suffer, how can we be better at pointing each other to Jesus?

IMPACT: try and **sum up** the big impact of this passage for you as individuals, and as a college group.

- **Share and pray:** What do you find hardest to grasp or believe from this passage? What challenges you the most? How do you need to change your thinking, or your behavior in light of this passage? Pray together.

REMAINING IMPACT GROUP TIME (20MINS) The remaining time is a great opportunity to support each other as Christians in college. Share the joys and struggles, particularly your personal evangelism.