



Facing the Challenge of **a hostile world**

An eight-week course for home groups and cell groups

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Focus Radio 2007

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Introduction to the Leaders' Guide

Welcome to the 'Facing the Challenge of a hostile world' course. This course is designed for home groups, cell groups, Christian Unions and adult Sunday schools. You can also use it in youth groups or in schools, or for personal study.

The world around us is becoming more and more hostile to faith in Jesus Christ: a worldwide flood of 'hate crime' laws is clamping down on freedom of speech and promoting active discrimination against followers of Christ. In the UK, one in five Christians believes they face discrimination in their local community because of their faith. One in four believes they are discriminated against at work, and one in three believes that the way the media portrays Christian faith discriminates against them.

Our purpose in this course is to explore what the Bible says about how we as followers of Christ should respond when the world around us meets us with hostility and rejection.

The course takes eight sessions to complete. When you use it with a group, each session is designed to last about 50 minutes. This is so the group will have time to do other things together too (pray, talk, eat and drink...).

This book is the leader's guide. It's designed to help you lead your group through the course. If there's more than one leader, each leader needs a copy of this guide. However, don't give it to members of the group! Give them the question sheet for group members.

Give out these sheets in advance of the session if you can. This will help members of the group to get the most out of the study, by giving them a chance to think about the questions and to look up the Bible references before the session. If you do this, you may want to give group members an opportunity at the beginning of the session to mention any particular questions or difficulties they've had. Don't necessarily respond to these straight away, but do make sure that you cover them in the course of the session.

Each session includes:

Purpose

A brief explanation of the purpose of the session – what we hope group members will learn through this session. This is for you as the leader – **don't** share it with group members at the start of the session!

Getting started

Each session begins with some questions to get people thinking and talking about the key issues. Before you start on these, it would be helpful to spend a few minutes reviewing the 'to do' activity from the previous session.

The Bible

This section includes some Bible passages to look up, and some questions to help group members think about them. For more information on the passages referred to, we recommend www.bible.org. Use the '[List articles... by passage](#)' link to help you find the appropriate resources.

Real life

Here are some questions to help us apply what the Bible says to our lives today. This course is meant to be very practical, so it's important for you as the leader to focus strongly on the application. Be as specific as you can, and encourage the members of the group to think through what they will do differently because of this session. It would be good to end the session with a brief time of open prayer, so that group members can pray through what they've learned and apply it to their lives.

To do

Each session includes activities to do at home. Encourage the members of the group to complete these activities. This will help them to get the most out of the session.

Going deeper

Most of the sessions also include some extra material for members of the group who want to go into the subject in more depth, for example book recommendations or web site links.

The questions and Bible readings are here to help you, not to tie you down! Feel free to leave out some of the questions or Bible passages, or to put in your own questions and Bible passages. You know what will work best for your group!

We have included suggested answers to some questions, but not all. For 'open-ended' questions, you as the leader may be happy to let the discussion go in whatever direction it is taken. However, for some of the questions, the answers given here include points that we believe are important to draw out during the discussion.

You may copy or print the question sheets that go with each session, to give out to members of the group.

We would like to hear from you how the course goes with your group, and how it could be improved for future users.

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1

Hope in the future (1 Peter 1:1-12)

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that when the world around us treats us with hostility, we can look forward in hope to the great future God has planned for us.

Getting started

1. How do the people around us view followers of Jesus Christ?

The world around us is becoming more and more hostile to our faith in Jesus Christ: one recent survey found that nearly half the British people think that religion is harmful. Another survey found that one in five Christians in the UK believes they face discrimination in their local community because of their faith. One in four believes they are discriminated against at work, and one in three believes that the way the media portrays Christian faith discriminates against them.

A worldwide flood of 'hate crime' laws is clamping down on freedom of speech and promoting active discrimination against followers of Christ:

For example, in Australia in December 2004, pastor Daniel Scot was found guilty of breaking the 'religious vilification' laws of the State of Victoria. His 'crime' was to hold a church seminar explaining what Islam teaches. Scot is himself a Pakistani, who has faced death threats because of his conversion to Christianity.

There is nothing new about this kind of hostility. In New Testament times, when someone became a follower of Christ, their family and friends often rejected them. Members of the surrounding society saw faith in Christ as subversive and anti-social. People called Christians atheists, because they would not take part in the worship of the gods. This made them dangerous – the gods might get angry! People saw the first followers of Christ in much the same way as we today view terrorists – they were harmful and destructive people.

Because of this, their friends and family could put huge pressure on them to conform. The purpose of their hostility was to shame followers of Christ into giving up their faith and becoming respectable members of society again.

The Bible

2. Read 1 Peter 1:1-2. How does Peter describe his readers?

Did you notice that there are two parts to his description? He calls them '*strangers in the world*,' scattered in various places. (The places he names are Roman provinces in what is now Turkey). As resident aliens, they are not truly at home in this world. But he also says that *God has chosen* them for a special destiny.

By describing them as strangers in the world, Peter immediately reminds them (and us) that this world is only a temporary home, and the hostility we face here will not last.

3. Read 1 Peter 1:3-12. What main point is Peter making in verses 3-5?

His hearers have a great hope for the future (verse 3), and an inheritance promised by God and kept in heaven (verse 4). Until that time comes, God's power will protect them from lasting harm (verse 5). This is particularly relevant for people who are rejected by their society.

While their friends and family were making them feel dishonoured and rejected because of their commitment to Christ, Peter focuses their attention on the great hope that lies ahead of them.

4. What response is Peter looking for (verse 6)?

He wants us to rejoice in our hope for the future, even when we face rejection and hostility in the present.

5. Read verses 7-9 again. Why does God let us go through tough times?

According to these verses, it is so that the reality of our faith will be shown, and so that we shall receive 'praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.' (In contrast to the shame and dishonour that we experience now.)

Real life

6. We don't talk very much about our future hope these days. Why do you think this is?

7. If we thought more about our hope for the future, how would this change our attitude to hostility and rejection in the present?

To do

What specific thing can you do this week to encourage yourself (and other followers of Christ) to think more about our hope for the future?

Going deeper

Read 'Capturing the low ground', by Wade Bradshaw
www.facingthechallenge.org/bradshaw.php

For more on 'Religion is harmful,' go to
<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/faith/article2368534.ece>

For more about Dan Scot's story, go to:
www.christian.org.uk/incitement2005/danielscot/index.html

Hope in the future (1 Peter 1:1-12)

1. How do the people around us view followers of Jesus Christ?
2. Read 1 Peter 1:1-2. How does Peter describe his readers?
3. Read 1 Peter 1:3-12. What main point is Peter making in verses 3-5?
4. What response is Peter looking for (verse 6)?
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2

Be different (1 Peter 1:13-2:3)

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that we are called to be distinctively different from the world around us, even when this provokes hostility and rejection.

Getting started

1. What are the main issues followers of Christ are condemned for in our society?

These include accusations that we are sexist, racist, or homophobic.

In Sweden in July 2003, pastor Ake Green was convicted under new 'hate crime' laws and sentenced to a month in prison for saying in a sermon that homosexuality was a 'deep cancerous tumour' in society. Green says: 'You should be able to speak about your convictions without having to go to jail.'

You may have seen the advertisement 'In the Name of the Father,' in The Independent newspaper in 2006. Showing a Bible alongside a splash of blood, the

advertisement claimed that in the past 12 months, the Gay Police Association had recorded a 74% increase in the number of homophobic incidents where the 'sole or primary motivating factor was the religious belief of the perpetrator.' The advertisement clearly portrayed Christians as violent towards homosexuals. (In a year that saw more complaints than any previous year, this advertisement attracted more complaints than any other, and the Advertising Standards Authority upheld these complaints.)

While this kind of public hostility towards followers of Christ is now common, many more people face hostility and rejection from within their own families. This was also true when Peter was writing.

2. Who do you count as your family? Are they sympathetic to your faith in Christ? How does (or how could) your faith cause tensions within the family?

The Bible

3. Read 1 Peter 1:13-17. What does the 'therefore' at the start of verse 13 connect with?

It refers back to what Peter said about the great hope that we have for the future. The key word that Peter uses to describe this is 'salvation.' (See 1:5, 1:9-10, 2:2)

4. In the light of this great hope, how are we supposed to live?

We are supposed to be different from the people around us. When our family, friends, and colleagues are putting us under pressure because of our faith in Christ, the temptation will always be to conform – to blend in, to 'go along with' things – not to stand out as different in any way. Peter says 'be different because God has chosen you.'

5. In verses 15-16, Peter says that we are to 'be holy.' When you hear the word 'holy,' what do you think of? Is this what Peter means by the word?

Today we may associate 'holy' with being 'holier-than-thou' – smug and self-righteous. Or we may associate it with keeping a list of regulations – 'don't smoke,' 'don't drink,' and so on. The root idea of 'holy' is that of being different and set apart. We will see what Peter means by this as we go on.

6. Read 1 Peter 1:18-21. What further reason does Peter give in these verses not to conform to the society around us?

He asks us to think about the great price that Christ has paid to rescue us from our previous way of life.

7. Read verses 22-25. What point is Peter making through the quotation in verses 24-25a (from Isaiah 40:6-8)?

The point is that God's message is everlasting and unbreakable. In verse 23 and 25b, he says that the follower of Christ has been born again through this Word. We can have hope for the future because God's word is completely reliable and cannot be changed.

When you are born, you come into a family. To be 'born again' means to come into a new family – the church.

8. What are we supposed to do because we have been born again (verse 22)?

We are supposed to love each other deeply and sincerely.

When people become followers of Christ, their own friends and families may reject them. Peter says here that the church is our new family. He will unpack what

this means later. It is important to grasp that when Peter says 'be holy,' he does not have in mind a list of 'do's and don'ts.' He is talking about how we relate to other people in God's family.

9. Read chapter 2 verses 1-3. What are we not supposed to do? In the context of our new family, what is Peter getting at in verses 2-3?

Spiritual 'growing up' (see the end of verse 2) is all about how we relate to other people in the Church – getting rid of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander (verse 1).

Real life

10. Think about your own experience of church. How is it like a family? How could it be more like a family?

To do

If someone who didn't know me watched my life, what would they most notice that is different from the people around me who aren't followers of Christ? What can I do this week to be different?

Going deeper

For more about Ake Green's story, go to

http://www.christian.org.uk/rel_liberties/cases/green_ake.htm

For more about the GPA advertisement, go to

http://www.christian.org.uk/issues/2007/gay_rights/gpa/complaints_10may07.htm

Be different (1 Peter 1:13-2:3)

1. What are the main issues followers of Christ are condemned for in our society?
2. Who do you count as your family? Are they sympathetic to your faith in Christ? How does (or how could) your faith cause tensions within the family?
3. Read 1 Peter 1:13-17. What does the 'therefore' at the start of verse 13 connect with?
4. In the light of this great hope, how are we supposed to live?
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3

Live down the accusations (1 Peter 2:4-12)

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that we are not to attack those who attack us. Rather we are to show by our lives that the accusations are not true.

Getting started

1. How does the world around us shame us for our faith in Christ today?

This can take many different forms. It may be by suggesting that followers of Christ are foolish, or wicked (or both). For example, you may have read Richard Dawkins' recent book 'The God Delusion,' or seen the TV mini-series 'Root of All Evil,' in which he says that religious faith is foolish, and that religion is the major cause of suffering and evil in the world.

2. How do we react to these accusations?

The Bible

3. Read 1 Peter 2:4-5. Why does Peter describe Jesus as 'rejected by men but chosen by God' (verse 4)?

Peter is writing to people who face rejection and hostility from the society around them. People also rejected Jesus. But just as Jesus is chosen by God, we as his followers are also chosen by God and special to him.

4. Read 1 Peter 2:9. How does Peter describe us in verses 5 and 9? Why?

When he says that we are living stones in God's building, a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation, he is encouraging us to see what a great privilege it is to belong to Jesus Christ, whatever the people around think of us. In a world where followers of Christ are shamed, Peter shows us that God has honoured us.

5. Verse 6 is a quotation from Isaiah 28:16. Why do you think Peter quotes this verse here?

Peter's readers were being shamed because of their faith in Christ. Isaiah points to the value of God's Messiah, and says that whoever trusts in him will not be put to shame. This is a timely reminder that God sees things differently.

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: Most English versions translate verse 7 as if it is Christ who is highly valued, or honoured. For example, the NIV says 'To you who believe this stone is precious.' However, the original simply says 'For you, therefore, who believe (is) the honour.' It may be *us*, rather than Christ, who receives the honour – the honour of being united with Christ. This makes more sense of verse 7 within the flow of Peter's argument.)

6. What point is Peter making through the two Old Testament quotations in verses 7-8 (Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14)?

Although Christ was at the centre of God's plan, the world rejected him. As followers of Christ, we are also rejected because we are united with him.

7. Why did God save us?

He saved us for his own praise and glory, 'So that (we) may declare the praises of him who called (us) out of darkness into his wonderful light.' (Verse 9).

8. In verse 12, how does Peter say we should deal with the accusations we face?

We are meant to live good lives so that people can see that the accusations are false. In other words, we are supposed to *live down* the accusations.

Real life

9. What does living down the accusations look like in practice?

Think in terms of *doing the opposite* of what people expect. It could mean that although they accuse us of being racist, we go out of our way to show love to immigrants and people of other ethnic groups. It could mean that although they accuse us of being sexist, we go out of our way to affirm positive roles for women. It could mean that although people accuse us of being homophobic, we go out of our way to show love to gay people. In whatever way, we have to show by our lives that the accusations are not right. This certainly means that we do not attack those who attack us (something we have not always been very good at).

10. Read Acts 22:23-29 and Acts 25:9-12. Do you think there are circumstances where we should defend ourselves using our legal rights? What are those circumstances?

To do

What specific situations do I face this week where people are likely to think badly of me because I am a follower of Christ? How should I respond? How can I show by my life that their accusations are false?

Going deeper

'The God Delusion' by Richard Dawkins, Black Swan 2007

'Deluded by Dawkins: A Christian response to The God Delusion,' by Andrew P Wilson, Kingsway, 2007

'The Dawkins Delusion? Atheist fundamentalism and the denial of the divine' by Alister McGrath, SPCK 2007

The following page has links to a wide range of reviews of 'The God Delusion,' not all by Christians:

http://idpluspeterswilliams.blogspot.com/2007_01_01_archive.html

For more on Christian response to other faiths, consider our course 'Facing the Challenge of other faiths' www.facingthechallenge.org/faiths.php

Live down the accusations (1 Peter 2:4-12)

1. How does the world around us shame us for our faith in Christ today?
2. How do we react to these accusations?
3. Read 1 Peter 2:4-5. Why does Peter describe Jesus as 'rejected by men but chosen by God' (verse 4)?
4. Read 1 Peter 2:9. How does Peter describe us in verses 5 and 9? Why?
5. Verse 6 is a quotation from Isaiah 28:16. Why do you think Peter quotes this verse here?
6. What point is Peter making through the two Old Testament quotations in verses 7-8 (Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14)?
7. Why did God save us?
8. In verse 12, how does Peter say we should deal with the accusations we face?
9. What does living down the accusations look like in practice?
10. Read Acts 22:23-29 and Acts 25:9-12. Do you think there are circumstances where we should defend ourselves using our legal rights? What are those circumstances?

To do

What specific situations do I face this week where people are likely to think badly of me because I am a follower of Christ? How should I respond? How can I show by my life that their accusations are false?

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4

The respect agenda (1 Peter 2:13-25)

Purpose

We saw last time that when people are hostile to us, we are to show by our lives that their hostility is misplaced. The purpose of this session is to understand that we are to show this especially in our attitude towards people in authority in society, and towards those we work for.

Getting started

In many countries, laws are being introduced to make sure that employers (and service providers) do not discriminate against people because of their beliefs or lifestyle. One example is the Sexual Orientation Regulations currently being introduced in the UK. (There is more about these in the 'Going Deeper' section.)

1. How should followers of Christ respond to anti-discrimination laws like the Sexual Orientation Regulations?

People have a right to employment (for example) regardless of their personal beliefs or lifestyles. We would not be happy to see a follower of Christ turned

down for a job because of his or her faith. On the other hand, churches and Christian organisations (and those of other faiths) also have a right to employ people who are in agreement with their beliefs. (We would not necessarily expect a Muslim organisation to employ a Christian.) So there are conflicting rights here. The question is how these rights can be balanced.

2. What should we do when people accuse us of discriminating against those who do not share our beliefs or lifestyle?

We saw last time the principle: '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.' (1 Peter 2:12). This session looks at how this works out in practice in our responsibilities (a) to people in authority in society, and (b) to the people we work for.

The Bible

3. Read 1 Peter 2:13-17. What key principle is Peter teaching here (verse 13)? Why (verse 15)?

We are to show proper respect for those in authority in society by obeying them. We are to do this *so that* we live down their accusations about what followers of Christ are like.

4. Read 1 Peter 2:18-25. Who is your master? What are your responsibilities to him or her? Does it make any difference whether he or she is good or bad?

5. How is the situation of an employee like that of a slave? How is it different?

Employees have far more legal rights than slaves did. A slave was the property of his or her master. The master

could do what they liked with the slave, short of actually killing him. When a slave became a follower of Christ, he or she might refuse to take part in religious rituals in the home. The unbelieving master would see Christianity as something that encouraged his slaves to disobey him. So the Christian slave of an unbelieving master could face all kinds of injustices, including physical brutality.

6. What does Peter appeal to in order to motivate us, in verses 21-25?

He appeals to the example of Christ, as someone who suffered unjustly, but did not threaten or retaliate.

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: When Peter encourages slaves to submit to their masters, he is not justifying slavery! He recognises that this is the way things are, and he tells slaves how to behave in this unjust situation so that they will not bring shame onto the name of Christ. The hostile world around must not have any reason to accuse them.)

Real life

7. Respect for those in authority is deeply contrary to our culture today. List as many specific areas as you can where followers of Christ are supposed to respect those in authority.

Examples include paying our taxes, not speeding...

8. Read Acts 4:18-20. Is it ever right to disobey human authorities?

9. Is it ever right for followers of Christ to protest? What issues would it be right for followers of Christ to protest about today?

To do

What should I do differently at work this week because of this study?

What should I do differently as a member of society?

Going deeper

To download a detailed briefing on the Sexual Orientation Regulations, go to:

http://www.christian.org.uk/soregs/briefing_march07.htm

For more on slavery in the Roman Empire, visit:

<http://www.roman-empire.net/society/society.html#slaves>

The respect agenda (1 Peter 2:13-25)

1. How should followers of Christ respond to anti-discrimination laws like the Sexual Orientation Regulations?
2. What should we do when people accuse us of discriminating against those who do not share our beliefs or lifestyle?
3. Read 1 Peter 2:13-17. What key principle is Peter teaching here (verse 13)? Why (verse 15)?
4. Read 1 Peter 2:18-25. Who is your master? What are your responsibilities to him or her? Does it make any difference whether he or she is good or bad?
5. How is the situation of an employee like that of a slave? How is it different?
6. What does Peter appeal to in order to motivate us, in verses 21-25?
7. Respect for those in authority is deeply contrary to our culture today. List as many specific areas as you can where followers of Christ are supposed to respect those in authority.
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What should I do differently as a member of society?

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To download a detailed briefing on the Sexual Orientation Regulations, go to:

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<http://www.roman-empire.net/society/society.html#slaves>

5

Happy families? (1 Peter 3:1-7)

Purpose

In session 3, we saw the principle that we are to *live down* the false accusations of the hostile society around us: '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.' (1 Peter 2:12). Then in session 4, we looked at how this principle applies to our responsibilities as (a) **citizens** and (b) **employees**. The purpose of this session is to understand how it applies to our **family** lives.

Getting started

1. Has anyone in your family ever been embarrassed in public because of your faith in Christ?

In the Roman Empire problems could arise when a wife was a follower of Christ but her husband was not. The wife would draw back from the pagan religious rituals of the family. This would humiliate the husband, and he would blame her faith in Christ! (For more on this, read the 'Going deeper' section.)

The Bible

2. Read 1 Peter 3:1-6. What does Peter say to Christian wives about how they should behave? What motivation does he give (verses 1-2)?

Peter says that wives are to submit to their husbands. They are to be good family members, as judged by the surrounding society (just as we are to be good citizens, and good employees). The purpose of this is so that their unbelieving husbands will be won over. Remember that the key issue in 1 Peter is how followers of Christ are to live in a hostile world in a way that does not bring shame on the name of Christ.

3. Are there any limits to the kind of submission that is called for here? What are those limits?

These verses do not mean that a wife must to a husband who is adulterous, violent or abusive.

4. Our society today is very different. How do verses 3-6 relate to us?

The point is that wives are to live in relation to their husbands in a way that does not bring shame on the name of Christ in their society. In today's world, the same principle applies, but the way it works out may be very different – wives often have their own careers, and are as well educated as their husbands (perhaps better!).

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: We saw in session 4 that when Peter calls on slaves to submit to their masters, he is not justifying slavery. He accepts that this is how things are, and he regulates how slaves are to behave so that they do not bring shame on the name of Christ. In the same way, he is not saying here that wives should always be subservient to their husbands. He accepts that

this is how things are in the society of his day, and he regulates how they are to behave.)

5. Read 1 Peter 3:7. Why would this verse have been surprising to Peter's readers?

In the light of what we have learned about relations between husbands and wives in Peter's day, the idea that a husband should be considerate and respectful towards his wife would have seemed strange and counter-cultural.

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: In Roman culture, women were seen as physically weaker than men. This was used to justify women staying at home while the men went out to the public world of work and business. Peter accepts that women are weaker, but draws a different conclusion.)

6. In what ways is verse 7 still counter-cultural for us today?

Real life

7. What is the key principle in these verses?

In our family relationships we are to live in a way that does not bring shame on the name of Christ.

8. How does this apply to our very different world today?

To do

What should I do differently in my family this week as a result of this study?

If you have time, spend a few minutes praying for each other's family lives.

Going deeper

In the ancient world, the husband was definitely the head of the family. He was usually the wage-earner, and he could be quite a bit older than his wife – it wasn't unusual for men in their forties to marry women in their twenties. The wife and children were expected to do what the husband said! This included following the husband's religious decisions:

'A married woman should... worship and recognize the gods whom her husband holds dear, and only these. The door must be closed to strange cults and foreign superstition. No god takes pleasure in cult [worship] performed furtively and in secret by a woman.' – The Greek writer Plutarch.

For more on this, see:

www.roman-empire.net/society/society.html#family

and:

www.roman-empire.net/society/society.html#women

Happy families? (1 Peter 3:1-7)

1. Has anyone in your family ever been embarrassed in public because of your faith in Christ?
2. Read 1 Peter 3:1-6. What does Peter say to Christian wives about how they should behave? What motivation does he give (verses 1-2)?
3. Are there any limits to the kind of submission that is called for here? What are those limits?
4. Our society today is very different. How do verses 3-6 relate to us?
5. Read 1 Peter 3:7. Why would this verse have been surprising to Peter's readers?
6. In what ways is verse 7 still counter-cultural for us today?
7. What is the key principle in these verses?
8. How does this apply to our very different world today?

To do

What should I do differently in my family this week as a result of this study?
If you have time, spend a few minutes praying for each other's family lives.

Going deeper

For more on family life in the Roman Empire, see:
www.roman-empire.net/society/society.html#family
and:
www.roman-empire.net/society/society.html#women

6

Suffering for Christ (1 Peter 3:8-22)

Purpose

The purpose of this session is to understand that we may have to suffer for our faith in Christ. When we go through trials, our new Christian family should be one of our main supports.

Getting started

Christian Unions in Exeter, Birmingham, and Edinburgh have recently been suspended by Student Guilds (the associations of student societies) or had their privileges removed, because they discriminate against non-Christians. (They expect members of their committee to sign up to their basis of faith.) UCCF describes the problems Christian Unions face as unprecedented in its 83-year history.

1. Have you ever suffered because of your faith in Christ? For example, have you had people stop you doing something, say things about you that are not true, or be offensive to you?

The Bible

2. Read 1 Peter 3:8-12. What kind of people is Peter talking to here? What behaviour does he encourage, and how does he encourage it?

He is talking to all followers of Christ. ('... all of you,' verse 8). He encourages us to live together as a loving family in harmony, sympathy, brotherly love, compassion and humility.

When someone became a follower of Christ, they faced hostility and rejection from the world around – often including their own families. It is vitally important that the Church, as their new family, supports, encourages, and helps them.

3. How are we to respond to those who harm us and insult us (verse 9)? What motivation does Peter give?

We are to bless them rather than to retaliate. (This is also the point of the quotation in verses 10-11, which comes from Psalm 34:12-16.)

The motivation Peter gives is that God watches over the righteous and hears their prayers, but opposes those who do evil.

4. Read 1 Peter 3:13-22. What main theme does Peter talk about in these verses?

He talks about suffering unfairly because of your faith in Christ (see the beginning of verse 14.) A hostile world persecutes followers of Jesus Christ, but has no reason to do so.

5. Identify three ways that Peter says we should respond to unfair suffering, in verses 14-15?

He says that we should not be frightened by it; that we should obey Christ as Lord, and that we should be ready to answer the questions of those who oppose us.

6. As we answer the questions of those who oppose us, what attitudes should we show, and why (verses 15b-16)?

We should respond with gentleness and respect, so that they will be ashamed of slandering us.

7. What key principle does Peter state in verse 17?

We should do what is right, even if this leads to suffering. If it is God's will for us to suffer for doing good, it is better to do this than to suffer for doing evil.

8. What is the main point of verses 18-22?

Jesus Christ is an example of someone who did what God wanted him to do, but suffered unfairly because of it. Jesus accomplished what God wanted through his sufferings, and he went through suffering to victory. In the same way we as his followers can be confident that God will bring us victoriously through our present sufferings.

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: Some of the things in these verses are really difficult to understand. It is important not to get bogged down in the hard bits – for example in questions about baptism, or about Jesus preaching to the spirits in prison. No-one really knows what this means, although there are many different ideas. Make sure that the group sticks to the main point.)

Real life

9. In what situations do people persecute you? How do you respond?

10. Have you ever seen followers of Christ who have defended their faith in ways that didn't show gentleness and respect?

To do

In verse 17, Peter says that we should do what is right, even if it leads to suffering. How could this apply to us this week?

What should you do differently this week because of this study?

Going deeper

When a new follower of Christ faced hostility from his or her family and from the surrounding world, he or she might be tempted to ask whether his or her new faith was really worth all the hassle. The temptation to fit in with what family or friends or neighbours wanted would be strong. One of Peter's main aims in this letter is to show the huge – and eternal – advantages of following Christ, and to take the sting out of the hostility of pagan neighbours. He encourages us to live in a way that honours Christ even in the face of hostility.

Suffering for Christ (1 Peter 3:8-22)

1. Have you ever suffered because of your faith in Christ? For example, have you had people stop you doing something, say things about you that are not true, or be offensive to you?
2. Read 1 Peter 3:8-12. What kind of people is Peter talking to here? What behaviour does he encourage, and how does he encourage it?
3. How are we to respond to those who harm us and insult us (verse 9)? What motivation does Peter give?
4. Read 1 Peter 3:13-22. What main theme does Peter talk about in these verses?
5. Identify three ways that Peter says we should respond to unfair suffering, in verses 14-15?
6. As we answer the questions of those who oppose us, what attitudes should we show, and why (verses 15b-16)?
7. What key principle does Peter state in verse 17?
8. What is the main point of verses 18-22?
9. In what situations do people persecute you? How do you respond?
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7

Living to please God (1 Peter 4:1-19)

Purpose

The purpose of this session is that we will understand that suffering for our faith does not 'let us off the hook' when it comes to living in a way that pleases God. Rather, such suffering should encourage us *to* live to please Him.

Getting started

1. What are the most important things in your life?

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: Encourage people to answer honestly, rather than just to give the expected 'religious' answers. Make sure that no-one is condemned for telling a truth that we see as being 'incorrect'!)

The Bible

2. Read 1 Peter 4:1-2. What does Peter say our attitude should be?

He says that we should be ready to suffer physically because we are committed to the cause of Christ, just as Jesus himself suffered. (Chapter 3 ends with the

example of Jesus – someone who suffered unfair hostility, yet was doing exactly what God wanted. This is where chapter 4 starts.)

3. What is one of the results of suffering?

It moves us away from living for our 'evil human desires' to living to please God. We often think that when we suffer, this excuses us for living in an ungodly way. Peter says exactly the opposite: when we suffer, this should encourage us to live for what God wants.

4. Read 1 Peter 4:3-4. What attitude did the people around show towards followers of Christ?

They were surprised that followers of Christ no longer wanted to join in the sex, drinking, and wild parties that they used to share. Followers of Christ would not take part in social occasions and civic events, because of the idolatry and immorality these involved. To the non-believers around, they seemed to be rejecting their friends and families.

5. Read 1 Peter 4:5-6. How does Peter counteract the pressure to join in these social activities?

He reminds us that God's judgment is coming on people who do these things (verse 5).

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: It is very important not to get bogged down in difficulties about what verse 6 means. Keep focussed on the main point!)

6. Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. What lifestyle issues does Peter identify in these verses? Why are they important?

He talks about being clear-minded, self-controlled and prayerful. He talks about loving each other deeply, and giving hospitality. And he talks about using your gifts to serve God.

We've seen in 1 Peter that when someone becomes a follower of Christ, the Church becomes his or her new family. When he or she faces hostility from the world around, it's important that members of the new family support each other. This is why love, hospitality, and service matter. Notice again that for Peter, living for God is expressed by how we relate to each other, not in terms of a list of rules and regulations.

7. Read 1 Peter 4:12-19. Identify at least four different ways we should respond to unjust hostility and suffering.

Do not be surprised: there is nothing strange about it (verse 12).

Rejoice: just as you share in the sufferings of Christ, you will also share in his glory (verses 13-14).

Do not be ashamed. Rather praise God (verses 15-18).

Trust God and keep doing what is right (verse 19).

Real Life

8. In what ways should we today be distinctively different from the people around us (i) in what we *don't* do? (ii) in what we *do*?

There are many possible answers to this. For example, one distinctive difference is that followers of Christ should not engage in sex before marriage or outside of marriage. Positively, we are to find specific ways to love and serve each other in our new family, the Church.

To do

What should you not do this week that will show your commitment to Christ? What should you do?

(NOTE TO THE LEADER: encourage group members to be as specific as possible in their answers to this question.)

Going deeper

For more on Roman citizenship, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_citizenship

Living to please God (1 Peter 4:1-19)

1. What are the most important things in your life?
2. Read 1 Peter 4:1-2. What does Peter say our attitude should be?
3. What is one of the results of suffering?
4. Read 1 Peter 4:3-4. What attitude did the people around show towards followers of Christ?
5. Read 1 Peter 4:5-6. How does Peter counteract the pressure to join in these social activities?
6. Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. What lifestyle issues does Peter identify in these verses? Why are they important?
7. Read 1 Peter 4:12-19. Identify at least four different ways we should respond to unjust hostility and suffering.
8. In what ways should we today be distinctively different from the people around us (i) in what we *don't* do? (ii) in what we *do*?

To do

What should you not do this week that will show your commitment to Christ? What should you do?

Going deeper

For more on Roman citizenship, go to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_citizenship

8

God's family (1 Peter 5:1-14)

Purpose

The purposes of this session are:

- to understand that the church is our new family, and our relationships within the church should reflect this.
- to review what we have learned from 1 Peter.

Getting started

1. In your experience, how is the church like a family?
How is it not like a family?

The Bible

2. Read 1 Peter 5:1-4. What are elders to do? Why (verse 4)?

They are to care for God's people consistently, serving those they lead, and leading by example. They can look forward to receiving a crown of glory when Jesus comes back.

3. Read 1 Peter 5:5-6. What attitude does Peter call for from young men? Why do you think this was specially a problem?

They are to be submissive to those who are older (literally, to obey the elders). Younger people are sometimes impatient of, and rebellious towards, older leaders. This is a reminder that they are to live in a way that does not bring shame on the name of Christ.

4. Read 1 Peter 5:7-11. Peter returns to the theme of suffering (see especially the end of verse 9 and the beginning of verse 10). What attitudes does he call for? What does he promise?

We are to resist the attacks of our enemy, the devil, and to stand firm in our faith. This standing firm is to be marked by *being humble* towards God and towards each other (see verses 5-6); *not worrying but trusting God* because we know that what we suffer matters to him (verse 7); and *being self-controlled and alert*, (verse 8).

Peter promises that God will restore us, and he will enable us to stand firm in the face of hostility and rejection.

5. Read Peter's final greetings in 5:12-14. Why did he write the letter? How does this tie in with what we know about his readers?

The opposition they faced from a hostile world could make them think it was not worth keeping going in the faith. Peter wrote to encourage them to stand fast (verse 12).

Real life

6. Review what you have learned from Peter's letter. As we are faced with the challenge of an increasingly hostile world, what are the main things we should do?

- Focus on our future hope.
- Not conform to the world around us – be distinctively different, even if this provokes hostility.
- Live down the accusations. We are to show by the quality of our lives that their hostility is misplaced. This should show in our counter-cultural respect for the authorities, and in our family relationships.
- We have to be prepared to suffer for our faith, following the example of Jesus himself. Suffering does not 'let us off the hook' of living to please God.
- The church is our new family. The way we act towards each other in the church should reflect our new family relationships. We should live lives of love and service towards each other.

To do

Take one or two of these points, and think through what specific difference it should make to your life during the coming week.

Going deeper

Take the time this week to read the whole letter of 1 Peter in the light of what you have learned about the circumstances of the original readers and why Peter wrote.

God's family (1 Peter 5:1-14)

1. In your experience, how is the church like a family? How is it not like a family?
2. Read 1 Peter 5:1-4. What are elders to do? Why (verse 4)?
3. Read 1 Peter 5:5-6. What attitude does Peter call for from young men? Why do you think this was specially a problem?
4. Read 1 Peter 5:7-11. Peter returns to the theme of suffering (see especially the end of verse 9 and the beginning of verse 10). What attitudes does he call for? What does he promise?
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