

Defending Our Faith

Devotional Reading: [2 Timothy 4:1–8](#)

Background Scripture: [1 Peter 3:8–17](#)

[1 Peter 3:8–17](#)

⁸ Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. ⁹ Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. ¹⁰ For,

“Whoever would love life
and see good days
must keep their tongue from evil
and their lips from deceitful speech.

¹¹ They must turn from evil and do good;
they must seek peace and pursue it.

¹² For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous
and his ears are attentive to their prayer,
but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

¹³ Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” ¹⁵ But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷ For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.



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Key Text

For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.—1 Peter 3:17

Examining Our Faith

Unit I: Faithful vs. Faithless

Lessons 1–5

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the Old Testament text quoted.
2. Compare and contrast the things he or she “must do” with what he or she “must not do.”
3. State one “must do” and one “must not do” for personal focus in the week ahead.

Lesson Outline

Introduction

- A. Man's Search for Meaning?
- B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle
- C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

I. Right Behavior (1 Peter 3:8–12)

- A. Be a Blessing (vv. 8–9)

Which Route?

- B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10–12)

II. Confident Believers (1 Peter 3:13–17)

- A. Do Not Fear (vv. 13–14)

- B. Give an Answer (vv. 15–17)

Faith to the End

Conclusion

- A. Finding Meaning
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It

anthropomorphism an-thruh-pu-more-fih-zm.

Polycarp **Paw**-lih-karp.

Silas *Sigh*-luss.

Smyrna *Smur*-nuh.

Introduction

A. Man's Search for Meaning?

Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Shouldn't we "get even" with those who do us wrong? Anyone with life experience will inevitably ask these questions. We want to make sense of our suffering and find a way to deal with the resulting despair, if not eliminate it entirely.

Viktor E. Frankl's 1946 book *Man's Search for Meaning* details his attempts to find meaning and purpose in his experiences as a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. By the end of the book, Frankl acknowledges human evil and the capacity of suffering humans to find meaning in their experiences.

Many individuals described in Scripture suffered persecution. The various ways they reacted are timeless in their ability to instruct all future generations.

B. Lesson Context: Peter, the Apostle

Peter was one of Jesus' original 12 disciples (also known as "apostles"; [Luke 6:13](#)). Peter (also called Simon or Cephas; [John 1:42](#)) was known for being impulsive (examples: [Matthew 14:22–28](#); [16:22](#); [26:35](#); [Mark 9:5–6](#); [John 18:10](#)). In spite of that fact—or perhaps because of it—he seems to have held a special place among the Twelve. He is named first in all four listings of those Twelve ([Matthew 10:2–4](#); [Mark 3:16–19](#); [Luke 6:14–16](#); [Acts 1:13](#)). Jesus conferred on him the "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" ([Matthew 16:19](#)). After Jesus' ascension, Peter was a leader of the first-century church (see [Acts 1:15–17](#); [2:14–40](#); [15:6–29](#)). His ministry focused mainly on Jews (see [Galatians 2:8](#)). In that position, he experienced persecution (example: [Acts 12:1–4](#)), which informed his outlook regarding suffering and trials.

C. Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter

[First Peter 5:13](#) reveals the likely location of where the letter was written: the city of Rome. That verse says "Babylon," not "Rome," but there is widespread agreement that *Babylon* is a code word for *Rome*. Historic, literal Babylon had been the great oppressor of the Jews in the sixth century BC ([2 Kings 24–25](#)). This served as Peter's analogy to Rome of the first century AD (compare [Revelation 14:8](#); [16:19](#); [17:5](#); etc.), particularly under the evil Emperor Nero (reigned AD 4–68).

The letter's positive attitude toward government ([1 Peter 2:13–17](#)) may indicate that Nero's state-sponsored persecution had not yet reached full intensity (but see [4:12](#)). In any case, Peter was not shy about confronting ruling authorities when necessary ([Acts 4:19](#); [5:29](#)). As one writer notes, 1 Peter is "one of the earliest Christian documents reflecting on the problem of the relation of the Christian to the state."

The letter of 1 Peter is one of two existing letters by that apostle ([1 Peter 1:1](#); [2 Peter 1:1](#)). The recipients of both letters were the various churches found in an area of northeastern Asia Minor, located in modern-day Turkey ([1 Peter 1:1](#); [2 Peter 3:1](#)). The first letter was likely intended to be circulated among the regions, perhaps by way of Silas, an assistant to Peter ([1 Peter 5:12](#)). Were the intended recipients primarily of Jewish background, primarily of Gentile background, or a roughly even split? The letter's dozen or so quotations from the Old Testament could indicate that the intended audience was primarily of Jewish background. A stronger case can be made, however, for seeing the audience as primarily Gentile in background as Peter addressed their former lives of "ignorance" ([1:14](#); compare Paul's use of this same word in [Ephesians 4:17–19](#) to refer to Gentiles).

The occasion for Peter's letter was primarily a response to the suffering of believers, particularly since more was yet to come (see [1 Peter 1:6–7](#); etc.). Peter could address whatever suffering his audience had or would experience because he had been "a witness of Christ's sufferings" ([5:1](#)); Peter himself had suffered for that name ([Acts 12](#)).

I. Right Behavior

([1 Peter 3:8–12](#))

A. Be a Blessing (vv. [8–9](#))

8a. Finally, all of you, be like-minded,

Verse 8 as a whole is only nine words in the original language. Five of those nine words are adjectives that describe behavior fitting for believers facing a hostile world.

The first adjective, translated as *like-minded*, describes the desired unity of believers. Unity is a gift from God ([Romans 15:5–6](#)). The frequency of New Testament references to unity speaks to its importance ([John 10:16](#); [17:11](#), [21–22](#); [1 Corinthians 1:10–12](#); [2 Corinthians 13:11](#); [Ephesians 4:3](#), [13](#); [Philippians 2:1–4](#); [4:2](#)).

What Do You Think?

Why might Christians not experience God's gift of unity?

Digging Deeper

What scriptural evidence gives you confidence in unity as a gift, even if believers seem divided?

8b. be sympathetic,

This is the translation of the second of the five adjectives. Were we to take the individual letters of the underlying Greek word and flip them to their sound-alike letters in the English alphabet, we would hear the word *sympathy*. The word appears in its verb form in [Hebrews 4:15](#); [10:34](#).

8c. love one another,

Repeating the procedure from verse 8b, converting the individual letters of the underlying Greek word to their sound-alike letters in English results in hearing the word *Philadelphia*—the city of brotherly *love*. Believers are described as part of God's household or family ([Matthew 12:50](#); [John 1:12](#); [Galatians 6:10](#); [Ephesians 2:19](#); [1 John 3:1–2](#)). Therefore, the third adjective describes the love that family members are to have for one another.

8d. be compassionate and humble.

This verse's fourth and fifth adjectives elaborate on how believers can live with love and compassion. To have heartfelt concern toward others is a crucial part of the life of a believer (compare [Ephesians 4:32](#); [Colossians 3:12](#)). Its presence reflects a life transformed by God's love (see [1 John 3:17](#)).

To be *humble* is probably an umbrella term that includes deference, kindness, and thinking of others more highly than oneself (compare [Romans 12:16](#); [Philippians 2](#); [1 Peter 5:5](#)).

9a. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult.

The command regarding not repaying *evil with evil* can be found in several other passages (examples: [Proverbs 20:22](#); [24:29](#); [Matthew 5:39](#), [44](#); [Romans 12:17](#), [19](#); [1 Thessalonians 5:15](#)). An aspect of evil treatment the original readers had suffered or were suffering was insults. The idea includes slander or reproach. Jesus himself had faced mocking and insults leading up to and during his crucifixion ([Matthew 27:27–31](#); [Mark 15:29–32](#); [Luke 22:63–65](#)). However, he did not respond to his abusers in the manner in which he was treated (see [1 Peter 2:23](#)).

What Do You Think?

In which situations is it most difficult not to respond to verbal assaults?

Digging Deeper

9b. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

It's not sufficient merely to refrain from rendering evil for evil. Rather, potential evil reactions are to be replaced with actual holy reactions ([Matthew 5:44](#)). This should not be confused with a salvation based on works, for Peter has already established salvation as God's work ([1 Peter 1:3, 23](#)). As a result of our salvation, we are to be conduits for God's blessing in the world.

Which Route?

He was a new Bible college professor. He knew his teaching skills needed much improvement, and negative student feedback wounded him deeply. In one feedback evaluation, a student said he should find a different line of work.

An especially painful incident occurred one day during the college's chapel service. A student had organized a skit in which the actors mocked a clueless professor who was obviously modeled after this man. After chapel, students watched as he went up to the stage to speak to the student who had instigated the mockery. Smiling, he shook the student's hand firmly and pulled him into a side-hug. Looking the student in the eyes, the professor said, "You're a brilliant actor, Jim. God's given you a great talent. I'm glad you're my student."

Jim managed to stammer a "thanks" and went back to moving stage props. Although the skit had been mortifying, the man was confident that he had chosen the route of Jesus—the route of love, compassion, and blessing. Had you been that professor, would you have done the same?

—A. W.

B. Pursue Peace (vv. 10–12)

10. For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.

This verse begins with a quote from [Psalm 34:12–16](#), supporting Peter's point regarding the right kind of behavior amid trials and difficulty. According to this psalm's superscription, David wrote this psalm during a time of personal suffering and trials, as recorded in [1 Samuel 21:10–15](#). Therefore, it was an appropriate psalm to cite to an audience of believers who themselves were undergoing trials (see [Lesson Context: Peter, the First Letter](#)). With this quote, Peter switches back to the negative, what-not-to-do imperatives but with greater specificity: *evil* as it comes from one's *tongue* (compare [James 3:1–10](#)).

A feature of Hebrew poetry known as *parallelism* is quite evident here. Note that the words *tongue* and *lips* are synonyms in the sense of being instruments of speech. The *evil* and *deceitful speech* they can produce are also parallel in meaning. The parallelism continues in the next verse.

11a. "They must turn from evil and do good;

Perhaps you recall from previous lessons that when parallelism is present, then only one idea is in

view, not two. Thus to *turn from evil and do good* are to be seen as a single action. The way to avoid evil is to replace those impulses with doing good as one action. To avoid evil without replacing it with doing good introduces the danger noted in [Luke 11:24–26](#).

11b. “they must seek peace and pursue it.

More Hebrew parallelism presents itself in this continuing quote from [Psalm 34:14](#): to *seek peace* is the same thing as to *pursue it* (compare [Matthew 5:9](#)). God’s people have peace with him ([Romans 5:1](#)), and we are expected to seek peace in relationships with others ([14:19](#)). This is not peace “at any cost,” but is peace “as far as it depends on you” ([12:18](#)). We don’t yield or agree to unholy viewpoints merely to keep the peace ([Matthew 10:34–36](#); [Luke 12:51–53](#)). God is indeed a “God of peace” ([Romans 15:33](#); [16:20](#)), but he also wages war ([Revelation 2:16](#); [19:19](#); etc.).

12. “For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

This verse features a literary tool called *anthropomorphism*, which is seeing God in terms of human characteristics and behavior. “God is spirit” ([John 4:24](#)) and, therefore, does not have a physical body. However, Peter describes the Lord figuratively as having *eyes*, *ears*, and a *face*. Peter does this to help his audience better understand the Lord’s character. This technique is nothing new, being used dozens of times in both Old and New Testaments (examples: [Genesis 6:8](#); [Exodus 33:10, 20, 23](#); [Amos 9:8](#); [James 5:4](#)).

II. Confident Believers

([1 Peter 3:13–17](#))

A. Do Not Fear (vv. [13–14](#))

13. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?

Another literary tool presents itself: that of the rhetorical question. Such questions are not intended to elicit an answer because the answer is obvious. The rhetorical question here contrasts an ideal situation with what was likely already being experienced by Peter’s audience, per the next verse, below.

14a. But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

While Peter hoped to see good behavior receive proper recognition (see [1 Peter 2:13–14](#)), this would not always be the case. Oppression is not inevitable for believers, but it is a possibility that all believers must prepare themselves to face—and not be surprised when it does ([4:12](#); [1 John 3:13](#)).

Peter was not suggesting those who suffer experience a masochistic enjoyment of their own pain. Blessing comes when people hear God’s word and obey his commands ([Luke 11:28](#)). The ultimate blessing comes when a person receives forgiveness for sin through faith in Christ Jesus (see [Romans 4:4–8](#)).

What Do You Think?

What blessing have you experienced during or following suffering for righteousness’ sake?

Digging Deeper

How can you communicate the hope of blessing while not ignoring the pain another is currently experi-

14b. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.”

This half-verse alludes to [Isaiah 8:12](#). That section of the book where it is located details a conflict between the southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel. When Ahaz, king of Judah, was faced with the destruction of his kingdom, the Lord promised that Judah would be protected ([Isaiah 7:3–9](#)). Even though Ahaz and his people faced destruction, they were commanded not to be afraid. They were to fear the Lord rather than earthly opponents ([8:12–15](#)).

B. Give an Answer (vv. 15–17)**15a. But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.**

Again, the challenge was (and is) to replace what is not to be done with what should be done instead. To *revere*, or sanctify (as in [John 17:17, 19](#), etc.), means to designate someone or something being set apart as holy ([10:36](#)). The underlying Greek word is also translated as “hallowed” in verses proclaiming the holiness of God’s name ([Matthew 6:9](#); [Luke 11:2](#)). Given the imperative tone of the verb *revere* as used here, we may wonder how we mere humans can possibly *revere Christ as Lord* more than he already is sanctified! Indeed, this verb is used in its imperative tone only five times in the New Testament: here and in [Matthew 6:9](#); [Luke 11:12](#); [John 17:17](#); [Revelation 22:11](#).

The key to understanding all this is context. Words take on definite meanings only within the contexts used. Take, for instance, the word *fine*. By itself, it has no fewer than seven potential meanings! Which of the seven is intended is discovered only in the context of that word’s use in a sentence and paragraph. The context of the imperative in the verse before us is found in these three words: *in your hearts*. Humans certainly do not sanctify God by literally making him holier than he already is! What we are to change, rather, is how we view him.

15b. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

[Colossians 4:6](#) says much the same thing as this verse. “Readiness” in a general New Testament sense has two aspects: we are to be ready to do good ([Titus 3:1](#)) even as we remain ready for the Son’s return ([Matthew 24:44](#); [Luke 12:40](#)). We err when we focus on either of those at the expense of the other. One error is reflected in the old description of someone who was “so heavenly minded that he was no earthly good.” The other error lets a Christian’s responsibility to be a change agent for social justice eclipse the need to evangelize for the life to come in eternity.

There are various areas in which Christians are to be ready. Peter specifies one of these: one’s readiness *to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have*. Notice that this isn’t addressing what preachers and Bible teachers are to do on Sunday morning to people who are already saved by the blood! Rather, it applies to all Christians as they (we) interact with unbelievers in everyday life.

Notice also that Peter’s imperative isn’t dealing with a Christian’s initiative in bringing up the subject of salvation in Jesus. Rather, the imperative here deals with how to react when an unbeliever asks

about our hope. But before the unbeliever asks about our hope, he or she needs to see that hope reflected in how we talk and behave differently from the ways the world does (1 Peter 4:3–4).

15c. But do this with gentleness and respect,

Any response that believers provide will be as effective only as the attitude with which it is given. In that light, the phrase *with gentleness and respect* speaks to a low-key response. Such a demeanor is to characterize followers of Jesus (see Matthew 5:5; Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12).

What Do You Think?

How do you remain ready to testify about the hope you have?

Digging Deeper

How would someone hearing you speak about your hope describe your attitude?

16. keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.

The New Testament has much to say about the importance of one's *conscience* as it uses that word about 30 times. The conscience can be a marvelous guide to proper thought and behavior if it is properly informed in doing so (Acts 23:1; 24:16; Romans 9:1; etc.). When functioning as God intended, it is a moral alarm system (Romans 2:15). But one's conscience can be overridden by evil desires (Ephesians 4:19; 1 Timothy 4:2).

17. For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

Proper conduct (*doing good*) in all situations is an important theme in this letter (see 1 Peter 2:15, 20; 4:19). When believers *suffer* for such conduct, the result is a powerful witness for unbelievers. The ultimate example of suffering in this regard is Christ (see 3:18, not today's lesson text).

This verse also reveals another aspect of believers' suffering: *God's will*. We should approach this topic with much caution because *the will of God* in some contexts means that he *causes* something to happen, but in other contexts, it means that he *permits* it to happen. God exercises his sovereign control by permitting what he does not cause. Some relevant passages to help understand the difference are Job 1:12; 2:6; Lamentations 3:32–33; Acts 14:16; 16:7; 1 Corinthians 16:7; Hebrews 6:3; 12:4–11; James 1:13–15; 4:15.

In any case, God is able to bring good out of suffering—indeed, that is his intent (Romans 8:28). God does not enjoy seeing people suffer, but he does allow it (example: Exodus 3:7–9) at times. A believer's suffering leads to faithful endurance (Romans 5:3–4; James 1:3) and a deeper relationship with Christ (Philippians 3:8–10).

Faith to the End

According to church history, Polycarp was a disciple of the Apostle John. Polycarp became the leader of the church of Smyrna (compare Revelation 2:8–11). At age 86, he was put to death by the Roman government for refusing to pray to the emperor. Given the chance to save his own life by recanting his faith, Polycarp said, “86 years have I have served him, and he has done me no wrong.

How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?” Polycarp was burned at the stake in AD 155.

Polycarp didn’t do anything to deserve this death. And in facing it, he set apart Christ as his Lord to the very end. He died with a clear conscience. If those who took his life were not ashamed of their slander in this life, they will be at the final judgment. In your last days, will you have so clear a testimony of faithfulness to Christ?

—A. W.

Conclusion

A. Finding Meaning

Few of us will experience the level of suffering endured by the martyrs of Christian history. However, that does not make Peter’s directives any less applicable—quite the opposite! When faced with suffering, we may search for meaning in that experience. The question asked relentlessly is, *Why?*



Visual for [Lesson 3](#). Allow learners to ponder this question before moving to those associated with verse [15c](#).

That question is natural and understandable. But it must also be temporary because ultimately the

Why? needs to change to *What's next?* This is a way that our response to suffering can also serve as a way to point people to a life of faith in Jesus. God wants the best for people. When such suffering occurs, believers should remember to be unified in demonstrating trust in God.

What Do You Think?

What is your main takeaway from this lesson?

Digging Deeper

What will do you this week in response to that takeaway?

B. Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us in all situations. Help us be unified with other believers. Show us how we can be attentive to the working of your Spirit. Fill us with peace and humility in all the trials that we might face. We trust that you will work through us to complete your will in the world. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Let suffering strengthen your faith.

Involvement Learning

*Enhance your lesson with **NIV** Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the **NIV** Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).*

Into the Lesson

Divide participants into three small groups: **Beach Group**, **Crowded Subway Group**, and **Movie Theater Group**. Based on their assigned locations, instruct groups to write two lists of appropriate behaviors and discouraged behaviors. Challenge them to include at least three do's and three don'ts.

After several minutes, ask the groups to write some guidelines for appropriate behavior in their setting, based on the behaviors they have already discussed. After a few more minutes, have the small groups share their rules with the whole group. Discuss what they discovered about rules and expectations.

Lead into the Bible study by saying, "Whether we realize it or not, everything we do is governed by rules or expectations. As we study the passage of Scripture today, consider what rules and expectations God has for his children."

Into the Word

Have participants return to their previous groups. Assign each group one of the following texts: [Matthew 5:43–48](#); [John 13:12–17](#); and [John 17:20–26](#). Have groups compare their text with [1 Peter 3:8–9](#) and answer these questions:

1. What is the common theme between the two passages?
2. What did Jesus do in his ministry that shows this theme in action?
3. What “must do” and “must not do” actions did you find in the passages?

Allow time for small group discussion, then ask groups to share their insights with the whole class. Based on the group discussion, create a list of *Must Do* items on the board as well as a second list of *Must Not Do* items.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “To Do and Not to Do” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated before coming together as a whole class to discuss.

Ask a volunteer to read [1 Peter 3:10–12](#). As a class, discuss what these verses reveal about why we ought to follow the commands of verses [8–9](#). Ask volunteers to read [Psalm 34](#) out loud. Then assign the previous three small groups these sections: [Psalm 34:1–7](#); [34:8–14](#); [34:15–22](#). Have each group make a list of all the reasons why believers should strive to live godly lives, as indicated in their verses and [1 Peter 3:10–12](#). After bringing the three groups back together, create a third list titled *Why* on the board. Have the groups provide answers to fill in this new list.

Ask a volunteer to read [1 Peter 3:13–17](#). Have participants pair up. Ask the pairs to share between them examples of when they have suffered in the past, and how God turned that suffering into a blessing.

Into Life

Review the lists written on the board earlier in the lesson. Challenge participants to choose one “must do” and one “must not do” from the verses, which they will put into practice in the week ahead. Distribute an index card and pencil to each person. Have participants write their chosen “must do” and “must not do” on the card. Invite participants to refer to their cards throughout the week. Ask participants to bring their cards and an assessment of their progress to share at the beginning of the next lesson. *Option.* If you used the alternative above, allow learners to work from their activity page.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “With Gentleness and Respect” exercise from the activity page. Allow learners one minute to complete as indicated before pairing up to give their answers.

Pray with learners before dismissing class.