

(1 Peter) - How to Handle Hardship



- How do you usually respond to suffering? Do you fall apart? Do you stress out?

Suffering will either make us bitter or better—all depending upon how we respond. Bible teacher Bruce Wilkinson agrees and writes: “Persecution can either cause you to grow or grumble in the Christian life. It all depends on your response!” (*Talk Thru the Bible*, p.469)

On July 18, A.D. 64, Rome was set on fire by the emperor, Nero. He did this in order to build new buildings but first had to destroy the already existing ones. Many people died, families were homeless, and the bitter resentment towards Nero was severe. Nero sought to shift the blame away from himself and accused the Christians. As a result, vicious persecution broke out against the followers of Christ. The believers in Rome needed spiritual strengthening and instruction because of their suffering. Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this epistle to encourage and strengthen them.

Central Lesson:

God has His **REASONS** for allowing suffering—we must **TRUST** Him and **RESPOND** in the right way.

Author: The author of the book is **PETER**.

The early church universally accepted the authorship of Peter. This is also supported by the internal evidence in the book. First, the Apostle Peter's name is given as the author (1:1). Second, there are similarities between phrases in this epistle and Peter's sermons as recorded in the Book of Acts (for example compare 1 Pet. 1:20 with Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 4:5 with Acts 10:42). Peter was a fisherman whom Christ called to follow Him and become a fisher of men (Mark 1:17-18). Peter occupied a central role in the early church and spread the gospel throughout the Roman Empire. Tradition claims that Peter eventually was arrested by the Romans and crucified upside down prior to Nero's death in A.D. 68.

Date: A.D. **62-64** possibly from Rome (The mention of Babylon in 1 Peter 5:13 was code for Rome which was persecuting Christians).

Key Verse: 1 Peter 1:7.

“These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.” NLT.

Key Chapter: Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 presents a clear focused emphasis on how Christians should respond to suffering. The chapter shows the proper attitude that Christians should have (4:1-6) and how to behave (4:7-19).

Key Words:

- **SUFFER** or Suffering (1:6; 2:19, 20, 21, 23; 3:14, 17; 4:1, 12, 15, 16, 19; 5:10).
- **HOPE** (1:3, 13, 21; 3:5, 15).

Theme: God has His **REASONS** for allowing suffering—we must trust Him and respond in the right way.

Peter tells us why God allows suffering and how we should respond to it. Peter knew his readers would be facing more severe persecution in the days ahead. He wrote this epistle to give them God's perspective on the subject. He warned them to not be surprised (4:12) at the suffering that would come their way. He encouraged them to prepare their mind with anticipation (4:1). Even more, he added that they should count it a privilege to suffer for Christ (4:13-14). The *Life Application Study Bible* explained, “Peter new persecution firsthand. Beaten and jailed, he had been threatened often. He had seen fellow Christians die and the church scattered. But he knew Christ, and nothing could shake his confidence in his risen Lord. So Peter wrote to the church scattered and suffering for the faith, giving comfort and hope, and urging continued loyalty to Christ.” (*Life Application Study Bible* Introduction to 1 Peter).

Peter addressed several practical areas of life that can be impacted by suffering. He wanted them to respond in the right way.

One Bible teacher points out that Peter is called “The Apostle of Hope,” as John was “The Apostle of Love,” and Paul was “The Apostle of Faith.” In short, the central message of 1 Peter is that God has His reasons for allowing suffering—such as strengthening and purifying us. We must trust Him and determine to respond in the right way even when we don't understand why we are experiencing suffering.

John MacArthur adds: “Since the believers addressed were suffering increasing persecution...the purpose of this letter was to teach them how to live victoriously in the midst of that hostility: (1) without losing hope; (2) without becoming bitter; (3) while trusting in their Lord; and (4) while looking for His second coming.” (*The MacArthur Bible Handbook*, p.481-482)

Outline: The *Life Application Study Bible* outlines the book as:

- I. God's great blessings to his people (1:1-2:10)
- II. The conduct of God's people in the midst of suffering (2:11-4:19)
- III. The shepherding of God's people in the midst of suffering (5:1-14)

Central Lesson:

God has His reasons for allowing suffering—we must trust Him and respond in the right way.

How will you respond to suffering—God's way or your way? Will you become bitter or better? Will you grumble or grow? Will you trust God in the dark hours of suffering when you don't understand why?

- ▶ Accept Christ as your Savior. ▶ As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ.
- ▶ Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ▶ Attend a small group. ▶ Read the Bible this week & journal meaningful verses. ▶ Pray for friends that need Jesus.