

Study 7

1 Peter 4v12-19 time for a total re-think – the joy of suffering!?

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.



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

As the letter draws to a close, Peter gives us a brilliant summary of his teaching about **suffering**, and once again points us ahead to the **glory** we will have with him in the future. These are great verses that encourage us not to give up, but to keep going, just like Peter's overall aim (5v12).

4v12 Last week, the non-Christian watching world was **surprised** to see how differently we live a) to how we used to, and b) to them. As we've seen over the last few weeks, that often leads to unjust suffering, being 'malign[ed]' in v4. Our passage (4v12-19) starts off with something we are **not to be surprised** at. We should have got it by now, but Peter knows how hard we find it to disconnect the link in our thinking between suffering, and something being wrong, so he really spells it out – '*do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you... as though something strange were happening*'. Peter goes on to highlight again that it is specifically suffering as a Christian he has in mind, and gives us even more reasons to '*stand firm*' (5v12), despite suffering, but more than that – to see suffering as something to rejoice in, and count as a blessing!

The reasons for suffering Peter makes it really clear in these verses that the suffering he's talking about is for being a follower of Jesus. It's there in v13, it's Christ's suffering we're sharing in. In v14, it is because of the '*name of Christ*'. V15 puts it around the other way (like 2v20), you should not suffer for these other things. V16 again is positive and very explicit - '*Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian*'. In v17, *whatever is happening* (see below) is happening to the '*household of God*'. And finally, in v19 (as we saw in 3v17) it is '*according to God's will*'.

The reasons to suffer Also in these verses, Peter gives his hearers, including us, lots of reasons to be willing to suffer for being Christian.

i) In v13, we share in Christ's suffering. We should be clear by now, that ever since Jesus, the pattern is suffering now, and glory later. So we should be happy to follow in his footsteps (2v21). If that's not enough, we also know that Christ's suffering and death, won our salvation, so we have nothing to fear from suffering and even death in this life, because suffering can't endanger our inheritance, or take away our life in the Spirit.

ii) in v14, we're to count suffering as a blessing, '*because, the Spirit of Glory and of God rests upon you*'. Our normal categories describing those who have the Spirit probably don't include suffering. Peter wants us to change that mindset. The blessings of having God's Spirit dwelling in us includes sharing in the suffering of Christ. In this sense, suffering for being a Christian should give us great assurance. If by the suffering and death of Christ, we are alive in the Spirit (3v18,21;4v6) - the Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our glorious future in heritage (Eph 1v13-14), then suffering can do nothing; insults cannot drive the blessing of the Spirit from us, in fact, we can even count suffering a blessing, as it reminds us that we're following in Jesus footsteps of suffering now, glory later (1v6,v11;4v13;5v10). This is a new thought from Peter. We saw in 3v14 that if we suffer for being Christian '*you will be blessed*'. Now Peter makes it even more explicit - '*you are blessed*'. Also, although glory is future –

when Jesus returns, in some way we have glory now, as we suffer like Jesus, for being a follower of Jesus. Someone put it like this – “Suffering leads to glory, and suffering to some extent tastes like glory”. So a mark of being a genuine Spirit filled Christian is unjust suffering, not necessarily the sorted looking, passionate and gifted Christian who is experiencing God and feeling close to Him. In the pain and trials of suffering, we can know we have the Spirit of God resting on us.

iii) The 3rd motivation Peter gives is in v17, and has to do with a Fatherly/family judgement from God now in the present, ahead of final judgement for the non-Christian. Like 1v6-7 & 17 (see the language of 4v12 that points us to 1v7), God seems to use trials and suffering as present judgement, or *discipline* – so that our faith will be proved genuine, so that we stand fast and will not be judged/condemned on the final day. (See 1 Corinthians 11v29-32; James 1v2-4). Loving discipline from God now that helps us stand fast, is far better than condemnation on the last day! End judgement is also in view. It is a how much more argument, if we find judgement uncomfortable, as God acts and judges to keep us for that day, how much more uncomfortable will judgement be for the unbeliever? We’re not being encouraged to rejoice in others judgement, rather the application for us comes in v19... *‘therefore...’*

iv) ...we can entrust ourselves to our faithful Creator, v19. The quote from Proverbs 11 in between, fits with this judgement theme. We are to keep an eye to future judgement, because in the present, it will often feel as if the wicked get off, and the righteous get a bum deal. Even though our salvation is ‘hard’ (not that salvation is uncertain in anyway, just that the road that leads to it is hard), it is certain because God is faithful (plus we also know that Christ’s suffering has won our salvation), and He is the creator (so He is powerful! He is more than able to keep our inheritance for us, and us for our inheritance 1v4-5). Also notice that we’re to entrust our *‘souls’*, not that we don’t entrust the rest, but even if we do suffer, and even if the worst was to happen to us, we can trust God for what happens after death.

The way to suffer In all this, Peter is challenging our outlook and attitude towards suffering.

V12-13 Don’t be surprised, but rejoice. In v13, we should rejoice in suffering now, because that will result in rejoicing when Jesus returns and His glory is revealed (like 1v7).

V16-18 Don’t be ashamed, but praise God/glorify – for the name of Jesus, and our salvation in Him, and that we have been counted worthy to suffer for the name of Jesus (Acts 5v41), and we know what that leads to (v14).

V19 Don’t give up, entrust yourself to God and keep doing good. At every opportunity, Peter discourages us from looking inwards, doubting and ducking our heads down and giving up. Keep doing good... and we know where that leads!

THE STUDY (40MINS)

- **The Big Idea:** we need to radically alter our attitude, to suffering, get rid of worldly thinking & stand up for Jesus
- **Ponder (discussion question to kick off with, before you read the passage):** What do you rejoice in? When do you consider yourself most blessed? What are you most ashamed of?

Big Questions for 2v13-3v7

Catch-up Q: What surprised the non-Christians in 4v1-11?

BigQ1: What does Peter tell us about suffering in v12? How does that fit with your attitude?

Dig: Get your group into pairs, and find all the ways Peter encourages our attitude to suffering in v12-19.

Live: What questions should we ask ourselves after a section like this? How do you compare in terms of what you rejoice in, when you feel blessed, and what you’re ashamed of?

Live: List all the ways the world’s view is opposite to Peter’s. How can we help each other believe and put this and put it into practice? How should the reality of v17b be a huge motivation to live good lives, and be unashamed of speaking the name of 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 behaviour 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.*

- **Share the names of 5 friends** you’re seeking to spend time with and share Jesus with in the rest of term.
- **Pray for the evangelistic BBQ on Saturday 6th June**
- **Pray for Release**, the mini events week at the end of term 11-13th June. Watch out for details, and pray that many would hear and believe the good news of Jesus in those last few weeks.
- **Pray that during exams**, Christians would be distinct and a witness

Why not commit to going to your college bar after impact, to spend time with mates and spread the great news about Jesus!