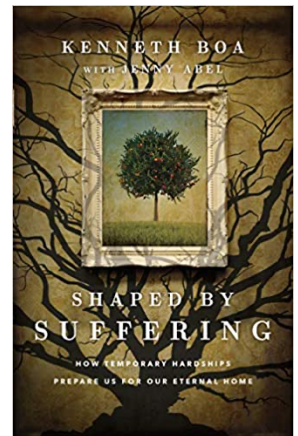


Shaped by Suffering – Study Guide

Book by Kenneth Boa with Jenny Abel

"The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast." 1 Peter 5:10 Suffering comes to us all. It may be disease or debilitation, pain or persecution. Our difficulties may be invisible to others or impossible to hide. Sometimes we suffer because of our Christian witness. Other times it's simply part of living in a fallen world. But suffering affects us all, in ways we don't always anticipate. Christians today are often not prepared to suffer well and have a shortsighted view of pain and trials. Ken Boa shows how God uses suffering to shape his children for eternity and to grow them in Christlike character. The book of 1 Peter tells us suffering is both a guarantee and comparatively brief; we shouldn't be surprised when it comes to us. The nature of our affliction is not as important as our response to it. God is at work through our hardships and wants to use them to prepare us for eternal life. Suffering can make us bitter or better. Rediscover living hope, present joy, and a glorious future.



Introduction

1. After reading the introduction, what are your feelings and expectations about this book?
2. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why?
3. What is it you hope to get from this study? Write out your goals, individually and as a group, so you can review them when your study is over.
4. Take some time to pray and invite God into your study. Ask him what HE wants you to get out of this and add those things to your list. Ask him to speak to you and to give you open eyes, ears, mind, and heart to receive all that he has for you, in humility, as you move forward.

Chapter 1 – The Crucible of Suffering

“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” – 1 Peter 1:6

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What trials have you endured or are you currently enduring?
3. Has adversity made you “bitter” or “better”?
4. Read through the epistle of 1 Peter and make a note of every verse that references suffering (or any of its symptoms). As you note each verse, list out the attitudes, perspectives, and responses Peter urges his readers to have toward suffering. How is the list similar to or different from what you’ve believed or heard taught (even in church or by other believers)?
5. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
6. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 2 – The Alchemy of Grace

“These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” – 1 Peter 1:7

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Think about the difficulties you face right now or have recently faced. What impurities do you think God is trying to skim off the top of your life through the means of these trials so he can forge Christlike character in you?
3. If you’re in a trial and find yourself bitter or angry, what obstacles are causing you to resist God’s work in and through this hardship?
4. Think of a time in your life when you experienced the “alchemy of grace” at work. Share what you learned through the trial and how God used difficulties to change you in the process.
5. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
6. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 3 – A Living Hope

“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.” – 1 Peter 1:3

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. We all have longings and hopes on earth. What are yours for yourself and your loved ones?
3. Are your earthly hopes “living” or “dead” from the perspective of eternity – that is, which will go on, and which will not last beyond this lifetime?
4. What shifts in thinking or action do you need to make to actively transfer your hope from the temporal to the eternal?
5. What’s the difference in hoping *for* and hoping *in* something?
6. If you’re able as a group, go outside and look at God’s creation around you (maybe take a walk together around your neighborhood or just look out a window if you can’t actually go outside). Notice the signs of the season: death and barrenness if it’s winter, new life if it’s spring, and so on. What evidence of each season do you see, hear, smell and feel? What beauty do you notice (an intricate flower or graceful bird) alongside ugliness (a dead animal, decaying leaves, etc.)? Reflect and share how you see each one to be necessary for the other. What can you learn about the cycles of suffering and death followed by restoration, hope, and glory, from the way God created the visible world?
7. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
8. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 4 – A Present Joy

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” – 1 Peter 1:8

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. If you’d been in Paul and Silas’s situation, unjustly imprisoned in a Roman jail for an indefinite amount of time, would you have had the same reaction as they did? Why or why not?
3. What’s the difference between happiness and joy? Describe a time when you have had one without the other.
4. In her book *Keep a Quiet Heart*, Elisabeth Elliot said “The secret is Christ in *me*, not me in a different set of circumstances.” What circumstances are you in right now that you’d like to change or be rid of?
5. Listen to (or sing) a praise song together that lifts your sights to the hope of and joy of heaven (you may have a song prepared, or ask if your group has any suggestions). Focus on the words and then pick a line or two to chew on. Share what they mean to you and the hope you find as you make those words your own.
6. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
7. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 5 – Preparing to Suffer

“Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” – 1 Peter 4:12

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Has suffering ever caught you off-guard?
3. What are a few of the ways we can prepare for suffering (according to the chapter but also sharing your own ideas)?
4. If a significant trial came your way tomorrow, would you be ready for it? If not, what could you do differently today to make sure you're prepared – to “moor yourself to the Rock of Ages,” as Charles Spurgeon put it? Come up with a plan to put your answer to action.
5. How has God shown himself faithful to you and to your loved ones in the past and how is he proving himself faithful to you in the present?
6. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
7. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you've just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 6 – Imitating Christ

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.” – 1 Peter 2:21

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What are the three ways Christ suffered (and we are called to imitate)?
3. Thinking about current challenges and pain in your life, what are some specific, practical ways that you can follow Jesus' example in your response to these difficulties?
4. When it comes to enduring justice, mistreatment, or similar forms of suffering, there's often tension between mercy and justice, between forgiving as Christ forgave us and holding others accountable for sin (not condoning wrongdoing). How have you seen this tension played out in your own life, in history, and/or in the world around you?
5. What does Jesus example teach us about how to respond in these situations?
6. Read and meditate on Isaiah 53. Spend some time praying and thanking God for the gift of this passage and all Christ endured for your sake. Then discuss how you can apply this passage in your own life and circumstances.
7. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
8. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you've just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 7 – Submitting to God

“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” – 1 Peter 5:6

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What does it mean to submit to God in our suffering? How is this different from fatalism?
3. How does seeing yourself as both an agent and a victim relate to submission to God? How will this view help you submit to him?
4. Romans 8:28 is an oft-quoted verse (sometimes somewhat carelessly) to those who are suffering. How did this chapter change or enhance your view of this verse?
5. Take a small index card or piece of paper and write on it the words *“Submit and Depend.”* Place it by your bed or in your car or somewhere else where you will see it often. Let it remind you to submit yourself and your day to God – placing yourself under his authority and depending on him to order your priorities and your time. Make these words a prayer to God, asking for his assistance to submit to him even in the difficulties that come your way each day.
6. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
7. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 8 – Submitting to Authority

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human authority: whether to the emperor, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.” – 1 Peter 2:13-14

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Review the four spheres of authority and submission described in 1 Peter. In which sphere do you struggle to submit the most? Why do you think that is?
3. In light of the epistle’s original audience, why do you think Peter spent so much time talking about submission to human authority? How is it related to the central theme of this epistle – suffering?
4. Think of a book or film you’ve seen about someone else’s persecution or suffering (preferably a true story). Share a short summary of the story with your group. How did witnessing this story help you empathize with others and prepare you for whatever suffering has or may come your way?
5. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
6. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 9 – Ministering to Others

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God’s grace in its various forms.” – 1 Peter 4:10

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. In chapter 6, three s-words are mentioned in connection with Jesus’ example: sinless, silent, and substitutionary. A fourth s (discussed in this chapter) is sympathy; this is one more way we imitate Christ in our relationships. How well do you sympathize with others who are suffering, especially those who are going through something you can’t relate to very well? How can you imitate Jesus better in this way?
3. Who in your life do you know who’s suffered and ministered to you out of their own difficulties? How?
4. What are two priestly roles described in this chapter? Do you think you’re guilty of leaving either of these roles too much to the “professionals” (paid pastors or other in formal ministry positions)? Explain.
5. Any one of us can love, serve, and pray for others. Based on ways you’ve suffered personally, discuss how you can use your experiences of suffering to minister to others in these three ways. Take some time privately to pray and ask God for his answer to this question.
6. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
7. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 10 – An Eternal Glory

“And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm, and steadfast.” – 1 Peter 5:10

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. Atheists are fond of accusing Christians of making up heaven as a kind of wish fulfillment or emotional crutch. How would you (and Peter) counter this charge?
3. What are some of the “patches of Godlight” – tastes of heaven – you’ve experienced on earth? (If it helps, think in terms of the three categories of beauty, intimacy, and adventure.)
4. What’s your vision of eternity like? How similar (or dissimilar) is it to the Gary Larson cartoons mentioned in this chapter?
5. Has there been a time when adversity in this life amplified your desire for heaven? If so, try to put into words what it is you were specifically longing for at that moment?
6. Take a moment to imagine being the thief on the cross crucified next to Jesus – the one who asked Jesus to remember him when he entered his kingdom. What would Jesus’ words have meant to you when he said, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43)? Now imagine yourself standing before God and ask him to fill you with eternal joy in his presence. Use Psalm 16 as a guide to help you pray for this as a group.
7. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
8. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Chapter 11 – A Clear Calling

“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.” – 1 Peter 3:15

1. What stuck out to you from this chapter? What did you agree with and disagree with and why? Could you relate to the stories and information being presented? What feelings did it evoke in you?
2. What were the four c’s gleaned from Philippians 2:14-16?
3. Describe in a sentence or two how these relate to 1 Peter and its theme of suffering.
4. This chapter asserts that the boundary lines seem to be sharpening between Christians and the surrounding American culture. Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. In what specific arenas or personal circumstances has this chapter (and this book as a whole) challenged you personally to live (or continue living) with Christlike character?
6. There are two things you can do on earth that you’ll never have a chance to do again in heaven: 1) share the gospel with the lost, and 2) serve people in need. Discuss how your group can pursue these tasks, both individually and corporately, and hold each other accountable on a regular basis.
7. What more would you like to learn about the topics presented in this chapter? What questions do you still have?
8. Where would you like to grow (personally and as a group) in relation to what you’ve just read and discussed? Take some time to pray and ask God to help you in this, and brainstorm as a group about how you can take action and hold each other accountable in the process.

Conclusion

1. What stuck out to you most from this study? What have you learned about God that you did not know before? What have you learned about yourself? What have you learned about others?
2. Take some time to review your goals from the beginning of your study. What goals have you accomplished, what are you still working on, and what do you need help with?
3. What questions do you still have after completing this study?
4. Finally, so what? What are you going to do with what you’ve studied, learned, and discussed? Be specific.
5. Now spend some time in prayer, asking God to awaken his purposes within you concerning this study. Consider whether you need to spend time in repentance, in a time of commitment and commissioning, or in a time of surrender. Add this to your prayer time as the Holy Spirit guides you.