

HOPE AGAIN: When Life Hurts and Dreams Fade

STUDY TWO

Hope Beyond Suffering: How We Can Smile Through Suffering

1 Peter 1:1–12

We all understand what it means to hurt. Pain is the one common element that unites us together. Because pain is such a pervasive problem, we need a potent prescription. Peter's first letter dispenses the remedy by telling us how we can endure pain, how we can handle suffering—not with clenched teeth but with a deep sense of peace and even joy.

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

EVERY single human being who has ever lived knows well the experience of deep emotional or physical pain. Though the seasons of greatest hurt come and go, and while each person's experience with pain is vastly different, no one can deny that suffering is an inescapable reality for *everyone*.

The good news of Jesus Christ promises many things like eternal life, everlasting peace, and extraordinary hope. More specifically, Jesus' life, death, and resurrection will, one day, fully eliminate the powers of sin and death as well as remedy and counteract all their painful effects.

Yet this perfect healing from our suffering won't arrive on this side of life.

Is it possible to find hope in today's pain and even to smile when life hurts most? According to the apostle Peter, the answer is *yes* . . . but *only* because of the good news of Jesus Christ. This *Searching the Scriptures* study continues our detailed exploration of Peter's encouraging words to a group of early Christians enduring a season of fretful suffering.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

You may be feeling the sting of suffering in your body, mind, heart, or soul this very minute. As you open God’s Word today, ask Him to remind you of the eternal hope you have in Jesus Christ and the timely hope of His presence.

Father, this life is painful, but I know that You will one day wipe the final tears from my eyes. I look forward to enjoying the eternal life You have promised me. Reveal to me the hope of my salvation through Your Word, and use this time to strengthen and guide me. I know You are with me every step of the way. Thank You. In Jesus’ name, amen.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Whenever you turn to a new book of the Bible, you should ask yourself, “What type of literature am I reading?”¹ First Peter belongs in the *letters* genre. Letters in the ancient world were similar to letters we write today. That means they are *real* documents written by *real* people for *real* reasons in *real* circumstances.

It is impossible, therefore, to understand and apply the message of 1 Peter without first knowing the author, the audience, and the occasion for writing. According to *1 Peter 1:1*, who is the author of this letter, and who is the audience?

Author: _____

Audience: _____

Peter’s readers were forced to scatter for many reasons, some fleeing their homes because of the ever-increasing pressure of persecution against believers in Jesus Christ. Turn now to *1:1–12* to discover Peter’s purpose in writing to these refugees—to show that Christians can have hope in Jesus Christ, who is greater than even the worst kinds of suffering.



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1 Peter 1:1–12



Observation: Hopeful Words for the Hurting

Read *1 Peter 1:1–12* slowly two or three times. Look carefully at every word, at every phrase, at every sentence, and simply ask, “What does this say?” While it is easy to jump ahead and wonder what the passage *means*, we must always observe a passage thoroughly before we can develop sound interpretations and meaningful applications.²

According to *1:3*, what do those who are “born again” obtain because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ? Read this verse using a few different Bible translations to see the full scope of Peter’s point.

Jesus’ death and resurrection also provide believers with a “priceless inheritance” (*1:4*). What is the nature of this inheritance?



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1 Peter 1:1–12

In *1 Peter 1:5*, Peter explains that God offers protection to those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. According to this verse, what does God protect His children from?

Peter acknowledges the hard reality that every human being “must endure many trials” (*1:6*). Yet he demonstrates a distinctively Christian perspective. According to *1:7*, what unique benefit does that Christian perspective offer through suffering?

What kind of attitude toward God does Peter celebrate in *1:8*?



Hope Beyond Suffering: How We Can Smile Through Suffering

1 Peter 1:1–12

According to 1 Peter 1:9, what is the result of trusting Jesus Christ?

For those of us who know Jesus Christ, our final chapter is heaven—when we step into the presence of the living God. Nothing else on this earth qualifies as the final chapter. So we always have this hope—this living hope. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: Faith, Hope . . . and Trials

Peter originally composed his letters in Greek, and while our English Bible translations are wholly reliable, not every Greek word has a one-to-one English counterpart. Thankfully, the meanings of key theological terms aren't buried in the sands of time. Even if you don't know Greek, you can use Bible study tools to dig deep and unearth the significance of these words.

Peter wrote to those who “must endure many trials” (1 Peter 1:6), and while he could have used many different words to depict his readers' suffering, he chose the word *peirasmos*. Look up this term using Bill Mounce's Greek lexicon available at billmounce.com. In what ways can you translate *peirasmos* into English? How does this term help you understand Peter's point in 1:7?



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1 Peter 1:1–12

Faith is a term that pops up so often in Christian vocabulary, few ever stop to ponder its supreme importance. In the ancient Greco-Roman world, *faith* carried undertones of trust or even allegiance. In light of this contextual understanding, what is the nature of a faith-based relationship with Jesus? How does enduring a season of suffering strengthen a Christian's faith?

Peter always clung to the hope he had in Jesus Christ, and he wanted his readers to do the same. Look up *hope* in the *Encyclopedia of the Bible* at biblegateway.com. What (or who) is the object of the Christian's living hope? How does Scripture's perspective of hope differ from the conventional usage of the term *hope* today?

How do trials, faith, and hope relate to one another?



Hope Beyond Suffering: How We Can Smile Through Suffering

1 Peter 1:1–12

For you who suffer, only Christ's perspective can replace your resentment with rejoicing. And for you who seek, only Christ's salvation can change you from a spectator to a participant. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Israel's Suffering Servant

At the end of the introduction of his first letter, Peter said, “This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you” (1 Peter 1:10). What prophetic words did Peter have in mind as he reflected on the needs of his suffering brothers and sisters?

Though Peter doesn't address a specific Old Testament prophecy in the introduction to his letter, later in 2:22, he quotes *Isaiah 53:9*—a key chapter that depicts a Servant of Israel who would suffer on behalf of His people. Peter likely had this chapter in mind as he wrote to his suffering brothers and sisters. According to 53:1–3, 7–9, what kind of suffering would this Servant endure?

Though these trials would be severe, the Servant would recognize that He would need to persevere for a greater purpose. According to 53:4–6, 10–12, what did this Servant's suffering accomplish?



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1 Peter 1:1–12

How was this prophecy of Israel's Suffering Servant ultimately fulfilled? How would the words of this prophecy offer hope to Peter's readers enduring their own kind of suffering?

Although Jesus suffered greatly, "it was our weakness he carried" (*Isaiah 53:4*). He carried our sins to the cross, and He carries us through our fiery trials today. For that, we can smile as we rejoice.



Application: Rejoicing Even in the Suffering

The words of Peter's letter are as true today as they were nearly 2,000 years ago. You may not have needed to flee from your home because of persecution, but you likely are facing faith-testing trials today.

What kinds of remedies does the world offer to soothe the sting of life's pains? Have you ever tried to find relief from your suffering in these dead hopes? What was your experience like? What lessons did you learn?



Hope Beyond Suffering: How We Can Smile Through Suffering

1 Peter 1:1–12

How have your past trials tested and strengthened your faith in Jesus Christ?

Hope found in anything other than Jesus Christ will leave your heart feeling empty and dry. Yet those who place their trust in Him can experience abundant, overflowing joy. Peter teaches that we can rejoice because . . .

1. *We have a living hope.*
2. *We have a permanent inheritance.*
3. *We have a divine protector.*
4. *We have a developing faith.*
5. *We have an unseen Savior.*
6. *We have a guaranteed deliverance.*

As you consider the suffering you've experienced in the past week, month, or year, which of these six timeless truths offer you strength to endure?



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1 Peter 1:1–12

God never promises that all suffering will cease the moment we place our faith in Jesus. That's just wishful thinking, not hope. True hope always looks to Jesus and His perfect sacrifice and rejoices in expectation of the wonderful promise of the things to come—no matter how hard the suffering is in the present.

It is because of this living hope that Peter could say, “Be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead” (1 Peter 1:6).



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for offering me living hope in Your Son. Though I eagerly await the day of His return—the day when all tears of sorrow will dry up—I ask You to use my present trials to strengthen my faith. Give me the ability to trust You and rejoice, even when my suffering is at its worst. I pray these things in Jesus' hopeful name. Amen.

ENDNOTES

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 121.
2. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, “[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#).”

