

UNDER PRESSURE

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

1st Peter 4.12-19 | August 19, 2018

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue in Peter's first letter to "God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia." As we have seen, these early followers of Jesus were under pressure in the culture around them. Last week we saw how we can suffer when we renounce sin. This week, we engage the reality of suffering because we claim the name of Christ.

II. Connecting with One Another

What stories do you think of when you hear about people suffering for their faith?

III. Study the Text

a. Read 1st Peter 4.12.

It must have come as a surprise to these early Christians that despite Jesus' sacrificial death and resurrection, they would still experience suffering – and suffering for their faith! How does Peter respond to their surprise? Why do you think he says this? Have you ever been surprised by suffering?

b. The image of fire is often applied to testing or persecution, even in modern conversation. Can you think of any examples of this?

Fire is also a symbol of God's holiness. Recall some examples of fire as representative of God's holiness or trying look through a Bible concordance (or biblegateway.com).

Which do you think is in Peter's mind here in 4.12? Why?

c. Read 1st Peter 4.13-14.

Here Peter may be recalling his own experience year's prior (see Acts 5.17-42). One author explains, "Far from being upset about such treatment, Christians should be glad that they are considered worthy to be set alongside their Master in this respect," as Peter will discuss in 5.10.

Has your faith ever prompted suffering? Have you ever experienced joy in the midst of suffering?

d. Recall that Jesus himself warned his disciples that they would suffer verbal abuse (see Matthew 5.11 and John 15.2). And they did (see Acts 5.41, 9.16, 21.13, James 5.10, 3rd John 7, and Revelation 2.3)!

How do Christians experience such things in our country? Around the world?

Since we are blessed to receive this suffering, how should we respond to it?

- e. Read 1st Peter 4.15-16.

The term Christian was originally an insult, because followers of Jesus were acting like him (see Acts 11.26). In fact, "Christian" only appears in the Bible 3 times, "disciple" appears 269 times. Dallas Willard concludes in his book *The Great Omission*, "The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ."

Reread verse 16, with that mind. If "Christian" is not a name these folks would use to self identify, what would it mean to "bear that name"?

What does it mean for you to bear that name (live as Jesus' disciple) in your circle of influence? How are you different than other non-Christians around you?

- f. Read 1st Peter 4.17-19.

Peter returns to a theme he introduced in 1.6-7. Why do you think he continually compares followers of Jesus to a precious metal such as gold? When have you been refined like a precious metal?

- g. The quote in verse 18 recalls an early Greek translation of Proverbs 11.31 (called the Septuagint). Why do you think Peter quotes this verse? What does he mean by it?
- h. How has the Holy Spirit spoken to you through this study of God's Word?
What will you do because of it?
How can others pray for you?

IV. Pray

- a. Lift up those around the world who are currently suffering for their faith as followers of Jesus,
- b. Ask God to prepare you to endure suffering, that you might rejoice in "bearing the name" of Christ.

(Click onto opendoorsusa.org to learn more about supporting persecuted Christians worldwide)

V. Digging Deeper

- a. Peter refers to the experience of these early Christians as a "fiery ordeal." One of the best-known references to fire is the experience of Shadrach, Mesach, and Abednego recorded in Daniel 3. Compare and contrast that story with Peter's instruction in 4.12-19. What similarities or differences do you notice?
- b. Sharing in Christ's sufferings means that we will also benefit from their consequences. See Romans 8.17, 2nd Corinthians 4.10, and Philippians 3.10.
- c. The "Spirit of glory" that rests on us in verse 14 is probably an allusion to the "Shekinah" glory. See Exodus 40.34-35, 1st Kings 8.11, and Matthew 17.5. When you suffer for Christ *that* glory rests on you!
- d. The refining of metal as a metaphor for God's people is throughout the Scriptures: Psalm 66.10, Isaiah 48.10, Jeremiah 9.7, Daniel 11.35 & 12.10, Zechariah 13.9, and Malachi 3.2-3.