

DISCIPLESHIP. LESSON 44

1	PRAYER
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Group leader. Pray for God’s guidance through his Spirit, for awareness of his presence and for listening to his voice. Dedicate this lesson about disciple making to the Lord.

2	SHARING (20 minutes) [QUIET TIMES] ESTHER 6, 7, 8 and 9
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Take turns and share (or read from your notes) in short what you have learned from one of your quiet times out of the assigned Bible passages (Esther 6, 7, 8 and 9). Listen to the person sharing, take him serious and accept him. Do not discuss what he shares.

3	MEMORISATION (20 minutes) [DISCIPLESHIP] (4) 2 CORINTHIANS 9:6-7
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A. MEDITATION

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever. Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God. This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of this service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their heart will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”

(4)

Write the following memorisation verse on a white or blackboard as follows:

Giving 2 Corinthians 9:6-7
Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7

Write the Bible reference on the back of your card.

1. The New Testament principles of giving.

The New Testament principles of giving are in 2 Corinthians chapters 8 and 9 and 1 Corinthians 16:2. Let us discover together what they say.

(1) The first principle: Christian giving is giving what you have received.

2 Corinthians 9:10 says, “Now he who supplies seed to the sower (farmer) and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness.” The Christian can only give what he has, and what he has he has first received. It is God who supplies the seed, which the Christian then sows! 1 Corinthians 4:7 says, “What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?” Therefore, Christian giving is the result of God’s grace, not the result of the Christian’s generosity. God not only gives the seed the Christian sows, but also has the ability to increase the Christian’s store of seed and enlarge the harvest of his righteousness.

(2) The second principle: Christian giving is actively sowing (scattering) the seed.

2 Corinthians 9:6 says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously”. Christian giving is not throwing away. Whatever a Christian gives is not lost, but rather multiplies! Christian giving is just like sowing seed. Outwardly, the seed of the farmer looks very small and insignificant, but inwardly every seed has tremendous potential. Contrary to all appearances, seed possesses the

potential of life, growth and multiplication. But in order to allow a seed to grow and bear fruit, a farmer must first scatter this seed into the soil. He must give the seed away, before he can expect a harvest! Just like the seed grows into a tree that bears fruit, in which there are many new seeds, so Christian giving can multiply many times!

(3) The third principle: In Christian giving, a man reaps what he sows.

Galatians 6:7 says, “A man reaps what he sows.” A Christian will reap according to the manner of his sowing. A Christian will harvest in proportion to what he has sown. This rule is true in the agricultural world, but also in the moral and spiritual world. Whoever sows little, will reap little and whoever sows abundantly, will reap abundantly.

Already in the Old Testament this principle was valid. In Proverbs 11:24-25 is written, “One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.” In Proverbs 19:17 is written, “He who is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward him for what he has done.”

Jesus taught that even giving “a cup of cold water” to someone would not remain without a reward (Matthew 10:42). He also said that to give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter to the stranger, clothing to the naked, attention to the sick and to the prisoner, is like giving these things to Jesus Christ himself (Matthew 25:35-40). Therefore, Christians ought to sow generously! They will reap generously!

(4) The fourth principle: The true measure of Christian giving is not the size of the gift, but the attitude of the heart.

2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

Giving during the Old Testament period was not free, but fixed by law (the ceremonial law of the nation-state of Israel, Malachi 3:6-12) Israel had to give, not just one tithe, but three kinds of tithes (Leviticus 26:30-33; Deuteronomy 12:4-7,17-19; Deuteronomy 14:22-29) and Israel had to give tithes for the purpose of maintaining the temple and the temple servants. (See Disciple manual 4, supplement 16. Giving. Tithing in the Old Testament).

But at his first coming, Jesus Christ *fulfilled* the law (Matthew 5:17). He *cancelled* “the written code” containing God’s righteous requirement by nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:14) and *abrogated* “the ceremonial law with its commandments and regulations (including the regulations about tithes)” (Ephesians 2:14-15). The regulations of the ceremonial law (including the giving of tithes) may never again be re-instated in the Christian Church!

Wherever the ceremonial law about tithing is illegally re-instated in certain church denominations under compulsion of the statutes of the church denomination or the pastor, Christians often give reluctantly and without joy. Such Christians can become opponents of the Church and of Christ.

Giving during the New Testament period should be *willingly* and *cheerfully*. Each Christian should decide in his heart how much, how regularly and for whom or what he gives! This may be much more than one tenth (Luke 21:1-4)! No quota or percentage is imposed on him. The leaders or the members of a congregation may not require that Christians give one tenth of their income to the congregation! Jesus said, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

(5) The fifth principle: Christian giving should be regular and systematic giving.

1 Corinthians 16:2 says, “On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money *in keeping with his income*, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” Paul exhorted the members of the congregation at Corinth to regularly and systematically set aside a certain amount of income on every first day of the week and to save it up until it was collected. The reference is *not to a collection during the worship service*, but to the personal responsibility of every Christian. Paul trusted the Christians and treated them as responsible members of the congregation. Each Christian decided how much of his income he ought to set aside for God’s work. These may be collected and given to those who need it when they need it.

2. What are the blessings of giving?

(1) Christian giving recognises that a Christian has sufficient for his own needs.

2 Corinthians 9:8 says, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that ... you will have all that you need.” Giving away money to God’s work seems to be foolish and a bad investment to people in the world. But the people in the world do not know that God has the ability to multiply the little a Christian gives or possesses. God’s grace leads to increase not decrease, even when Christians give away much. After the Christian has given (his money, time, energy), he discovers that he still has sufficient for his own needs.

(2) Christian giving makes a Christian abound in every good work.

2 Corinthians 9:8 also says, “God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times ... you will abound in every good work.” The Christian, who gives, discovers that God makes him rich in good works.

2 Corinthians 9:9 says, “He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures forever.” The Bible does not suggest that a person can be justified by giving gifts to the poor. A person can only be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. However, God makes a Christian who gives rich in righteousness, that is, rich in good deeds!

(3) Christian giving makes a Christian generous.

2 Corinthians 9:11 says, “You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion.” Some people think that Paul is preaching “the prosperity gospel”, that is, that a Christian who gives money to God (with the association: “to his own church”) will receive much more money from God! But the context (verse 8-10) points to spiritual and inner riches, rather than to material and financial riches. A Christian who gives (money, time, energy, etc.), does not per definition become rich in a material sense. He will always have sufficient for his own material needs (see Matthew 6:25-34). But the Christian who gives, lives! He becomes generous! He learns to give more and more of himself, of his time, of his energy, of his talents and his material possessions to God and God’s kingdom. He continues to give, because he wants to experience the abundant grace of God in his life.

(4) Christian giving causes other people to praise and thank God and to pray for the giver.

2 Corinthians 9:11-14 says that the people who receive the gifts will praise and thank God. They will also pray for those who give. In 1 Corinthians 12:24-26 is written, “God has combined the members of the body ... so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it.” Whatever happens to one part of the Church of Christ somewhere in the world (for example, flooding, drought, hunger, disaster, oppression, persecution, etc.) affects the whole Church in the world. The Christians of any local congregation do not constitute the whole Body of Christ! All Christians in all congregations in the world constitute the one Body of Christ (John 10:16)! That is why Christians in every local congregation should occupy themselves with what is happening to their brothers and sisters in other places in the world. That is why Jesus Christ prays that all who believe in him, will be one, so that the world may believe that God sent Jesus Christ (John 17:20-21).

(5) Christian giving leads to great appreciation of God’s indescribable gift.

2 Corinthians 9:15 says, “Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” God has given his only Son, Jesus Christ, as a sacrifice of atonement for sins. And with Christ, God gave *everything* (Romans 8:32)! God’s giving infinitely transcends all Christian giving.

- God did not give “something”, but gave himself in Christ!
- God gave us nothing less than the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21)!
- God gave us his Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9-10)!
- With Jesus Christ God gave us all possible blessings in heaven (Ephesians 1:3)
- God gave us eternal life, that is, that we may know him personally and live with him forever in complete perfection!

That is why a Christian cannot describe God’s gift! But he can experience God’s gift as a glorious life-changing reality! The Christian does not give because it is his duty, but because he is grateful for God’s indescribable gift in Christ. God’s giving inspires all Christian giving!

3. To whom should Christians give?

(1) Give to Christians who feed you.

1 Corinthians 9:7-14; Galatians 6:6. Christians should give support to those who preach the gospel and teach the Bible to them, even if they do not belong to their own congregation.

(2) Give to Christians who lead you.

1 Timothy 5:17-18. Christians should give support to the elders of their own congregation who do their work well. The elders (shepherds, overseers and teachers) may not demand support and the members may not neglect support. Both those who support and those who are supported must trust and obey God. Leaders, who do not do their work “well”, should not be supported.

(3) Give to Christians who do God’s work in other places.

Philippians 4:14-18; 3 John 5-8, Christians should give support to missionaries and itinerant evangelists, even if they do not belong to their own congregation.

(4) Give to Christians who are needy.

James 2:15-17; 1 John 3:17-18; 2 Corinthians 8:7-15. Christians should give support to the needy members of their own congregation, like widows, orphans, the disabled, poor and struggling. They should also give support to the needy congregations in other parts of the world.

(5) To needy people in general.

Proverbs 19:17; 21:13; Matthew 6:1-4. Christians should also give to the needy non-Christians in the world. “He who is kind to the poor, lends to the LORD.”

4. How much should Christians give?

(1) Give in proportion to your income.

In 2 Corinthians 8:12 we read, “If the willingness is there, the gift is acceptable according to what one has, not according to what he does not have.” Christians should give according to how much they possess and according to their ability to give (2 Corinthians 8:12). The rich can give more than the poor.

(2) Give generously according to your own decision.

In 2 Corinthians 9:6-7 says, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion for God loves a cheerful giver.” Christians ought to make a clear decision beforehand in their heart and with God with regard to whom they will give, how much they will give, how regular they will give and how long they will give. The amount is a personal matter between each Christian and God. No one may enforce Christians to give to a particular congregation or organisation, or to give a specified amount. Nevertheless, the New Testament encourages Christians to give generously and even sacrificially!

B. MEMORISATION AND REVIEW

- 1. Write.** Write the Bible verse on a blank card or on one page of your small notebook.
- 2. Memorise.** Memorise the Bible verse in the right way. (4) Giving. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7.
- 3. Review.** Divide into twos and check one another’s last memorised Bible verse.

4	BIBLE STUDY (70 minutes) [LIVING IN THE WORLD] (4) SUFFERING IN THE WORLD. 1 PETER 2:11-25
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Make use of the five steps method of Bible study and study 1 Peter 2:11-25 together.

STEP 1. READ.	GOD’S WORD
<i>Read.</i> LET US READ 1 Peter 2:11-25 together. Let us take turns to read one verse each until we have completed the reading.	

STEP 2. DISCOVER.	OBSERVATIONS
<i>Consider.</i> WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE IS IMPORTANT FOR YOU? Or WHICH TRUTH IN THIS PASSAGE TOUCHES YOUR MIND OR HEART? <i>Record.</i> Discover one or two truths that you understand. Think about them and write your thoughts in your notebook. <i>Share.</i> (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, take turns to share). Let us take turns to share with one another what each of us has discovered. (The following are examples of people sharing what they have discovered. Remember: In every small group, the group members will share different things, not necessarily these things)	

2:23

Discovery 1. Christ did not retaliate or threaten when he suffered.

“When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” When Christians suffer, for example under the oppression and persecution by other religions in the world, they may not take revenge or even threaten their enemies with revenge. The God of the Bible has not given the members of particular religions the right to take the law into their own hands and to kill people by terrorist attacks or by stoning. The right to execute the penal code is only given to the official judges of the country as representatives of God’s authority (Romans 13:1-2)!

The law of revenge: “An eye for eye, tooth for tooth” was a part of the penal law of Israel and not a rule that may be applied by any arbitrary individual taking the law into his own hands! The law of revenge teaches that the punishment must be equal to the committed crime. “If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. Anyone who takes the life of someone’s animal must make restitution – life for life. If anyone injures his neighbour, whatever he has done, must be done to him: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he injured the other, so he is to be injured. Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. You are to have the same law for the alien and the native-born. I am the LORD your God” (Genesis 9:6; Leviticus 24:17-22; Exodus 21:22-24).

There must be minimum two witnesses at the execution of the penal law. The judges must first investigate the matter carefully. The applied punishment served to scare off other criminals, so that similar misdeeds would not be repeated! “One witness is not enough to convict a man accused of any crime or offense he may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse a man of crime, the two men involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of the LORD before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against his brother, then do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from among you. The rest of the people will hear of this and be afraid and never again will such an evil thing be done among you. Show no pity: life for lie, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” (Deuteronomy 19:15-21).

2:21

Discovery 2. God calls Christians to suffering.

God calls Christians to walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. In this case they must follow the example of Jesus Christ when they suffer unjustly under the oppression and persecution of their fellowmen. Christians must react to suffering just like Jesus Christ did. Suffering is unavoidable! Jesus Christ said, “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). And the apostle Paul said, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Timothy 3:12). Christians must expect that non-Christians will despise them and treat them with injustice. Within the Christian Faith suffering for the sake of Jesus Christ is meaningful!

STEP 3. QUESTION.

EXPLANATIONS

Consider. WHICH QUESTION ABOUT ANYTHING IN THIS PASSAGE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ASK TO THIS GROUP?

Let us try to understand all the truths in 1 Peter 2:11-25 and ask questions about the things we still do not understand.

Record. Formulate your question as clearly as possible. Then write your question in your notebook.

Share. (After the group members have had about two minutes to think and write, let each person first share his question.)

Discuss. (Then, choose a few of these questions and try to answer them by discussing them together in your group.)

(The following are examples of questions the students might ask and some notes about the discussion of the questions.)

2:18

Question 1. How should Christians view slavery?

Notes. Slavery is an ancient institution in the world (Genesis 9:26-27; Genesis 21:10; Genesis 39:17; Genesis 44:10). Slavery was important in Egypt. Slave drivers were appointed to force the Israelites to heavy workloads. They had to build the store cities of Pithom and Rameses” (Exodus 1:11-14). Slavery was also known in Israel, but the civil law of Israel had rules with regard to slavery. “These are the laws that you are to set before them: “If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free without paying anything” (Exodus 21:1-2). During the New Testament period there were still slaves who worked under supervision of slave drivers (Matthew 18:25) and there were house slaves who had more contact with their owners and masters (Matthew 24:45).

Some of these slaves were Christians and the apostles teach how they should behave. Peter said, “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh” (1 Peter 2:18). And Paul said, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favour when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men” (Ephesians 6:5-7). It is not a matter of freedom and equality in all human relationships, but a matter of the righteousness and kingship of Jesus Christ in the lives of all people in all kinds of social situations, whether as free people or as slaves. Also slaves and masters must submit themselves to the righteousness and kingship of Jesus Christ. “You know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. And masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them, since you know that he who is both their Master and ours is in heaven, and there is no favouritism with him” (Ephesians 6:8-9). Christian slaves must spread the righteousness and kingship of Jesus Christ among other slaves. They must set an example how one can represent Jesus Christ by showing inner awe and outward respect to their masters, even when their masters are unjust! And Christian masters must spread the righteousness and kingship of Jesus Christ among other masters. They set an example of how one can represent Jesus Christ by not threatening their employees and by not showing unjust favouritism among them.

This biblical relationship between masters and slaves may be applied today to *modern relationships between employers and their employees*. Employees who are Christian must submit themselves to the authority of their employers, respect and obey them and serve them wholeheartedly as they would serve Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:23).

When their employers make unreasonable demands, they will suffer. For example, some employers treat their employees as their possession and force them to work many hours overtime, employ them in unhealthy and dangerous circumstances and make all kinds of unreasonable demands. Other employers recruit employees that are desperate to find work, make them work overtime, pay them insufficiently and fire them for no reason at all. When employers make demands that are forbidden in the Bible, employees must resist their employers with respect. For example, employees must resist their employers when they expect them to give and receive bribes, to be dishonest and lie, to get involved in corruption, to steal professional secrets, to do business with the underworld, to send letters of threat, to commit murder, and to mess with products within the food industry or medicines, etc. Employees may say that they will obey God more than any human on earth (Acts 4:19-20; Acts 5:29). If employers fire them, they will suffer, but must bear their suffering in a worthy way. Christians may suffer in doing good, but not suffer in doing evil.

Slavery has not yet been banned from this world. There are still children that are recruited as child soldiers in terrorist armies and never receive any education. There are still women that are abducted and pressed into the sex industry in

strange countries without possessing a passport. There are still poor people who are shanghai'd together with their children into cheap labour to produce products for a few rich owners and allow government leaders to fill their purses with bribes. There are still many people who are made slaves of drugs in every section of society. Drug producers (including producers of cigarettes) and drug traffickers make millions of victims. There are also many people that are made slaves by lottery and gambling.

Christians must speak out and act against all these forms of slavery. Christians must hunger and thirst for righteousness (Matthew 5:6), that is, to establish justice and righteousness in an honourable way. Christians must persevere in doing good, in working hard, in being faithful and in delivering quality. Christians ought to speak to their employers about the things that need to change according to the Bible, but they may not gossip or speak evil behind their backs.

2:19

Question 2. What are the advantages of suffering for doing what is right in God's eyes?

Notes. There are religions where people are rewarded for doing evil and are encouraged to do evil.¹ But Christians may not glorify suffering by doing evil. Christians may only suffer for doing what is good and right in the eyes of the God of the Bible. The prophets in the Old Testament period often suffered for doing what is good and right in God's eyes. The apostles in the New Testament period often suffered for doing what is good and right in God's eyes. And Christians are still called to suffer for what is good and right in God's eyes.

But Christians are also called to react against their suffering in the way Jesus Christ did. Christians may not revenge themselves and may not threaten, but must bring their suffering to God in heaven, because in the Last Judgement his judgment will be completely righteous and perfectly fair.

Moreover, suffering for doing what is good and right in God's eyes has advantages for the Christian:

- Matthew 5:11-12 says, "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." (Joseph, Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Daniel, John the Baptist).
- Romans 5:3-4. "We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character hope."
- Hebrews 12:10-11 says, "Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."
- James 1:2-4 says, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."

2:20

Question 3. Why is there so much suffering and death in the world?

Notes. The Bible mentions at least five reasons why there is suffering in the world: people suffer because (1) they are godless, (2) they are wicked, (3) they believe in lies, (4) they know that they will die, and (5) that they are under God's judgement.

(1) People suffer through godlessness.

What is godlessness? *Read* Romans 1:18-23. God's "wrath" is God's holy displeasure with sin, his righteous indignation with the godlessness and unrighteousness of people. God is enraged by the godlessness of people. "Godlessness" is not believing that God exists or not reckoning with the God who has revealed himself in the Bible. It is living as an atheist – a person who regards himself as "god" and does what is good in his own eyes (Judges 21:25). Godlessness is to believe in a "god" made by the hands of man from created materials (in idolatry) or a "god" invented by the imagination or mind of man (in modern religions). Godlessness is to believe in evil spirits and demonic powers. In short, godlessness is a broken or wrong relationship with the God who revealed himself in the Bible.

Why are people godless? People make "gods" for themselves or deny the existence of God, because they desire to determine their own lives. They make "gods" that allow them to live as they like and approve of the way they behave. Their gods do not require of them to repent and reform! People who honour and serve the Living God cannot continue to live as they want to and cannot remain the people they are. The true and living God wants people to change so that they become what God intended them to be! That is why so many people want nothing to do with the God of the Bible. They do not want to change (John 3:19-21)!

¹ For example to commit a terrorist attack in their own country or to get involved in a holy war in another country.

What are the consequences of godlessness? Living without the God of the Bible affects the mind, heart and relationships of people. Godlessness results in God's anger (Romans 1:18). Because people have turned their backs upon the God of the Bible, they suffer in many ways. Godlessness causes human thinking to become futile (Romans 1:21-22). Without God's truth and wisdom people live in a world of lies and deceit. They deceive one another and as a consequence they suffer and cause other people to suffer! Godlessness causes immorality (Romans 1:23-24). Many people cannot find in themselves the power to do the good they would like to do. Without a heart that respects God and without doing good works, people suffer and cause other people to suffer! In short, people suffer because they deny the existence of the God of the Bible or because they exchange the God of the Bible for gods made or devised by man.

(2) People suffer through unrighteousness.

What is unrighteousness? *Read* Romans 1:24-32. God's "wrath" is directed against the unrighteousness of people. God is indignant about the wickedness of people. People devise all kinds of evil they do to one another, drag one another into their wicked life-style and approve the evil things people do. Verse 28-32 describes what God regards as "unrighteousness": sexual immorality and perversity, greed, depravity, murder, strife, deceit, and malice. People are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless and ruthless. No wonder that people who do these things to one another suffer! In short, unrighteousness is a broken or wrong relationship with other people.

Why do people do unrighteousness? People do unrighteousness, because they do not want to serve! They rather want to serve their own sinful desires! By nature people are independent and self-sufficient. They are selfish! People even sanction their unholy wars and unholy life-styles on the basis of their religious convictions.

What are the consequences of unrighteousness? The relationship that people have with God determines the relationship they have with people. When people exchange the true and living God for their false "gods" or even themselves, then the God of the Bible hands them over to their own perverse desires to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another (Romans 1:26-28)! Then the God of the Bible allows people to become what they want to become! Then God hands them over to their wicked life-style. Then people suffer the consequences of their own evil desires. They reap what they sow (Galatians 6:7-8). Because they want to be godless, they get a taste what a life without the God of the Bible is like in reality! Then the people rush down the broad way to damnation, a way they themselves choose (Matthew 7:13). In short, people suffer because they do unrighteousness, stimulate others to unrighteousness and approve the unrighteousness in the world (Romans 1:32). People harm one another and therefore suffer!

(3) People suffer through lies.

What is truth? *Read* Romans 1:18 en 25. God's wrath is God's holy displeasure with sin, his righteous indignation about the godlessness and unrighteousness of people. God's anger is directed against people suppressing the truth and exchanging the truth for lies. "The truth" is first of all Jesus Christ himself (John 14:6) and secondly the words written in the Bible (John 17:17). The truth about "the security of a Christian" who has submitted himself to God is that he knows that God loves and accepts him unconditionally (Isaiah 43:4). The truth about "the significance of a Christian" is that he knows that what God wants him to be and do is important and significant (Jeremiah 29:11). Thus, when a man twists the words of God in the Bible, it becomes a lie and causes suffering.

Why do people deny, suppress or change the truth? People do not want to hear the truth or live by the truth, because they must first change, but do not want to change. Jesus said, "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again'" (John 3:7). So people develop the wrong beliefs and convictions, twisted moral values and all kinds of problems. As long as the political authorities and religious leaders refuse people to be born again and to change, people will remain godless and unrighteous, pigheaded and selfish. People will continue to suppress the truth or exchange the truth for their own lies.

What are the consequences for denying, suppressing and exchanging the truth? When people deny, suppress and exchange the truth about "the security of a Christian", they become insecure, lonely, anxious, or develop a low self-esteem. When they deny, suppress or exchange the truth about "the significance of being a Christian", they regard their existence as useless and see no sense in living.

People without the true and living God are also without the truth which God has revealed! They do not know the truth about God and also not the truth about themselves. They do not know who they really are, where they come from, how they should live or where they are going! They suffer because they feel insecure, confused and worthless. They suffer because they see no meaning in life or because they have submitted to a destructive life-style. In short, to suppress or exchange the truth is a broken or wrong relationship with oneself.

What is sin? Through the fall into sin every man has by nature a wrong relationship with the God of the Bible, an imperfect relationship with other people and a relationship grown crooked with himself. Every natural man is godless, does wickedness and believes in lies. The Bible calls these three wrong relationships "sin".

The "root" of sin is the wrong relationship to the God of the Bible. It is to be independent from God and self-sufficient. Sin is to miss God's goal for your life. Sin is to fall short of God's perfect standard (Jesus Christ). Sin is to transgress

God's commandments in the Bible. Sin is rebellion against the God of the Bible. Sin is twisting God's Word (the Bible).

The "fruit" (consequence) of sin is doing what God has forbidden (in the Bible) and not doing what God has commanded (in the Bible). Thus, the real reason why there is so much suffering in the world is SIN!

(4) People suffer through death.

What is the meaning of death? Romans 6:23a says, "The wages of sin is death". "Death" is feared by most people. It is so terrible that people are afraid to even mention the word. Death is regarded as the ultimate suffering. People constantly live in fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). The word "death" has different meanings in the Bible.

Spiritual death. Read Ephesians 2:1-3. Every human being consists of a body and a spirit (or soul). "Spiritual death" means that the spirit of man is dead. It is the condition in which the spirit of man is separated from the God of the Bible and God's life. The spirit or heart of man must first be born again before it can really live. Then only will he know God and fellowship with God!

Physical death. Read Psalm 49:10-12; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6,10. "Physical death" means that the body of man is dead. It is the condition in which the spirit of man is separated from his body and from life on this earth. When a man dies, he has to leave everything behind. And his body returns to "dust" (the elements of the earth).

Eternal death. Read Matthew 10:28; 25:46a; Luke 16:22-26; Revelation 20:14-15. "Eternal death" means that man with his body and his spirit is forever separated from the presence and care of God. Man was originally created to live for God (Colossians 1:16). But when a person lives for himself until the end, he does not restore his relationship with the God of the Bible and thus continues to miss God's goal with his life, then it will become clear in the Last Judgement that this situation will not change. For him there will be no place in heaven or on the new earth. He will go to a place forever separated from the presence of God and excluded from the loving care of God (2 Thessalonians 1:8b-9). This is the meaning of "hell".

What are the consequences of death? Death brings separation. Death separates the body from the spirit (Ecclesiastes 12:7) and the body returns to dust (Genesis 3:19). Death separates one from his family and friends. He must leave them behind (Luke 16:27-28). Death brings separation from all the possessions and accomplishments he has worked for so hard (1 Timothy 6:7). Death brings separation from involvement in everything that takes place on earth (Ecclesiastes 9:6). Death is a terror for all who remain behind. They will have to miss the departed. For all people who have no relationship with the God of the Bible, death means that they have no idea what to expect after death! That is why death is their greatest enemy and anxiety. In short, people suffer because they know that they will die!

(5) People suffer under God's judgement.

What is God's judgement? Man's godlessness and wickedness leads to God's wrath (Romans 1:18)! God is utterly displeased with man's sin, enraged by man's godlessness and incensed at man's unrighteousness. "His soul hates all who do wrong" (Psalm 5:5), all the wicked and all who love violence" (Psalm 11:5).

God's present judgements are *punishments* for the sins of people and at the same *warnings* from God to repent. On the one hand, God judges and punishes, because he is holy and righteous and therefore must condemn and punish the godlessness and unrighteousness of people. On the other hand, God is merciful and loving and wants to save man and bring him back onto the right path. When a child does something wrong, his father is angry and punishes the child in order to unlearn its bad behaviour. "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). It's the same with God and man. God does not put up with the evil condition of people and things on earth. That is why God *already now*, before the last Judgement, condemns and punishes godless and unrighteous people. He does this in two ways: Through his built-in judgements in creation and through his judgements carried out in history.

God's judgements built-in in creation. Read Galatians 6:7-8a. God allows people to suffer for their own sins. He has built natural laws into his creation, like gravity. Whoever neglects gravity falls dead. Likewise God has built spiritual and moral laws into man, like: "What a man sows he will reap". For example, whoever sows laziness reaps poverty. Whoever sows hatred reaps broken relationships. Whoever sows tyranny reaps war. Whoever sows impurity reaps sickness. People often suffer, because it is the natural result of their own misdeeds. Thus, whoever sows sin reaps God's judgement.

God's judgements carried out in history. Read Ezekiel 14:21; Amos 4:6-12; Haggai 1:3-11. God reigns over the world and thus over all powers in nature and all events in history! When people are disobedient or the relationship between God and a certain nation is broken, God *withdraws his care and protection* (cf. Acts 14:17) from them and brings punishments on them. For example, he withdraws his blessing from the economy, agriculture and industry. Haggai 1:6 and 9 says, "You have planted much, but have harvested little. You eat but never have enough. You drink, but never have your fill. You put on clothes, but are not arm. You earn wages, only to put them in a purse with holes in it. ... You expected much, but see, it turned out to be little. What you brought home, I blew away." In this way God uses wars, epidemics, earthquakes, floods, droughts and hunger to show people his displeasure with sin; and at the same time to warn them that they must return to him (Acts 3:19; Revelation 9:20-21).

The reason why God already now in the present time brings his judgements onto the earth is to spur people on to break with their godlessness and unrighteousness, to start living a holy and righteous life for God (Hebrews 12:4-11) and to warn them about his approaching Last and Eternal Judgement that will damn the ungodly and unrighteous people for ever in hell (1 Corinthians 11:32)!

God's future Last and Eternal judgment. *Read* Hebrews 9:27. There must be and will be a future and final judgement! Why? Life on this earth is clearly not fair. (*Read* Psalm 73:2-20). Good people suffer, generous people are exploited, nice people are terrorised, and poor people are robbed. Also the opposite happens! If God is good and powerful, how can he allow such injustice in the world? Just because God is good and almighty he will restore justice in the universe! He will do this when he will judge all people that have ever lived in his Last and Final Judgement! God will punish unbelief, unrighteousness, and neglect in every form with the eternal fire of hell (Revelation 21:8). People will be cast off out of the glorious presence and majesty of the Lord (2 Thessalonians 1:9). In the last Judgement God will reveal to people why they receive eternal punishment or eternal life (Matthew 25:46). In short, people suffer, because they know or suspect that they will be finally judged!

The relationship between sin and suffering. Every man is a part of some greater whole. He is a part of a family, a dwelling place, a church, a profession, a nation and all of humanity. That is why man suffers because of one of the following reasons:

- due to his own sins (Romans 3:23; 6:23a; Numbers 12:1-10)
- due to the sin of others (2 Samuel 24:15-17; Romans 5:12)
- due to the sin of his nation (1 Samuel 5:1-6)
- due to being a part of whole human race (Genesis 6:5-7; Romans 5:17-19)
- due to the evil plans of the devil (Matthew 12:22; Luke 13:16)
- due to the good plan of God (John 9:1-3).

In short, human suffering is due to the degeneration of the human race of which every man is a part.

2:21-23

Question 4. How should Christians react to suffering for doing what is good?

Notes. In the world, when people suffer, they often react with open rebellion or violence. They stand on their so-called “human rights” as they themselves define these rights without reference to God or God’s Word in the Bible. Labour unions of employees call their members to strike and force employees who do not want to strike with violence. Or they force employers by destroying their property. Employers fire employees who do not want to participate in their corrupt practices, etc. Families take the law into their own hands and commit so-called “honour killing” when they murder someone. So-called freedom fighters in a country unleash a civil war against their government under the pretext of “freedom and democracy”. But once they are in power, they form a (religious) state that suppresses other religions and ethnic minorities. Non-Christians often react to injustice by committing more injustice. They believe in the law: “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Matthew 5:38).

How should Christians respond to injustice? Jesus says, “Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). The apostle Paul took a stand against injustice (Acts 23:1-5). The Lord Jesus Christ took a stand to speak the truth, but remained silent when he was falsely accused (Mark 11:15-17; Mark 14:60-62; Mark 15:1-5). The apostle Peter says, “To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:21-23). Christians must follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. When he was arrested, he did not threaten his opponents with the armies of heaven, but rebukes his overzealous disciples instead (Matthew 26:51-54). When he was martyred and spit upon, when a crown of thorns was pressed on his head and people beat him with sticks on his head, he said absolutely nothing (Matthew 27:26-31).

This was not “passive resistance”²! Jesus acted against injustice! He submitted the judgement to God the Father who would judge justly (1 Peter 2:23). Every time Jesus suffered injustice, he prayed and entrusted his case to God. The right to judge and to punish belongs only to God. It is written, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (Romans 12:17-21). In his own time God will judge the corrupt political leaders, the unfair judges and the godless religious leaders in each country. That is why Jesus as a human being had no need to take right into his own hands and threaten people or revenge himself on people! And while he suffered, he prayed for his enemies (Luke 23:34; cf. Luke 6:27-28).

STEP 4. APPLY.

APPLICATIONS

Consider. WHICH TRUTHS IN THIS PASSAGE ARE POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS FOR CHRISTIANS?

Share and record. Let us brainstorm with one another and record a list of possible applications from 1 Peter 2:11-25.

² The passive resistance of Ghandi from a biblical point of view was not without violence. It was deliberate resistance and caused much inconvenience. The teaching and example of Jesus Christ must be followed: “Do not resist an evil person” (Matthew 5:38-42)!

Consider. WHICH POSSIBLE APPLICATION DOES GOD WANT YOU TO TURN INTO A PERSONAL APPLICATION?

Record: Write this personal application down in your notebook. Feel free to share your personal application. (Remember that people in every group will apply different truths or even make different applications of the same truth. The following is a list of possible applications.)

1. Examples of possible applications from 1 Peter 2:11-25.

- 2:11. Remember that abstaining from the sinful desires, which war against your soul, may be difficult. Such sinful desires are sexual immoral desires, self-centredness, selfishness, self-righteousness and greed for materialism, position (in society or in the family) or fame. Fighting against your own sinful desires may be a very painful process! But the reward will be holiness and righteousness!
- 2:12. Remember unbelievers and people of other religions may persecute you for being a Christian, for worshipping Jesus Christ and for living a Christian life-style. But if you continue to do good deeds (Luke 6:27-28) in their midst, these people may one day change (Proverbs 16:7) and begin to glorify God.
- 2:13-15. Submit in everything that is right in God's eyes to governments that oppress Christians. By continuing to do what is good in God's eyes, you may eventually silence their ignorant talk.
- 2:16. Live as free people, that is, as people who have been set free from the power of sin and have been forgiven by God even under oppressive and anti-Christian governments. Live as free people, that is, as people that have been set free from hatred, retaliation, threatening, lies and injustice.
- 2:17. Show proper respect to everyone, even to oppressive and anti-Christian rulers. You show the proper respect to the brotherhood of Christians by continuing to love Christians of every individual congregation, especially when they are persecuted and suffer. You show the proper respect to God by continuing to fear the one and only God, who has revealed himself in the Bible, especially when you yourself are persecuted because of your faith in Jesus Christ. And you show your proper respect to the government of your country by continuing to obey all their rules, except those rules that are directly opposed to the Bible.
- 2:18-20. If you are an employee of a non-Christian employer, deliberately submit to him with all respect in everything that does not contradict the Bible. If he is harsh in his treatment of you, God will commend you for being conscious of God in your difficult situation and for bearing up under the pain of unjust suffering.
- 2:21-23. Never forget that God has called all Christians to suffer! He has called you to suffer for doing what is good and right in his eyes. He has called you to react towards suffering in the way Jesus Christ reacted to his suffering. He has called you never to retaliate the wrong others do to you! He has called you never to threaten the others when they cause you to suffer! He has not called you to judge your own difficult situation or the people that cause you to suffer pain! He has called you to entrust yourself and your very difficult situation to God, who judges justly! God has called Christians to suffer and he has commanded them how to react to their suffering!

2. Examples of personal applications from 1 Peter 2:11-25.

I want to follow Christ's example in suffering. Every time people insult me, I want to refuse to retaliate and instead bless them and do good to them. When I suffer pain by the way other people treat me, I will not run away from the pain, but bear up under it.

I want to concentrate, not on the reasons why I suffer, but on the good results that suffering for doing what is right in God's eyes can have on my life.

STEP 5. PRAY.

RESPONSE

LET US TAKE TURNS TO PRAY ABOUT ONE TRUTH THAT GOD HAS TAUGHT US in 1 Peter 2:11-25. (Respond in your prayer to what you have learned during this Bible study. Practise to pray only in one or two sentences. Remember that people in every group will pray about different issues.)

5	PRAYER (8 minutes)	[INTERCESSION] PRAY FOR OTHERS
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Continue to pray in groups of two's or three's. Pray with one another for one another and for the people in the world (Romans 15:30; Colossians 4:12).

6	PREPARATION (2 minutes)	[ASSIGNMENT] FOR NEXT LESSON
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(*Group leader.* Give the group members this preparation for at home in writing or let them copy it down).

1. Commitment. Be committed to make disciples.
Preach, teach or study the Bible study of 1 Peter 2:11-25 together with another person or group of people.
2. Personal time with God. Have a quiet time from half a chapter of **Job 1, 2, 12 and 14** each day.

Make use of the favourite truth method. Make notes.

3. Memorisation. (4) Giving **2 Corinthians 9:6-7**. Daily review the last 5 memorised Bible verses.
4. Prayer. Pray for someone or something specific this week and see what God is doing (Psalm 5:3).
5. Update your notebook on making disciples. Include the notes on your personal time with God, memorisation notes, Bible study notes and this preparation.