

A little suffering now, but enduring inheritance to come

(Suitable for use within a group over approximately one hour, or for an individual's personal Bible reading)

Thinking about life as a student in healthcare

1. Define 'hope'.
2. Consider your university peers.
 - a. What do they put their hope(s) in? Are these hopes, if realised, enduring?
 - b. Have you seen evidence that these hopes sustain (or otherwise) your peers during times of suffering in their lives?
3. When you consider the world around you, what do people consider the purpose of suffering to be? What is their general attitude towards it?

What does God have to say?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-7.

The book of 1 Peter was written by the apostle Peter, most likely between AD 62-64 (the time during which the great persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire (under Emperor Nero) occurred). The letter revolves around the theme of suffering – both the suffering of Christ and the suffering of His followers. Peter was not writing from a naïve, abstract viewpoint. He himself endured much persecution during his own life time (under Nero's reign), culminating in his own martyrdom. He writes to encourage believers in the purpose of suffering, and the motivation to endure it (following the example of Christ).

However before launching into his address on suffering, here in this passage Peter helps his readers maintain true perspective as he reminds them of the great hope they have – a hope that, in contrast to any suffering they may endure now, will last eternally. Further, this hope is accessed through faith, and this faith is refined through suffering. Suffering feeds back directly into the hope of heaven (by strengthening, even sustaining, faith) – and here it's purpose.

Putting it into practice

Imagine yourself in the following situation:

Due to circumstances that exist outside of your university course (for example, illness), you are not able to attend the amount of required class time which results in you having to repeat that whole year. You will no longer be able to graduate with your original year group, and you also find yourself having to cope with increased financial and emotional stresses (due to the repeat year).

1. How does the hope outlined in this passage change how you *feel* in this example of suffering? (Look particularly at verses 4 & 6).
2. How does this passage inform you as to how to think about and process this suffering that has come upon you?
3. Reflecting on your answers to questions 1 & 2 above, what attitude would be appropriate for you to maintain towards suffering?

Spend time praying for one another that God will give you the courage, strength and capacity to have this attitude should suffering befall.

Verse 7 tells us that suffering refines our faith, which is 'of greater worth than gold'. It follows therefore that suffering, while painful, is not something to be despised, but rather is something to be endured, with the understanding that it brings great benefit to our faith (and so has purpose) – the most precious thing we have.

4. List three practical ways that you will be able to remind yourself of this truth in the midst of suffering when it will be hardest to believe.

Bible Bites

(Suitable to be completed over approximately 20-25 minutes)

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What does God have to say?

Read 1 Peter 1:3-7:

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.'

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