

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series you may learn to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. Two teachers will do Bible study together about one important aspect of being a disciple of Jesus Christ. We will use a very easy Bible study method called the five steps method. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme. The fourth series of 5 Bible studies is about living in the world. We will be studying the following 5 Bible topics: “Money in the world”, “Truthfulness in the world”, “Temptations in the world”, “Spiritual warfare in the world” and “Suffering in the world”. Today’s Bible study is: A DISCIPLE PERSEVERES UNDER SUFFERING IN THE WORLD.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read 1 Peter 2:19-23. Let us take turns to read one verse each.

1 Peter 2:19-23. “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. (T) But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. (S) To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. (T) ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ (S) 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.”

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in this Bible passage. “Which truth in this passage is important for you?” or “Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?” Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is 1 Peter 2:23, which says that Christ did not retaliate or threaten when he suffered. I have a real desire to have that kind of self-control and inner power not to treat my enemies in the same way as they treat me.

(T) An important truth for me is in 1 Peter 2:21, which says that God calls Christians that suffer to follow in the footsteps of Christ and react to suffering in the same way as he did. Suffering is unavoidable. 2 Timothy 3:12 says, “Everyone who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”. Suffering in Christianity is significant and has great advantages for those who follow Christ’s example.

(S) **STEP 3. QUESTION**

Let us try to understand all the truths in this passage and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. “Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask?” Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers. People in the world suffer mainly for two reasons. They either suffer for doing what is wrong or they suffer for doing what is right!

1st Question. Why is there so much suffering and death in the world?

(T) Most people suffer, not because they are doing what is right in God’s eyes, but because they are doing what is wrong in God’s eyes. There are five reasons why people suffer for doing wrong. Let us take turns to explain them.

One. People suffer because they are godless. According to Romans 1:18-23, God has a holy and righteous anger against all the godlessness of people. *Godlessness* means two things. A person is godless when he does not believe that God exists and thus lives an atheistic life-style in which he himself is his own god and does whatever he pleases. A person is also godless when he does not believe in the God, who revealed himself through the prophets of the Bible and Jesus Christ. Such people believe either in idols of stone or in a god that they have thought out with their minds. In short, godlessness is living without the true God of the Bible! Godlessness consists of the wrong relationship to the God of the Bible. The result of godlessness is that the thinking of godless people becomes futile and their hearts become darkened. Because such people think what is worthless, useless and fruitless, they live in a world of lies and deceit. Such atheistic lies and religious deceit causes people to suffer. Because people lack the necessary light to live a moral and spiritual life, they live in a world where people cannot find the power to do good. Such moral and spiritual darkness causes people to suffer.

(S) Two. People suffer because they are wicked. According to Romans 1:24-32, God has a holy and righteous anger against all the wickedness of people. *Wickedness* consists of the wrong relationship to other people. The people in the world do many wrong things to one another. They drag one another into indecent and depraved life-styles. They invent ways to do evil and do every kind of conceivable wickedness to one another. Consider the things listed in Romans 1, like spiritual arrogance and hating God, sexual immorality and perversion, commercial greed and deceit, social gossiping and boasting and political senselessness and

faithlessness. People are filled with evil and constantly do evil. They invent evil and approve of evil. No wonder, when people do these things to one another, they all suffer!

(T) Three. People suffer because they believe in false beliefs. According to Romans 1:18,25, people suppress the truth and exchange the truth that comes from the God of the Bible. They unconsciously or deliberately sin against their own conscience. They deliberately ignore, suppress or even exchange the truth about who God really is, about what God says and does in the Bible and about the lost condition of man and his eternal destiny separated from God. The governments of nations do not like to submit themselves to a spiritual and moral power that is higher than themselves! The people that have power in a country often suppress and exchange the truth, because they do not want to change, but rather maintain their evil status quo! As long as governments and people refuse to change, remain unjust, selfish and egocentric, they will continue to suppress and exchange the truth for their own evil ends. The result of believing in false beliefs is that people lack personal security and personal significance in life. These feelings of insecurity and insignificance cause people to suffer.

(S) Four. People suffer because death is a reality. According to Romans 6:23, “the wages of sin is death”. The wrong relationship with the God of the Bible, the wrong relationship with other people in this world and the wrong relationship to yourself are called ‘sin’ in the Bible. *Sin* means to miss God’s goal for your life. God’s goal for your life is to have the right relationship with the God of the Bible, to have the right relationship to your neighbour and to have the right relationship to yourself. Jesus Christ says, “The first and greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second commandment is to love your neighbour as yourself” (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:30-31). Because all people in the world have sinned, all people are spiritually dead, they will die a physical death and they will suffer eternal death, unless they are completely transformed by Jesus Christ! Most people in the world do not realise that they are spiritually dead and that they are heading to eternal death. But most people in the world know that they will die physically and they fear this death! Physical death is so terrible, that they do not want to think about it or talk about it. Physical death becomes the climax of all suffering for most people. Physical death means the *separation* of your soul from your body. Your body will decay in the grave. Physical death means your separation from your loved ones on earth. You will have to leave them behind! Physical death means separation from your possessions, loss of all your education, loss of your job, leaving behind all your worldly accomplishments and position. Nothing you have worked for so hard during your lifetime, can you take along with you in death. Physical death is also terrible for those who are left behind. They are separated from their loved one and continually miss him. Moreover, they themselves fear death even more, because they don’t know when they will die and they don’t know what to expect after death. Physical death causes all people to suffer.

(T) Five. People suffer because God judges them. According to Galatians 6:7-8, God allows his judgements to strike people who transgress his laws. God has built laws into his creation. If these laws are transgressed, they bring punishment with them. For example, if a person ignores the physics law of gravity and jumps off a tall cliff, he could be killed. God has also built spiritual and moral laws into his creation and into people’s hearts. If people transgress God’s spiritual and moral laws, they are punished and as a consequence they suffer. According to Haggai 1:6-10, God brings his judgement over people who ignore, reject or disobey him. God controls the universe, including the events of history and the forces of nature. In times when people disobey God or when the relationship between people and God is broken, then God withdraws his care or God punishes people. God withdraws the fruits of nature as well as people’s basic needs of food and clothing. He causes people’s wages to be insufficient and blows their high expectations of life away. In this way, God uses all kinds of disasters like earthquakes, floods, and especially draughts and famines throughout history to show his displeasure against sin and to warn people to repent and turn back to him.

According to Hebrews 9:27 God’s final judgement will come after death. Then God will judge all people for their godlessness, wickedness, belief in false beliefs and rejection of him. According to 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9, the wicked will be punished with everlasting separation from God and will be tormented day and night forever and ever. The suffering of the final judgement of God is far worse than any other suffering or death! All wicked people and all people who reject Jesus Christ will suffer under God’s final judgement. This is very serious! Suffering in God’s future judgement will be far worse than all the present suffering on earth!

2nd Question. How should Christians regard slavery?

(S) In the first century after Christ, many slaves had become Christians and they often suffered under their harsh masters. 1 Peter 2:18 says, “Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect.” The word *slaves* here means *house servants* who came into more contact with their masters and owners in the house than the slaves who worked under their supervisors outside (Exodus 5:6). The Bible tells them to *submit* themselves to their masters. This means that they should subordinate themselves and obey their masters. They should submit not only *in fear*, because resistance was useless and would increase maltreatment, but should submit *with all inward and outward respect*, because God demands this. They should submit, not only to masters who are good and considerate, but also to masters who are harsh. The word *harsh* means, grumpy, pig-headed, unreasonable, capricious, unpredictable and even unjust. The apostle Peter demands that Christian house servants subject

themselves to their masters even when their masters are hard to serve, due to their unreasonable demands and injustice.

This *slave-master* relationship in the early times may be applied to modern *employer-employee* relationships. The Bible demands that Christian employees submit themselves to their employers with respect. Whenever their employers make unreasonable demands and act with injustice towards them, they suffer. In our time, many employers act as if they own their employees and can make any kind of demand on them. Some employers demand very much overtime work without pay. Other employers make their employees work in unhealthy or dangerous conditions. Again other employers make people, who are desperate for employment, work very hard, but grossly underpay them or even withhold paying their wages. In some countries employers use cheap foreign labour and even children in their labour force without giving them an education or fair wages. Many such harsh and unjust conditions cause also the Christians to suffer. Christians should submit to harsh and even unjust employers with respect. Christians should continue to do good, to work hard, to be faithful and honest. They should talk to their employers and about their employers with respect.

However, when employers demand that their employees do things that are forbidden in the Bible, then the employees may gently resist their employers. For example, under no circumstances may Christian employees give or receive bribes, cheat and lie in business, steal or do any other kind of evil. Whenever their employers threaten them, they should point out to their employers that they should obey God more than any other person on earth (Acts 5:29). Whenever their employers punish or dismiss them, they should endure this suffering with respect.

3rd Question. How should Christians react to suffering for doing what is good?

(T) In the world, when people suffer, they often react with open rebellion and even violence. They stand on their human rights and rights as employees. When their employers do not give in, they respond with strikes, force other employees to join their rebellion or persecute employees who do not join their rebellion. Whenever their demands are not met, they turn to violence, beating their fellow employees, destroying their employer's property or even destroying public property. In the world, people generally react to injustice by doing injustice in return. They take "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" very literally (Matthew 5:38).

How should Christians react to suffering for doing what is good? The apostle Peter says that Christians should follow in the footsteps of their Master, Jesus Christ. He never committed any sin, and yet when people hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate. He did not pay evil people back by doing evil to them. When people beat him with fists and sticks, he did not threaten them. He could have threatened them with the armies of angels and judgement of God, but instead, he did not open his mouth. However, Jesus Christ did not remain completely passive when he suffered for doing good. 1 Peter 2:23 says, "Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly." Whenever Jesus Christ suffered, he prayed and stated his case to God the Father. He handed the right to judge every case over to God. In his own time, God the Father will judge the unjust and wicked people! Therefore, Jesus Christ did not feel the need to retaliate or threaten.

4th Question. What are the advantages of suffering for doing what is good?

(S) Christians must distinguish between suffering for doing what is wrong and suffering for doing what is right. Christians are called not to seek suffering for doing what is wrong, but to endure suffering for doing what is right. The prophets in the Old Testament often suffered for doing what is right. Jesus Christ suffered for doing what is right. The apostles suffered for doing what is right. And Christians all over the world today suffer for doing what is right. Jesus Christ called all Christians to endure suffering for doing what is right.

But Christians are also called to react to their suffering in the way Jesus Christ reacted to his suffering. They should not retaliate or threaten, but surrender their lives and situations to the sovereign God, who in his own time will judge justly. Moreover, suffering for doing what is right in God's eyes will result in great advantages for the Christian. 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." And Hebrews 12:10-11 says, "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."

(T) STEP 4 and STEP 5. APPLY and PRAY

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application does God want you to turn into a *personal application*.

Do not forget to pray about one truth that God has taught you in 1 Peter 2:19-23.

(S) ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

First. Consider how *you* react to suffering. Then memorise 1 Peter 2:23.

Second. Prepare next week's Bible study from Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. See the workbooks "Go and make disciples" and Internet on www. Etc

Third. Listen on short wave radio every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY to "Discipleship training on the air".