



## EXPERIENCING GOD'S EMBRACE

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### WORSHIP

Begin your group with a time of worship. If someone in your group can lead worship, invite them to lead two or three songs. Alternatively, consider using one or more of these songs from our Sunday morning worship time:

- **Again And Again** (*Red Rocks Worship*)
- **His Name Is Jesus** (*Phil Wickham*)
- **No Longer Slaves** (*Bethel Live*)

### SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- 1 Peter 5:1-7, 10-14
- Philippians 3:9-11
- John 16:7
- Ephesians 5:17-19

### OPENING PRAYER

Begin by asking God to open hearts and minds to His Word.

### Ice Breaker (5-10 min)

Icebreaker Question: What's the difference between a quick hug and a meaningful embrace? When was the last time you experienced either?

## KEY TAKEAWAYS (5 mins)

1. Suffering with Christ is normal and purposeful. We shouldn't be surprised by trials; instead, we can rejoice as we participate in Christ's sufferings, knowing we'll share in His glory.
2. Jesus is both authoritative and caring. The Chief Shepherd leads with power but also with sacrificial love. We can trust His leadership completely.
3. Humility must be intentional. We're called to "clothe ourselves" with humility—it's an active choice, not a passive state. This humility frees us to cast our anxieties on God.
4. We need each other. Even the apostle Peter needed help from Silas. God designed the body of Christ to function through diverse gifts working together.
5. Suffering is temporary; glory is eternal. After we've "suffered a little while," God will restore, strengthen, and establish us (v.10).

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (35-40 min)

### Part 1: Embracing Suffering (1 Peter 4:12-19)

**Question 1:** Peter tells us not to be surprised by "fiery ordeals." Why do you think we're often caught off guard when suffering comes into our lives?

**Question 2:** The sermon mentioned "suffering with broken, messy people so that they might receive the gospel." Share an example of when ministry to others has been costly or difficult for you. What kept you going?

**Question 3:** Read Philippians 3:10-11. Paul wanted to know "the power of his resurrection AND participation in his sufferings." Why are both aspects important? Can we truly know Christ without embracing both?

**Question 4:** How can we distinguish between suffering "as a Christian" (v.16) versus suffering due to our own poor choices or sin?

### Part 2: The Chief Shepherd's Leadership (1 Peter 5:1-4)

**Question 5:** Peter describes three characteristics of Christ's leadership:

- Authoritative leadership
- Self-sacrificing care
- Eternal perspective

Which of these do you find most comforting? Which is most challenging to submit to?

**Question 6:** The sermon referenced John 21 where Jesus asked Peter three times, "Do you love me?" and then commanded him to care for His sheep. How does Jesus's restoration of Peter after his denial inform how we should view our own failures and calling?

**Question 7:** What does it look like practically to serve "not because you must, but because you are willing" in your current season of life?

### **Part 3: Embracing Humility (1 Peter 5:5-7)**

**Question 8:** Peter quotes, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." Why is this described as a "bedrock truth" we need to receive?

**Question 9:** Verse 7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." How does this verse connect to the call to humility in verses 5-6? What's the relationship between humility and anxiety?

**Question 10:** Share one area where you're currently struggling to "humble yourself under God's mighty hand." How can this group pray for you?

### **Part 4: Diverse Gifting (1 Peter 5:12)**

**Question 11:** Peter relied on Silas's writing skills to communicate his message. When have you had to depend on someone else's gifts to accomplish something important?

**Question 12:** What gifts do you see in the people around this table? How can we better utilize each other's strengths in our group and church community?

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION (10 Mins)**

Choose one of the following to practice this week:

### **Option 1: Embrace Suffering**

- Identify one "messy" relationship or difficult ministry opportunity you've been avoiding
- Pray for God's strength to engage with it redemptively
- Take one concrete step toward that person or situation

### **Option 2: Practice Humility**

- Write down 3-5 current anxieties
- Spend time in prayer specifically "casting" each one on God
- When anxiety returns, physically remind yourself (hand gesture, note, etc.) that you've given it to God

### **Option 3: Celebrate Diverse Gifts**

- Identify someone in your church whose gifts are different from yours
- Thank them specifically for how their gifts have blessed you or the body
- Ask how you can support or encourage their ministry

### **Option 4: Study the Chief Shepherd**

- Read John 10:1-18 (Jesus as the Good Shepherd)
- Journal about how Jesus has shown both authority and care in your life
- Share your reflections with one person this week

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

Personal Reflection (2-3 minutes of silence):

- Which of the four "embraces" is God calling you to focus on right now?
- What's one specific way you can respond to this message this week?

Group Sharing:

- Invite 2-3 people to share their reflection
- Close in prayer, specifically addressing the needs and commitments shared