

# Life: Joyful faith

July 25, 2014

• *The Bible Studies for Life lesson for Aug. 10 focuses on 1 Peter 4:12-19.*

Some biblical concepts are difficult for me to wrap my mind around. Joy in suffering is one of those. How do Christ followers find joy when they face persecution and death? Suffering and joy don't seem to be realistic companions. Or do they?

## **Rejoice in suffering**

Peter is writing to people living a new way of life that went against the status quo. Jewish believers were leaving their long-held traditions to embrace a personal relationship with the living Christ. They were forging a brand-new way of life. Not everyone was enthusiastic. Because of persecution, these believers had been scattered throughout Asia Minor.

Peter's salutation of "dear friends" in 1 Peter 4:12 brings to mind the relationship he has with those who are suffering. He is not writing from some safe cabin up in the mountains away from the action. He is in the midst of their experience. He knows what he is writing about.

He doesn't gloss over their circumstances. He names it for what it is—a painful trial. Sometimes, in an attempt to comfort people, we minimize their pain. Peter says even in the midst of painful suffering, rejoice! Read 1 Peter 4:13 carefully: "Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."

These words remind us we belong to Jesus. He suffered for our sake: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such

opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

Jesus could see beyond the suffering to the joy, the wellbeing on the other side of the cross and grave. He suffered for a season, but it ended when he won the victory over sin and death. His glory is revealed as he sits on the throne.

### **The blessing of suffering**

Suffering because we belong to Christ is a blessing. John Ortberg’s book *Soul Keeping* reveals blessing has three elements—a benefit, a benefactor and a beneficiary. Let’s use 1 Peter 4:14 to illustrate these elements.

What is the benefit? “The Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.” We experience joy and wellbeing because we belong to Christ. Paul says in Romans 8:35-39 no life circumstance can separate us from the love of Christ.

Who is the benefactor? It is Christ. He died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sin. He rose from the grave and defeated death. He is alive today and praying for us at this moment.

Who is the beneficiary? The one who has given his/her life to Christ. Today, many around our world gladly suffer because they belong to Jesus. Stories are told of evangelists who knowingly go into villages hostile to the gospel. Before they enter the village, they dig their own graves. They demonstrate their joy, their sense of being wellbeing, because they know what is waiting for them if their earthly lives are taken.

Their joyful faith humbles me. They are a picture of 1 Peter 4:16, “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” Is the well being I have in the Lord my strength in the face of suffering? Am I so passionate about him that I am willing to

lay down my life for another? Is it possible we are ashamed of Christ? The Apostle Paul said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, and then for the Gentile" (Romans 1:16).

### **Judgment begins at the house of God**

Peter differentiates between suffering for Christ and suffering because of sin. Some suffering we bring on ourselves. The examples listed in 1 Peter 4:15 are a reminder of things we did or are capable of doing as sinners. And the list is longer than what Peter penned in this one verse.

Too many today do not understand how a loving God can pass judgment on sinful human beings. He has the right to do so because he is our Creator (1 Peter 4:19). When God convicts us of sin, we can choose to repent and follow him or continue in our sinful ways. Repentance brings a change of mind that results in a change of action. No longer are we driven by the sinful desires that once controlled of us.

Holiness and sin cannot live a peaceful co-existence. We are God's holy people. He works within us to purify us from all unrighteousness. He is right in judging our sinful ways. That's why his judgment begins with the people who belong to him.

### **Commit and continue**

Peter says those who suffer according to God's will should do two things: Commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good (1 Peter 4:19).

The apostles were beaten, crucified, beheaded and stoned because they committed themselves to their Creator. They were unwavering, unrelenting in their faith. We would not have our New Testament if they had not committed their lives to Christ and continued to do good in the face of

suffering. Who will find Christ because we exhibit the same kind of joyful faith?