

# Leader Guide



**Speaker:** Casey Scott

**Series:** Growth Spurt

**Title:** Holy Hardship

**Primary Texts:** Romans 5:1–8; 1 Peter 3:13–18

**Big Idea:** God uses Holy Hardship (faithfully received, whether you chose it or not) to make you like Jesus.

## Sermon Outline

### 1. Introduction: Time Under Tension

- Illustration: holding a light dumbbell—**weight + time** = growth.
- TUT: muscles grow not just by lifting weight, but by staying under load.
- **Spiritual TUT:** God uses practices and pressures that keep our souls under tension to trigger growth.
- New series: **Growth Spurt** – ways God produces *rapid* spiritual growth.
- Today: **Holy Hardship**
  - Not suffering from sin, foolishness, or being obnoxious.
  - Hardship that God **uses**—sometimes chosen, sometimes forced.

### 2. Grace First, Then Growth (Romans 5:1–2)

- “Since we have been **justified through faith...**”
  - Declared right with God through Jesus’ death and resurrection.
  - Results: **peace with God, access to grace, hope of glory.**
- Holy hardship is **not** how we earn God’s love; it’s what God uses **after** we’re loved.
- If reversed, Christianity becomes “spiritual CrossFit”: pain as proof.
  - Gospel order: **Grace → then formation.**

### 3. The Chain Reaction of Holy Hardship (Romans 5:3–5)

- “We glory in our sufferings...” (pressure, tribulation).
- God’s sequence: **Suffering → Perseverance → Character → Hope.**
- God uses pressure like a trainer uses weight: Not to crush, but to strengthen.
- Hope doesn’t disappoint because God’s love is poured into our hearts by the Spirit.

### 4. Clarifying the Kind of Suffering (1 Peter 3:13–18)

- Romans: *what* God does inside suffering.
- 1 Peter: *which* suffering counts & *how* we carry it.
- Filter: “Even if you suffer **for what is right**, you are blessed.”
- Two categories of **Holy Hardship**:
  1. **Hardship BY Doing Good** (chosen disciplines).
  2. **Hardship FOR Doing Good** (pushback for obedience).

## 5. Hardship BY Doing Good (Chosen Holy Hardship)

- Voluntarily putting life under strain because we want Jesus more than comfort:
  - Fasting, spiritual disciplines, sacrificial serving, generous self-giving, saying no to temptation.
- **Key principle:** Chosen hardship **trains you for** unchosen hardship.
- We “stand in grace” (Rom. 5:2): Discipline doesn’t earn grace; it **displays** grace and visible hope.
- Peter: “In your hearts revere Christ as Lord... always be prepared to give an answer...”
  - Chosen hardship makes our **hope visible** and points people to Jesus, not to us.

## 6. Hardship FOR Doing Good (Forced Holy Hardship)

- Hardship we don’t choose:
  - Persecution, pushback, misunderstanding, slander, exclusion **because** of obedience.
- Peter: “Suffer for what is right... do not fear their threats.”
- Paul: we rejoice in suffering **because we know** what God is producing.
  - Not masochism—**knowledge-based hope**.
- Same chain: suffering → perseverance → character → hope.
  - Forced hardship **tests, reveals, and refines** faith.
- Peter’s posture:
  - Answer with **gentleness and respect**, keeping a clear conscience.
  - Win = Christlike witness, not “owning” opponents.
- Participation in Christ’s pattern:
  - “Christ also suffered... to bring you to God.”
  - A **cross-shaped life** produces **cross-shaped hope** (Christoformity).

## 7. Real-Life Examples

- Integrity costing social capital or advancement.
- Refusing to lie, cheat, or gossip and being labeled “difficult” or “not one of us.”
- Holding to Jesus’ teaching on holiness, sexuality, forgiveness, truth and being called hateful.
- Faithfulness in marriage or sexual purity mocked as naïve.
- Not bowing to approval idols and experiencing loneliness.

Peter: **Don’t fear. Honor Christ as Lord. Be gentle, respectful, ready to explain your hope.**

## 8. Conclusion & Invitations (Romans 5:6–8)

- Jesus endured both **chosen** and **forced** holy hardship for us:
  - “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”
- Before we suffer for Jesus, **He suffered for us.**
- If God loved us like that as sinners, He will not abandon us now—
  - That’s why Christian hope does not disappoint.

**Two invitations:**

1. **Choose hardship (BY doing good).**
2. **Receive hardship (FOR doing good).**

For those not yet at peace with God: the starting line is Romans 5:1—  
**“Since we have been justified through faith...”**

## II. Heart Questions (This is Me)

1. **How do you naturally respond to hardship—fight, flight, freeze, or faith?**
  - What emotions surface when you hear that God may use hardship, not just remove it?
2. **Where have you experienced “time under tension” recently—emotionally, spiritually, or relationally?**
  - Looking back, can you see any evidence that God used that season to grow you?
3. **How does it land on your heart to hear that you are justified, at peace with God, before you ever “do” any holy hardship?**
  - Does that feel freeing, confusing, or hard to believe?
4. **Which kind of hardship stirs more anxiety in you: chosen disciplines or unchosen suffering? Why?**
5. **When you imagine suffering “for what is right,” what are you most afraid of losing—reputation, relationships, comfort, control, security?**
  - How might Jesus be meeting you in that specific fear?
6. **What part of Jesus’ own suffering for you moves your heart the most?**
  - How does remembering His cross change the way you feel about carrying your own cross-shaped hardships?

## III. Head Questions (This is What I Need to Think About)

1. **Read Romans 5:1–2.**
  - What does it mean to be “justified through faith”?
  - How do peace with God, access to grace, and hope of glory form the foundation for everything Paul says next about suffering?
2. **Read Romans 5:3–5.**
  - Trace the chain reaction: suffering → perseverance → character → hope.
  - Why is it important that Paul says “we know” these things, not just “we feel” them?
3. **Read 1 Peter 3:13–18.**
  - According to Peter, what kind of suffering is in view?
  - How does he distinguish between suffering for doing good and suffering for doing evil?
4. **The sermon distinguished between hardship BY doing good and hardship FOR doing good.**
  - How would you define each in your own words?
  - Why is that distinction important so we don’t glorify all pain indiscriminately?
5. **How does understanding “grace first, then growth” protect us from turning disciplines into legalism or spiritual performance?**
  - What happens theologically if we reverse that order?
6. **How do chosen disciplines (fasting, serving, self-denial) prepare a believer to face unchosen suffering?**
  - Can you think of biblical or historical examples where this seems to be true?
7. **What does it mean to say that a cross-shaped life produces cross-shaped hope (Christoformity)?**
  - How does Jesus’ own pattern of suffering and glory shape Christian expectations about blessing and hardship?

## IV. Hands Questions (This is How I Need to Act)

1. **Choose one “Time Under Tension” practice for this week (chosen hardship).**
  - What specific discipline will you adopt—fasting a meal, a new prayer rhythm, serving someone sacrificially, denying a particular appetite, or finally doing a hard good thing you’ve delayed?
  - When will you do it, and what will you ask God to form in you through it?
2. **Identify one area of forced holy hardship in your life right now.**

- Where are you experiencing pushback, misunderstanding, or loss because you're trying to follow Jesus?
- How might Romans 5:3–5 and 1 Peter 3:13–18 reframe how you interpret that situation?

**3. Practice Peter's posture “with gentleness and respect.”**

- Think of one person or context where you feel attacked or dismissed.
- What would it look like this week to respond with gentleness, respect, and a clear conscience instead of defensiveness or retaliation?

**4. Make your hope visible.**

- What is one practical way you can let your hope in Christ be seen—so that if someone asked about it, you'd have an answer ready?
- (Example: choosing peace rather than panic, generosity rather than self-protection, forgiveness rather than resentment.)

**5. Invite accountability.**

- Who could you share your chosen hardship practice and your current forced hardship with?
- How will you invite them to pray for you and check in about how God is using your “time under tension”?

**6. Encourage someone else in holy hardship.**

- Identify one person you know who is suffering for doing good.
- What concrete step can you take this week to encourage them—text, note, prayer, presence—reminding them that God is using this to make them more like Jesus?

**7. Next-step with Jesus.**

- If you're not sure you have peace with God, what is your next step toward “being justified through faith”—conversation with a leader, exploring baptism, or honestly bringing your questions to God in prayer?