

Faith in the Wilderness Study Guide: Turning to the Gospel in Times of Suffering

A study guide for the book

Faith in the Wilderness: Words of Exhortation from the Chinese Church

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“Faith in the Wilderness is a timely resource for Christians in the freer world, marking a significant moment in church history. Saturated with knowledge of endurance under cultural and political hostility, our Chinese Christian family has delivered much more than a rich repository of scholarship; they’ve given all Followers of the Way reflections on survival and flourishing to help shape the next generation of global Christians into the image of Christ.”

—K. A. Ellis, Director

The Edmiston Center for the Study of the Bible and Ethnicity

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Introduction

A church that is truly acquainted with suffering can offer us a fresh perspective on both the attraction and offense of the gospel. The teachings in *Faith in the Wilderness: Words of Exhortation from the Chinese Church* do not shy away from how completely counter to our thinking the gospel is, nor how much God asks of us to follow him—yet they gently remind us of how fruitless it is to put our hope in this world and how glorious a reward is in store if what the Bible says about the next world is true.

The book *Faith in the Wilderness* and this study guide are resources for anyone seeking to encounter the gospel message with fresh eyes while tackling such difficult subjects as death, sin, and hell. It's also a model of contextualization and pastoral care as the writers minister to Christians and non-Christians alike who are weary of suffering.

The book was compiled at the height of the global COVID-19 pandemic. As you read, recall your own experience of the pandemic or any other extended time of hardship and uncertainty in your life. Be challenged by each author's call to faithfulness and hope that awaits us on the other side of the sea.

How to Use This Study Guide

Two common threads in *Faith in the Wilderness* are evangelism and suffering, two subjects we don't necessarily hold together in the West. As you read and study, be thinking not only about how you handle suffering but how you can share the gospel with those who are suffering—a posture that can radically change how we approach an evangelistic conversation.

For Group Leaders

We suggest leaders be prepared to share honestly from your own experience about subjects like suffering, death and sin. Everyone suffers, but we live in a culture where we avoid admitting it; your job is not to ask people to share when they're not comfortable but to model what it's like to confess your sin and suffering and turn to God and Scripture in prayer. Sometimes small examples (a fight with your spouse, loneliness) are easier and more relatable starting points. You can also encourage your group members to share by breaking them into smaller groups of three or four.

This study could be done in:

- A Bible study or fellowship group
- An affinity group, such as a moms group or a group for the elderly
- A campus ministry outreach
- A youth group
- A group training for evangelism, missions, or mercy and justice ministry

Groups can read the chapters at home or start each session by taking turns reading portions of the chapter aloud (most should take about thirty minutes). For each chapter, we've included a brief *Summary* and *Author Bio*, the *Scripture Passage*, and a few *Discussion Questions* to process and personalize the author's message. There is also a *Spiritual Formation Exercise* or guide for prayer, which can be done privately during a silent time at the end of your group meeting.

A brief note on author's names: In China, a person's name starts with their surname and ends with their personal name, so "John Doe" would write his name in Chinese as "Doe John." However, when the author has chosen an English pseudonym, they follow the English convention of putting the personal name first. Hence in this guide, Simon Liu will be referred to by his surname "Liu," and Guo Muyun will be referred to by his surname "Guo." Most author names are not real, and most details have been removed to protect their identities.

Foreword by Timothy Keller

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

—Matthew 5:11–12 (NIV)

Summary:

Christians in the West seldom face serious persecution, but it is a reality for Christians in Asia, particularly China.

From Matthew 5:11–12, we learn four things:

1. Every Christian will be persecuted in some form.
2. True persecution comes because of Jesus, not because of our own tactlessness.
3. Real persecution should glorify God and attract people, as well as offend them.
4. We can experience the blessedness Jesus promises by meditating on his suffering.

Discussion Questions:

1. Timothy Keller discusses the difference between persecution for representing Christ versus simply “being obnoxious.” His “test” is that the former will attract some while offending others. What are some examples you’ve seen of a message that attracts without offending (for example, by watering down the gospel message)? What are some examples you’ve seen of a message that offends without attracting (for example, by not showing God’s love and care for people where they are)?
2. Most people have a natural tendency either toward people-pleasing or outspokenness. How can both tendencies reflect something godly to be encouraged *and* something sinful to repent of?
3. Brainstorm a few ways you could share the gospel in a way that both attracts *and* offends. How

can you share a story of how God has intervened in your own life with a person who doesn't believe?

4. Name experiences you've had of "persecution," whether it meant social disapproval, hindrance to your career, or something more serious. You can also share times you have not spoken about your faith for fear of these things.

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

What sins can you confess to God and repent of? What is one step you can take to begin to change your behavior?

Spend some time meditating on Jesus' suffering, as Keller suggests. What does it mean to "rejoice" in Matthew 5:11-12?

Seek out a trusted friend to ask for feedback, accountability, and prayer on this matter.

Introduction: A Church Acquainted with Suffering by Hannah Nation

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, “I believed, and so I spoke,” we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the LORD Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

—2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1

Summary:

In recent years, persecution and pandemic have been two almost interchangeable aspects of suffering experienced by the Chinese urban house church. The theology of suffering represented by the sermons contained in this book has three aspects:

1. Union with Christ opens our eyes to the true broken state of ourselves and our world.
2. Those who follow Jesus, those who are truly united to him, must suffer.
3. Union with Christ also reveals to us that judgment and the kingdom of heaven are real, and they are coming.

These messages were preached during lockdown, at great risk to the speakers, after seeing the opportunity to preach the gospel when it was needed most.

Discussion Questions:

1. How often have you heard your pastors or churches talk about suffering as “walking the way of the cross”? In what ways is Nation correct about our “relentless efforts to forget death and ignore suffering”?
2. How is the theology of the Chinese house church described here different (or similar) to what you’ve been taught? How might our relative freedom and lack of persecution in the West lead us to be uneducated on this subject?
3. Look at Nation’s three points. Name some ways these points can transform your attitude toward and experience of suffering.

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Pray the passage from 2 Corinthians for the Chinese church. Then pray it for your own church. Finally, pray it for yourself.

Take some time to thank God for willingly suffering for us in order to ultimately rescue us from all suffering. Ask for his strength to endure any suffering you face right now.

Part 1: Meditations on Brokenness

Chapter 1: Let Us Fall into the Hand of the LORD by Guo Muyun

But David's heart struck him after he had numbered the people. And David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly." And when David arose in the morning, the word of the LORD came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, "Go and say to David, 'Thus says the LORD, Three things I offer you. Choose one of them, that I may do it to you.'" So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, "Shall three years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider, and decide what answer I shall return to him who sent me." Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man."

So the LORD sent a pestilence on Israel from the morning until the appointed time. And there died of the people from Dan to Beersheba 70,000 men. And when the angel stretched out his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD relented from the calamity and said to the angel who was working destruction among the people, "It is enough; now stay your hand." And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. Then David spoke to the LORD when he saw the angel who was striking the people, and said, "Behold, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly. But these sheep, what have they done? Please let your hand be against me and against my father's house."

And Gad came that day to David and said to him, "Go up, raise an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." So David went up at Gad's word, as the LORD commanded.

—2 Samuel 24:10–19

Summary:

Drawing on the global COVID-19 pandemic, Guo discusses human nature in the face of famine, pestilence, and war and humanity's effort to protect itself through its own strengths. Thankfully, in

Christ, God provides the true prophet, priest, and king so that when humanity falls into the hand of God, it does not need to fear.

About the Author: Guo Muyun taught in a Chinese university for fourteen years, while also serving his church. He was ordained as a minister in the Presbyterian house church in 2018.

Discussion Questions:

1. Guo depicts a cycle of history repeating itself, with seasons of war and turmoil followed by seasons of prosperity.

Think about your experience of the pandemic. In what ways did scarcity bring out the best and worst in you? What did you learn about human nature, looking at your own circle of friends and neighbors—and nationally?

2. According to Guo, King David's sin in this passage was finding his strength in his army rather than in God's provision. Is this true of you? What are practical ways in which you rely on worldly measures of success instead of God's grace and mercy?

Were these other sources of your security tested during the pandemic or during other crises in your life? How did you respond?

3. David took responsibility for his sin and chose the punishment that would be borne by all of his people. In the chapter, the writer accepts this corporate responsibility for an individual's sin.

Does this trouble you? Why would God ask this of David? How does this parallel Jesus' death paying the penalty and his righteousness being attributed to *all* who believe in him?

4. Guo alleges that Christians today are guilty of silence, not acting out their priestly role of representing God to the people or the people to God.

How would it change Christians' behavior if they saw themselves as priests speaking the truth about sin to those in power and praying on behalf of the people's sin to God?

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Set aside a time this week to pray through your answers to questions 1 and 2 above. Ask yourself how you have been participating in the human cycle of fear, anger, and selfishness. Repent to God of your personal sin and any corporate sins God has brought to your attention.

Then ask God where you could be acting as a priest. Do you see someone who needs care more than you do? Can you speak or work against an injustice that God has put on your heart? Pray to God for the wisdom and love to do so. Again, seeking accountability from a trusted friend or leader may be helpful.

Chapter 2: A Deadly World by Simon Liu

Then, at break of day, the king arose and went in haste to the den of lions. As he came near to the den where Daniel was, he cried out in a tone of anguish. The king declared to Daniel, “O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to deliver you from the lions?” Then Daniel said to the king, “O king, live forever! My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths, and they have not harmed me, because I was found blameless before him; and also before you, O king, I have done no harm.” Then the king was exceedingly glad, and commanded that Daniel be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God.

—Daniel 6:19–23

Summary:

With a frankness uncommon in Western discussions of death, Liu looks at the realities of life in a fallen, “deadly” world through the story of Daniel and the lion’s den. Liu reminds readers that we may not be as strong as Daniel, but we have a Savior who is the righteous King, who will save us from our sin.

About the Author: Simon Liu is a pastor and mentor to pastors in China. Over the past decade, he has been involved in over 140 church plants across China.

Discussion Questions:

1. Liu addresses the recent increase in natural disasters as well as the global pandemic. Have you ever had to face death yourself or the death of someone close to you? What was your response?
2. Daniel was able to face death without fear; “... he worshiped God without regard for his own life.” How does Liu describe a Christian that is truly living out their faith?
3. Liu says that we are not meant to be like Daniel but to see him pointing to Jesus, who faced death in order to deliver us from it. How does believing in Jesus enable us to live without fear?

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

We often avoid thinking about death because we are afraid of it. However, as Christians, we have a hope that transcends death. If we begin to live out of faith and not fear, it can change how we experience death and suffering.

If you are facing death or suffering right now, meditate on Jesus' suffering and death and what he can offer you as someone who understands what it's like—and who has done it for you.

If you are not personally facing death or suffering, think of someone who is. This could be a friend or family member or someone more distant—even the house church in China. Commit to praying for them over the next few weeks. Pray not just for healing or deliverance but for faith in the resurrection when they face death or suffering.

Chapter 3: Sin and Hell by Yang Xibo

Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea. And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.' For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another.

—Mark 9:42–50

Summary:

In Mark 9:42–50, Jesus gives a stark warning about the dangers of hell. How are modern people to interpret this? In his exploration of this passage, Yang approaches hell without baggage or bias, showing us what we can learn about sin, its costs, and how to live instead as salt in the world.

About the Author: Yang Xibo is the pastor of a house church in Xiamen, China. He received his Master of Divinity from Singapore Theological Seminary.

Discussion Questions:

1. Many are uncomfortable with the idea of hell. Yang argues that without hell, there is no justice, there is no repentance (even in hell), and there is no understanding of the depth of God's grace.

Are you uncomfortable with the idea of hell? Using Yang's arguments or others, explain why hell is an important part of Christian theology.

2. Yang's main exhortation is to take seriously "the severity of sin." He gives many examples of how ordinary people are sinners who, left unchecked, can destroy their community and harm one another. Do you agree? Can you add examples that you've seen?

3. The depth of our sin leads us to our need for the cross. How does understanding the seriousness of sin and hell help you better appreciate Jesus' sacrifice?

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Yang calls us to repent as Christians rather than judge those around us. Pray a prayer of repentance for yourself and for all Christians to “live out a Christian life with love and bravery.”

Part 2: Meditations on Redemption

Chapter 4: Why We Must Pursue Christ by Brian Li

... circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

—Philippians 3:5–11

Summary:

Paul spent his life pursuing righteousness but then completely reversed direction when he began to pursue Christ. In all of our fallen human relationships and strivings, we will never find satisfaction or security; only faith in Jesus can give us true righteousness. However, this will require fighting our own sinful nature.

About the Author: Brian Li received his Master of Divinity from Singapore Bible College. He is involved in church planting and marriage counseling with his wife, Stephanie, with whom he has two daughters.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean that Paul, who had achieved the top of the religious pyramid of his day, now considers his achievements a “loss”? Is he speaking literally or figuratively?

2. What do you pursue? What “systems” are you trying to perform well in? Describe who you are trying to “please” in your work, school, or personal life, and what the “rules” are in this particular system.
3. What have you found broken or oppressive in these systems? Think about as many aspects as possible: the use of authority, competition for approval, biases in the system, work-life balance, etc.
4. How does finding our identity in Christ help us in the midst of these relational systems? Share some specific examples of what this could look like for someone with a difficult parent, boss, teacher, etc.

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Li shares an extremely personal (and unflattering) example of how he was harsh with his wife and had to apologize publicly. Acting out of his identity in Christ as a redeemed sinner, he chose not to hide behind the usual hierarchies of husband over wife and teacher over students. This became the most powerful testimony to the gospel to his students.

What would it look like for you to demonstrate the gospel through repentance and forgiveness rather than defensiveness? How can we use our authority differently than the world does?

Chapter 5: True Love by Victor Guo

And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

—Philippians 1:9–11

Summary:

Guo examines the fruit of love in the lives of Christians and how to love our families, churches, and fellow citizens in the midst of the pandemic. It is hard for us to love, but we can do so with God's mercy and the knowledge that he loved us when we were unlovable.

About the Author: Victor Guo is the pastor of a reformed house church.

Discussion Questions:

1. Guo notes that we are inclined to pray for sickness and health more so than for love and holiness. Why do you think that is?
2. How does this prayer (or Paul's pastoral prayers in general) compare to the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6), which Jesus said we should use as a model? What can we learn and imitate from Paul's prayers?
3. Guo discusses some aspects of love that we don't always associate with it: knowledge and discernment; honesty and integrity; good works motivated by the gospel. Which of these have you not traditionally associated with love, and why? How are these an important part of loving others well?
4. Of course, we often don't love well, and Guo ends with a reminder of the gospel message that we are unlovable sinners. How can the gospel message give us a source of love when it's hard to do so?

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Find one or two ways you can bring your prayers more in line with biblical prayers (such as the prayers of Paul, the Lord's Prayer, or the Psalms). Write a note to yourself and put it in your Bible or post it in a place where you'll see it every day. Practice praying this way, and try to incorporate these practices into your daily prayer life.

Chapter 6: Never Lost by Chen Yi

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

—Ruth 1:1–7

Summary:

We want to believe we are in charge of our own destinies, but when we are faced with a scale of loss such as the global pandemic, what does it reveal to us about our world, ourselves, and God?

Demonstrating the house church’s intimate experience with loss and suffering, Chen uses a broad swath of art and literature to flesh out the reality of loss in our world and to point readers to the only hope in loss—Jesus Christ.

About the Author: Chen Yi is a house church pastor and church planting director and coach.

Discussion Questions:

1. Chen starts by stating our natural human desire: that “Humans can stand on their own feet, control their own destiny, and are free from bondage to God.” How does suffering prove this idea wrong? What does suffering reveal about ourselves, the world, and God? Think of specific examples.

2. Naomi lost almost everything in ways that were out of her control. Imagine how you would have responded in her shoes. How did God redeem her suffering? What does this tell us about God? About our lives?
3. Chen gives some pastoral advice about how to support those who are suffering. What are some things he cautions against? How can you change your approach the next time you try to comfort someone who is suffering?
4. Summarize the worldly response to suffering versus the response of those who have Christ.

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

It has been said that suffering will either make us “bitter or better.” (Or a mix of both!)

Have you ever had a period of loss where one hardship seems to follow another? What was your emotional and spiritual reaction to it?

Based on this chapter, write out some truths about God and ourselves that you can root yourself in when you face trials.

Part 3: Meditations on Hope

Chapter 7: Test of Faith by Noah Wang

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

—1 Peter 1:6–9

Summary:

Peter wrote to a church enduring intense persecution, just as the Chinese church is facing today. He explains what it means to have joy in the face of suffering, and why our faith, which is always mixed with selfishness, must be tested to be purified. This powerful pastoral essay is illustrated with many examples from the Bible and the author's own life.

About the Author: Noah Wang grew up in a Chinese military family and attended church with his mother as a child. He was converted in 1989 and is the pastor of a house church.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to Wang and this passage, what are some benefits of trials that test our faith? How does this idea both challenge and encourage us?
2. Wang says that Christians should expect “a hundred different kinds of trials” as they live in a way that runs counter to the ways of the world. Discuss some examples of persecution, either subtle or overt, that you have encountered. In what ways can you “expect” these? Name a few things you can do to prepare for them.

3. What are some ways Wang lists that our faith can be “contaminated”? Do you agree that trials are the only way these impurities can be found out?
4. First Peter 1:13 and other verses emphasize our hope in the second coming. How could putting your hope in heaven instead of this life change how you practice your faith and live your life?
5. Wang says that tested love is pure and leads to joy. How did the sufferings of the early church (or the Chinese church today) lead to love and joy?

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Wang says, “In all suffering, the most difficult thing to believe is that God hears us and is with us.” He describes a time in his own life—the death of a child—when it felt like God was silent.

What comforts or truths does Wang offer when we are enduring suffering? What does it say that Wang endured a child’s death but went on to preach this sermon at the risk of being arrested?

Take a moment to praise God for the testimony of Wang and others whose faith has been tested and who are able to show more love and joy because of it.

Chapter 8: Our Hope by San Shou

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the LORD, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the LORD, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the LORD himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the LORD in the air, and so we will always be with the LORD. Therefore encourage one another with these words.

—1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

Summary:

Death is the end for all of us unless we have the hope of Jesus' return. San provides an in-depth discussion of what death is, what it means to die as a Christian, and what the promise of eternal life consists of. San's point-by-point examination of the topic offers a fresh perspective for both those inside and outside the Christian faith.

About the Author: San Shou is the pastor of a Chinese house church.

Discussion Questions:

1. San describes the distress of the church in Thessalonica, which prompted Paul to write this passage. Summarize Paul's description of death in your own words.
2. According to San, what is our natural reaction to death? Is this true in your experience?
3. The resurrection is key to the Christian's understanding of death. We often think of "going to heaven" as a reward, but 1 Thessalonians reminds us that it comes after suffering and death, just as Jesus suffered and died before resurrecting. How does the idea of resurrection change

when we think of it not as a simple reward but as coming after experiencing “sin, tears, or grief”?

4. How could this understanding help our fear of bad things happening in this life?

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Meditate on the passage. Do you believe that heaven will redeem any suffering in this life?

Take some time to thank God for the resurrection and ask him to help you have hope in it when you fear your own death or the death of loved ones.

Chapter 9: On the Other Side of the Sea by Paul Peng

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and amazing, seven angels with seven plagues, which are the last, for with them the wrath of God is finished.

And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,

“Great and amazing are your deeds, O LORD God the Almighty!
Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!
Who will not fear, O LORD, and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

—Revelation 15:1–4

Summary:

Peng offers a poetic and imagery-filled examination of what awaits Christians after Christ’s return. This chapter draws on the symbolism of the Red Sea in Exodus in order to understand the description of the sea of glass in Revelation and its promise to those who believe and persevere in the gospel until the end.

About the Author: Paul Peng is the pastor of Blessings Reformed Presbyterian Church, a Chinese house church.

Discussion Questions:

1. Peng observes that during the pandemic, some people became caught up in reading bad news and grew miserable, while others decided to shut out the suffering altogether. How are both reactions, while understandable, sinful?

2. Peng lists many ways that the sea can be used as a metaphor for life. What are some things in your own life that could be described as an ocean that threatens to overwhelm you?
3. What does the imagery in this passage of Revelation stand for? What parts of the image strike you the most?
4. Peng addresses visualization, or positive thinking, a popular secular strategy. How is Christian faith similar or different from this?
5. Peng compares the Red Sea with the sea of glass. What was the experience of crossing the Red Sea like for Israel—before, during, and after? What can this teach us about our journey through the dangers of life?

Spiritual Formation Exercise/Prayer Guide:

Imagine that the stormy seas of your life (question 2) have been calmed by Jesus. What would it mean to experience those things as perfectly calm and still?

Pray that God would give you small experiences of that sea of glass, of his conquering of the storms of your life and his peace and victory, on this side of heaven.



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