

1. Being a Christian can cause suffering. What other things in life do people willingly choose to do even though they will likely cause them to suffer? Why do they still choose to do it?

The point here is to introduce the idea that some things are worth enduring suffering for. Some eg's: childbirth, war (& law enforcement in general), bodybuilding & other exercise, investigative journalism

2. **Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.** Back in 1:6 Peter referred to suffering "grief in all kind of trials". What kind of suffering is he referring to in this section?

Suffering caused specifically by being a Christian. In 1:6 "all kind of trials" can refer to this but also to suffering that's common to all because we live in a fallen world.

3. "painful trial you are suffering" v.12 (NIV) is better translated "tested by fire" (Basic English Version), where "fire" can carry the connotation of "purifying". This is not referring not to an obvious, physical persecution, but to the suffering they face for being Christian. Peter has referred to this already in 2:11, 12, 2:20b, 3:14, 16-17, 4:4. Have you experienced this kind of suffering, or anything similar, because you are a Christian? What have been your thoughts in such times?

No need to push if people don't have experiences to discuss, but try to encourage people to realise that the normal Christian life involves suffering for our faith in various ways.

4. Why does Peter say, "don't be surprised"? What is the problem with Christians thinking something "strange" was happening to them when they suffer for their faith?

This is part of being "clear minded" v.7. If you think something strange is happening, you might be tempted to think you are doing something wrong, or that God is not happy with you, or even that it's not worth being a Christian because it's just you that finds the going hard sometimes.

5. Christians often talk about having "fellowship" together. The word "fellowship means, "share" and is the word the NIV translates "participate in" in v.13. What is the fellowship that all Christians have and how should we think about it?

Fellowship with Christ in his sufferings – this should give us cause to rejoice because it also means we have fellowship with him in his triumph and glory.

6. **Read Matt 5:11-12.** Peter seems to have this in mind at v.14. What usually comes to mind when someone puts you down for being a Christian? How can these words help you in those times?

We need to read, remember and remind each other of this eternal perspective so that we won't retaliate with our own put downs, or be intimidated into silence about our faith.

7. Why do you think Peter adds v.15?

Sadly, some Christians will view anything bad that happens as some kind of spiritual suffering for Christ, even when they themselves have caused it by being offensive or obnoxious! This is a reminder that we are still responsible for our own actions and need to behave in a way that doesn't cause needless suffering.

8. **Read Mark 8:38 and 1 Peter 4:16-18.** What is the end result of being ashamed of the name of Jesus? Sometimes we feel that we "have it easy" as Christians because we are not physically persecuted. But we are constantly pressured to feel ashamed for our faith. What do these verses tell us about our situation?

When Jesus comes in judgment, he will treat us the way we have treated him. The pressure to be ashamed or 'embarrassed' for following Christ is part of the cosmic, spiritual battle that Christ came to triumph over. The subtle, daily, social pressure to think little of Jesus has just as serious potential (perhaps more) than the overt, physical attacks of those who are hostile to Christianity.

9. Does the conclusion of v.19 (ie having committed yourself to God, **continue to do good**) strike you as surprising? Why does Peter finish this section with such an exhortation? Perhaps also read: 1:2, 2:14, 20, 3:1-2, 6, 11, 13, 14, 16.

We have been saved for obedience to Jesus Christ – a life of godly behaviour is God's will for us. Peter has been encouraging us with this message throughout his letter. It is entirely consistent, then, when exhorting us not to be surprised, or ashamed but to rejoice in the face of suffering, to go on doing them= very things that have caused the suffering in the first place! This is to God's glory, this reminds you that you belong to Jesus, and just maybe it will win over the hearts of some who currently oppose Jesus and so oppose you, his follower (so 3:1-2).

10. Spend time praying for Christians in places you know that are under physical persecution, but pray also for the suffering that all Christians (ourselves included) must endure because we all live in a fallen world where 'the world, the flesh and the devil' seek to derail our faith.