

Strangers IN A *Strange Land*

Peter's Guide to the Christian Journey

***Sermon and
Small Group Series***



All Campuses

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Credits

Weekly devotionals drawn from Steven Cole’s series on 1 Peter. Used with permission.

Discussion questions written by the Village Bible Church pastoral team.

How to Use this Study

Time

Properly preparing for your small group study will involve about two hours of study throughout your week.

Devotional

At the beginning of each study, you will find a devotional by Pastor Steven Cole. This one page synopsis will help you to begin thinking about the passage and its implication in your life. Please take time to meditate on this each week.

Study Questions

This study is used to develop an understanding of the passage. It will be broken down each week into the following sections:

Open It

This section is used to get us thinking about the main focus and thrust of the passage. These questions will be used during your small group and will help to break the ice and center the discussion.

Explore It

This section will take very little time and may seem basic, but they will help you see the details of the passage. Don't read too much into the questions – they are observation questions.

Get It

This section will help you to dig deeper into the meaning of the passage. It is here that we begin to look at our own lives in light of scripture. Some of the questions will also help us to take the passage and apply it personally to your everyday life.

1 Peter: Live as Strangers

Introduction

Recipients

1 Peter begins:

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...." (1 Peter 1:1)

If you look at a First Century map of the Roman Empire you'll see that these are Roman provinces located in the northeast part of Asia Minor -- present-day Turkey. Paul had travelled in this area several times and established a number of churches. Now Peter addresses these Pauline churches.



The letter's recipients are further described as "strangers" or as "exiles of the Dispersion." The Jews who had moved away from Palestine into the cities of the Roman Empire were called the Diaspora, the Dispersion. But Peter doesn't seem to be referring here to Jews, but rather clearly to Christians, "who have been chosen ... for obedience to Jesus Christ...." (1:2). It seems that the concept of the Diaspora has now been appropriated by the Christian community to refer not to the Jewish Diaspora, but Christians who are scattered throughout the empire (see also James 1:1).

Author

The author clearly identifies himself as Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ" -- an obvious reference to Peter, a son of Jonah, and a leader of the first generation church.

The early church accepted this epistle as Peter's work without question -- which, in itself, is a bit surprising. The church of the first few centuries was inundated with letters and gospels purporting to be written by Peter. The church didn't have much trouble separating this letter from the host of pseudepigraphs -- writings in the name of a great church leader. The letter was widely quoted or alluded to by early Christian writings by Clement of Rome (c. 96 AD), Ignatius, Barnabas, Hermas, and Polycarp (baptized 69 AD). It was specifically identified as Peter's work by early Church Fathers such as Papias, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and many others.

In modern times, when some scholars have disputed the authorship of nearly every New Testament book, 1 Peter has not escaped. Some reject Peter's authorship on these grounds: (1) Its elegant Greek doesn't seem to reflect the language skills of a rough Galilean fisherman. (2) The author is self-effacing and does not brag of his prominence. (3) It shows some literary and theological dependence on Paul's epistles. (4) Its historical period seems later than Nero's persecution. (5) Some of the vocabulary of the letter also appears in the pagan mystery religions. (6) Its is classified by many as a baptismal sermon.

None of the arguments against Peter's authorship is very strong. Indeed, if the Apostle Peter didn't write this letter, then the author is someone taking a pseudonym, *claiming* to be Peter. The early church, which was quite familiar with this practice, wouldn't take such a document as authoritative, which they obviously did. Thus I feel confident in identifying the author as the Apostle Peter himself. Of course, Peter may have dictated the letter to Village Bible Church

a secretary who rendered it into excellent Greek. Perhaps Silvanus could have served in this role, since Peter concludes his letter by saying, "With the help of Silvanus, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly..." (5:12). This may be the Silvanus (sometimes referred to as "Silas") who was an associate of Paul (2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1) -- we just don't know for sure.

Who was Peter?

Like all letters of this time, this letter begins with a brief acknowledgement of the sender. This letter makes the claim to have been written by the Apostle Peter. Peter was one of Jesus' twelve disciples, and along with James and John, he was one of the inner group of Jesus' closest friends and followers. Peter is often portrayed in the gospels as someone with an exuberant faith and devotion to Jesus. It was Peter, for example, who was willing to step out of the boat and walk on the water with Jesus.

Peter appears to have been the spokesman for Jesus' twelve disciples; and, while we may think Peter was impulsive and sometimes slow-witted by some of the statements he made, Peter was probably just stating aloud what the other disciples were also thinking.

Peter was the first to openly state that Jesus was the Messiah (Mat 16:16-19; Mark 8:27-33). It was also Peter who denied Jesus. (See Luke 22:31-34, 54-71.) But he was later lovingly restored by Jesus and given a special commission (John 21:15-19). When the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost, it was Peter who, again, was the chief spokesman. Peter, with John at his side, became the leader of the very first Christian church in Jerusalem.

Peter was mainly an apostle to the Jews, yet after a vision, followed by a visit to the home of Cornelius, a Roman centurion (Acts 10), Peter understood that the Gospel was for all people: Jew and Gentile. When Peter went on his missionary travels with his wife (1 Cor 9:5), James, the brother of Jesus, took over the leadership of the Jerusalem church (Acts 12:17).

Was Peter writing to Paul's Churches?

The Apostle Paul had travelled several times to Asia Minor and established many congregations there. Paul would have had a special influence and authority over the churches he had founded. This is true of the churches in Galatia in Asia Minor. Was Peter writing to churches that Paul had pioneered? And if so, why?

Many Bible scholars suggest that 1 Peter was written during the reign of Nero. (Nero ruled the Roman Empire between the 13th of October, AD 54, and the 9th June, AD 68.) It is widely believed that Paul was martyred in Rome during the reign of Nero. Some believe that Peter was also martyred in Rome under Nero's reign, a couple of years after Paul's execution. Perhaps Peter is writing this letter to the churches after the death of their beloved Apostle Paul; to encourage them despite present persecution, with worse on the way. Suffering and persecution are prominent themes in this letter.

If Paul had been executed for his faith at this time, it would explain why Mark and Silas (Silvanus) were now with Peter (instead of Paul) and helping Peter in his ministry. Silas was a prophet and an experienced and faithful ministry colleague of Paul (Acts 15:22,32, 40). But here he is helping Peter to write this letter (1 Pet 5:12). Mark, who is mentioned very briefly in 1 Peter 5:13b, would write his Gospel account of Jesus' ministry almost as Peter's biographer.

I am inclined to give a slightly later date to Peter's letter. I tentatively suggest that it was written a few years after the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple which was destroyed in 70AD. This later date makes certain passages, such as 1 Peter 2:3-10, all the more significant. (If Peter wrote this letter after 70AD, it means that Peter's execution happened a few years later than is traditionally believed.)

Persecutions and the Epistle's Date

It is difficult to affix a date independently of who is the author. Other than local persecutions, the first State-instigated persecution took place in 64 AD when Nero blamed Christians for the Fire of Rome. Roman historian Tacitus tells us that Christians were persecuted by Nero with public approval for "hatred of the human race" (Tacitus, *Annals*, xv.44). Early Christian tradition attests that both Peter and Paul lost their lives under Nero (1 Clement 5). Other persecutions took place under Domitian in 95 AD. In 110 or 111 AD, Pliny asks Emperor Trajan for guidance as to what extent he should punish those who have been identified as Christians (*Epistle to Trajan*, xcvi, xcvi).

None of these occasional historical references demands a date later than the 60s. So if we assume, as I do, that Peter is the author, we should probably date this letter near the end of Peter's life in 63-64 AD.

The author indicates that he is writing from the church that is in "Babylon" (5:13). Most likely, Babylon is used to designate the city of Rome, in the same way that it is used in Revelation 17-18.

Significance and Theology

Though it is only five chapters long, 1 Peter is an important Letter for us to study, since it contains a number of important themes that Christian disciples must master if we would serve Jesus faithfully in our own day. Some of the main themes include hard lessons that you may have struggled with:

- Appreciating our salvation rather than taking it for granted
- Learning obedience and submission even though it's tough
- Practicing holiness without developing a sanctimonious smirk
- Living in the world without being tainted by it
- Emulating Christ's sacrificial lifestyle so it becomes our own
- Growing through our sufferings rather than being defeated by them
- Being faithful in our relationships with family, employers, and employees
- Grasping our true identity as God's people
- Preparing for judgment without being driven by fear
- Developing the character of leaders of which God can be proud
- Peter reminded his audience that they were exiles, refugees or foreigners – temporary residents – in their present society and in this present world (1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:11), but that the end of the age was imminent (1 Pet 4:7).
- Peter taught that Jesus Christ would soon be revealed, and with his coming he would inaugurate the final stage of Salvation (1 Pet 1:5 cf 1:9).
- Peter speaks of Salvation as an ongoing process (1 Pet 1:3-5, 9; 2:2) culminating with the glorious revelation of Jesus Christ at the end of the age.

Though 1 Peter teaches us a lot about what God is like, it is also an intensely practical book that teaches us to grow and change in positive ways.

Written by Dr. Ralph F. Wilson.

Hope and Holiness in a Hostile World

Week 1 | 10/21 – 10/27

1 Peter 1:1-2

Devotional

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

1 Peter 1:1-2

After an extensive tour of the United States some years ago, the late, well-known German pastor and theologian Helmut Thielicke was asked what he saw as the greatest defect among American Christians. He replied, "They have an inadequate view of suffering."

I think his observation still holds true. If it were not so, how could American Christians even give a moment's credence to the ridiculous idea that it is always God's will for believers to be healthy and wealthy? When we visited Macau in 1987, I asked a young woman from mainland China if she had heard of that teaching in China. She laughed softly, shook her head, and replied, "No, that teaching wouldn't get very far in China."

But an inadequate view of suffering is not just a problem for those who think that it's always God's will to give us a trouble-free life. I find it to be a problem among many Christians undergoing trials. Some face debilitating illness, but instead of submitting to God, they grow bitter and complain, "Why me?" Some put up with intolerable marriages for a while, but then bail out with the excuse, "Don't I have a right to some happiness?" Others look back on a childhood in which they were abused and angrily complain, "Where was God when I needed Him? What kind of God would allow an innocent child to suffer like I did?"

All these people share in common an inadequate view of suffering. Because of their bitterness toward God, they are not in submission to Him. They are vulnerable to temptation and sin. Others who suffer may submit to God, but it's more like glum resignation than grateful trust. They're depressed because of their problems, perhaps even to the point of suicide. They've lost hope.

What all these people need is both hope and holiness in a hostile world. That is to say, they need to hear and apply the message of 1 Peter. The apostle wrote this letter to Christians scattered throughout what today is northern Turkey. He probably wrote from Rome (referred to in code as "Babylon" [5:13]) just before Nero's fierce persecution of Christians in that city in A.D. 64. But the pressure was already on many who held to this new belief in Jesus as God in human flesh, who died on a Roman cross and was raised from the dead. Believers were being slandered (2:12; 3:14-

16; 4:14). Gentile Christians were reviled by their former partners in sin (4:4). These Christians needed to know how to handle these trials that came upon them on account of their seeking to follow Christ.

Peter points them to Christ, our great example, who endured unjust suffering from a hostile world, but who maintained both hope and holiness by submitting Himself to the Father's sovereign purpose. That's the message of 1 Peter:

In spite of a hostile world, Christians can live in hope and holiness by submitting to God.

We all need this practical message because, in one form or another, we all face trials. Peter holds out no promise that following Jesus will exempt a believer from hardship. Far from it! He says that we should not be surprised at fiery ordeals, as if they were abnormal (4:12). But he points us to Christ and to the glory promised us in heaven. If we will learn the lessons packed into this great letter, we will be strengthened and encouraged as we live for Christ in this hostile world.

- Steven Cole

Open It

1. Describe a time when you felt like a stranger to those around you.
2. The devotional this week says, “what all people need is hope and holiness.” Describe a time in your life when you were hopeful of the future. What was going on? And what made you hopeful?

Read It

| 1 Peter 1:1-2

NOT OF THIS WORLD

Explore It

1. Who is Peter writing to? And where are they? (v. 1)
2. Why is Peter qualified to write to them? (v. 1)
3. How many members of the Trinity are referenced in Peter’s greeting? (v. 2)

Get It

1. Why might it be necessary for Peter to identify himself as an “apostle” (v. 2)? (cf. Ephesians 2:20; 3:5; 4:11).
2. Peter describes the believers being scattered over several places, what do you think was the reason for their “dispersion”? (v. 2) (see also introduction)

10. Peter writes that we are “elect” (v. 1), which means that we are “elected” or “chosen” by God to receive salvation. How does it make you feel to know that God “elected” or “chose” you? (cf. Romans 8:29-30; Ephesians 1:5, 11)

What two ways does Peter say the believer will experience the unseen work of God's election?

What are some of the signs in your life that show that the Spirit of God is sanctifying you?

11. What role does each member of the Trinity play in our salvation?

12. Why do forgiveness (sprinkling) and obedience come together as a package?

Why is it deceptive to think you can have one without the other?

13. We are exiles and strangers in this world, and we are called to obey God in everything, surrendering everything to His Lordship. What is one thing that you could surrender to God this week in order to be more accurately described as an exile or stranger in this world?

Wisdom from others:

We are aliens not because men have rejected us, but because God has elected us. ~John Piper

The Christian says, "Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists." A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only... to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, echo, or mirage.

I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to the other country and to help others do the same. ~ C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity, p. 136-137.

At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in. When human souls have become as perfect in voluntary obedience as the inanimate creation is in its lifeless obedience, then they will put on its glory, or rather that greater glory of which Nature is only the first sketch. ~ C.S. Lewis, The Weight of Glory, p. 43.

Saved Unto Eternity

Week 2 | 10/28 – 11/3

1 Peter 1:3-5

Devotional

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. This inheritance is 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. 1 Peter 1:3-5

Have you ever been going through a difficult time when some bubbly Christian came bursting into the room shouting, "Praise the Lord!" Don't you hate it when that happens? About the last thing you want to hear when you're going through hard times is, "Praise the Lord!"

And yet when the Spirit of God inspired Peter to write to these suffering Christians, after his opening greeting, the first thing he does is to burst forth in praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" How insensitive of Peter! How could he do such a thing?

Let me put it this way: What if you were going through some trial and I burst into the room and exclaimed, "Praise God! You've just inherited \$100 million!" Would that make any difference? A \$100 million inheritance may not solve all your problems, but it does have a way of opening up some interesting new options, doesn't it? With that much money, at least you could take a nice long vacation to mull things over! Just daydreaming about it has a way of lifting your spirits, doesn't it?

Back to reality, folks! You haven't inherited \$100 million. You've inherited something far better! Peter is saying, "Blessed be God, because He has given us far more than \$100 million. He's caused us to be born again to a living hope. Our inheritance is reserved in heaven!" So, **Whatever our problems, we can praise God as Christians because He has saved us unto eternity.**

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. What does the word "inheritance" bring to your mind? If you received an inheritance of \$100 million like in the devotional, what would you do with it?

2. Have you ever met a person who seemed to genuinely praise God in spite of hardship? Why was that person able to do so?

Read It

| 1 Peter 1:1-12

Saved Unto Eternity

Explore It

1. What is the first priority given to in verse 3?

2. What attribute of God does Peter say is at work in our new birth? (v 3)

3. What are the 2 things that our new birth gives? (v 3-4)

4. What qualities does Peter give about the inheritance? (v 5)

5. What do the teaching of Jesus in John 3 and Peter in 1 Peter 1:3 have in common?

Get It

1. Peter, like Paul in 2 Cor. 1:3 and Eph. 1:3, praises God immediately after greeting those to whom he is writing and before he continues to expound upon our salvation. What does this indicate to you about the priority of worship for the Christian?
2. What is the significance of the resurrection to or salvation according to this passage?
3. How does the “living hope” of verse 3 compare to the hope of the world? (cf. Eph. 2:12, 1 Thess. 4:13)
4. *In the ancient world, inheritances were often related to land. Peter is writing to people who have likely been displaced from their lands. In the Old Testament, Israel was promised a new land to be their own (Lev. 20:24). In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that the meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5).*
Why would the idea of an inheritance be significant to Peter’s audience (remember v.1)? What about us?
5. How is hope related to the promise of an inheritance? Why does hope matter in times of trial?
6. Peter uses 3 words to describe the inheritance, translated as “that can never perish (aphtharton), spoil (amianton) or fade (amaranton)” (v.4, NIV). Commentators agree that these refer to freedom from death, freedom from moral decay, and freedom from the ravages of time. What does this say about our salvation? About the God of this salvation?

7. How does the fact that this inheritance is “in heaven” offer encouragement to Peter’s audience? (see Mt. 6:19-21; Luke 12:33)

8. Verse 5 indicates that not only is our inheritance protected, but that we too are protected by God. How can this be if Peter’s readers (and often we ourselves) are enduring trials?

9. In what ways does following Christ put you in jeopardy in today’s culture?

At the same time, how does this come with God’s protection?

Does it offer comfort or is it discouraging?

10. What does this passage tell us about the way Peter views our salvation with respect to time (see note below)?

How should this change the way that we think about our salvation?

<p>We tend to think about salvation solely in terms of “getting saved” – when we confess Jesus as Lord and savior, but salvation is threefold (justification, sanctification, glorification). Peter references the point of justification in verses 1 and 2. But salvation is more than this. Verse 2 also speaks of the Spirit making us holy and our resultant obedience. This is our sanctification. Now in verse 5, Peter adds another element, actually 2. According to verse 5 God is protecting us until we receive this salvation. It is not yet complete. Our final glorification happens in heaven (see verse 4). Until that time, God’s protection allows us to persevere.</p>

11. Out of the various things that we have talked about (worship, hope, inheritance, the complexity of our salvation), what has been most impactful to you this week? Why?

12. Generally we are taught to place our trust in our jobs, 401Ks, our political leaders, etc. Where should we place our trust?

How can we begin to do that starting today?

13. Think of a significant challenge you are facing right now. How will truths of this week's lesson change your perspective?

Wisdom from Others

It will take us a long time to appreciate the riches of this passage, for there are few passages in the New Testament where more of the great fundamental Christian ideas and conceptions meet and come together. ~William Barclay.

Christians are transients in this world, but they are not wanderers. They're passing through with a clear purpose and destination in mind. ~Edmund Clowney

Sanctification is justification in action. ~ Jerry Dodson

Joy from the Pits

Week 3 | 11/4 – 11/10

1 Peter 1:6-9

Devotional

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

"In this you greatly rejoice" In what? In our great salvation just described in 1:3-5. Even though we are in the pits, temporarily distressed by our trials, we can look to our Savior and the salvation He has provided, which we already have begun to enjoy, but which we won't experience in full until He returns, and we will have an inexpressible, glorious joy that floods our souls right there in the pits.

Trials are to purify our faith. Peter says (1:8) that inexpressible joy in trials comes through believing in Jesus even though we do not see Him. We need to understand that faith is not an automatic response. Neither is it passive endurance. Faith is actively choosing to trust God in spite of my circumstances. Faith is putting my weight down on the firm promises of God. Spurgeon said that trials aren't just to burn out the dross, but also to burn in the promises.

In a time of trials, it seems as if Christ is not there with you. So by faith you must say, "He promised to be with me even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), He promised never to leave or forsake me (Heb. 13:5), so I lay hold of Him right now by faith." As Jesus told Thomas, who didn't believe in His resurrection until he saw Jesus with his own eyes, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). That's us! We will be blessed when we look to the Savior by faith even when we're in the pits. It's our choice and duty.

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him.

1 Peter 1:8

Love for Jesus Christ in response to His ultimate love for us as seen in the cross, is the central motivation for the Christian life. It's so easy to drift into the place of the church in Ephesus, which Jesus commended by saying, "I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot endure evil men, and you put to the test those who called themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false; and you have perseverance and have endured for My name's sake, and have not grown weary." Wow! What more could you want, Lord? "But I have this against you, that you have left your first love" (Rev. 2:2-4).

It's easy to drift there in your marriage, isn't it? You're faithful to one another. You live together in relative harmony. You function as husband and wife, you raise your children, you pay the bills and do the other things required to run a household. But somewhere the romance went cold. You need to rekindle the delight in your spouse you once knew.

It's the same with the Lord. We can be dutifully living the Christian life, but we've lost the romance with Christ. I'm talking here not just about commitment, which is the core of love, but also feelings which stem from that commitment. I agree with Jonathan Edwards, that the core of religion is emotional. Our hearts need to be filled with love for Jesus Christ.

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. Was there a time in your life where God used something painful to strengthen you or to ultimately bring blessing?

2. Is there an example of someone in your life who you would say has “suffered well”?

Read It

| 1 Peter 1:3-12

Joy from the Pits

Explore It

1. Why are we sometimes not joyful? (1:6)

2. What do these trials prove? (1:7)

3. What will be the result of a faith that remains strong? (1:7)

4. Who loves Jesus even though they have never seen Him? (1:8)

5. What is the reward for trusting Jesus? (1:9)

Get It

1. There are four common (not necessarily right) Christian views of pain and suffering:
 - a. *We suffer because we lack faith. We're supposed to claim healing by faith and deny all negative thoughts.*
 - b. *Christians must go through suffering, but they're supposed to do it with a smile on their face. "Rejoice always.... In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:16, 18); "All things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28).*
 - c. *Work through all the stages of grief. Express how you feel. Vent all your anger, rage, and bitterness. If you don't feel it, you're in denial.*
 - d. *Don't deny the pain or grief, but at the same time find genuine joy in the Lord from the pits.*

Which of these views seems to take the most holistic biblical approach to trials? Can you support your answer with scripture?

2. How do these verses describe the attitudes of believers during trials and suffering? 2 Corinthians. 6:3-10, Acts 5:41, Acts 16:22-25, 1 Peter 1:6
3. According to these scriptures, who does God take through trials? (Hebrews 5:8, John 16:33, Acts 14:21-22)
4. In Mark 10:30, what does Jesus promise to those who follow Him?

Does it seem strange to you that trials are the mark of Jesus' love? Why or why not?

5. What is the purpose of trials for the follower of Christ? 1 Peter 1:6-7 & James 1:2-4

6. What are some ways that faith and gold are similar? What are some ways they are opposite?

7. Martin Luther said that if he had not been attacked as strongly as he had been, he would never have come to the place of certainty and faith as he did. Can you relate to that? If so, in what way?

8. 1 Peter 1:6 says that our suffering and grief lasts only a little while, but sometimes pain and suffering seems to go on for a long time. How do we reconcile these seeming contradictory thoughts?

9. Charles Spurgeon argues that, "if a Christian doesn't go through those times when he is depressed, he will grow proud, he won't be able to relate to others who suffer, and he will miss lessons that we learn no other way. Martin Luther says that "affliction is the best book in my library." In what ways do you resonate with these comments? In what ways do you disagree?

10. Have you ever felt like God has forgotten you or was asleep or on vacation when your problem hit? If so, describe that experience.

11. If someone in a terrible trial says to you, "How can a loving God allow this to happen?" How would you respond?

12. How do we cultivate and maintain the kind of love for our unseen Savior referred to in v 8-9?

Wisdom from Others

In a time of trials, it seems as if Christ is not there with you. So by faith you must say, "He promised to be with me even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20), He promised never to leave or forsake me (Heb. 13:5), so I lay hold of Him right now by faith. – Steven Cole

Trials can be extraordinarily painful. The answer isn't positive thinking or trying harder—the answer is to realize that your life is short and eternity is long. God is so much greater than your problems that you must place your hope in him. – Mark Driscoll

It sometimes happens that a man has to undergo a painful operation or course of treatment; but he gladly accepts the pain and the discomfort because of the renewed health and strength which lie beyond. It is one of the basic facts of life that a man can endure anything so long as he has something to look forward to--and the Christian can look forward to the ultimate joy. – William Barclay

In this world trials are not meant to take the strength out of us, but to put the strength into us. – William Barclay

A Christian's joy wells up from a sense that his deepest needs are met permanently. He is loved unconditionally, he has purpose, and his ongoing life is secure. Therefore, his sense of well-being does not depend upon current circumstances. – Larry Crabb

What's So Great about Salvation?

Week 4 | 11/11 – 11/17

1 Peter 1:10-12

Devotional

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

1 Peter 1:10-12

As you think about your life, what consistently brings you the most joy? Some might answer, "My family"; but for others their family is the source of their greatest pain. Some may say, "My friendships" or "this new guy (or gal) I'm dating." A few may answer, "My job" or "career." Some may not be honest enough to say it, but they really live for their possessions or hobbies or leisure activities. Or, some might be brutally honest in saying, "I don't have much joy in my life."

For every Christian, the true answer ought to be, "The thing that brings me the most joy in life is my relationship with the Lord and the full salvation He has provided." The Lord and His salvation ought to be the hub of our lives from which radiate out the spokes of joy in our families, our friendships, our jobs, our possessions, and our other activities. If you take away the hub, everything else would crumble into meaningless ruin.

Yet I fear that for too many Christians, salvation is nice, but not necessary. It adds a little fulfillment to their well-rounded lives, but it's not the essential core without which life would disintegrate. If they were honest, they would ask with a shrug of their shoulders, "What's so great about salvation?"

God has a sure-fire method of getting us to answer that question: He puts us in the fires of affliction! Trials have a way of getting us to focus on the bare essentials of life. What really matters? What am I living for? What gives life meaning and makes it count? And, of course, the more life-threatening the trials, the more focused we are.

In 1777, Dr. William Dodd, a well-known London clergyman, was condemned to be hanged for forgery. When his last sermon, delivered in prison, was published, a friend commented to Samuel Johnson that the effort was far better than he had thought the man capable of. Dr. Johnson's classic reply was, "Depend upon it, when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates his mind wonderfully."

Peter's readers were enduring affliction. Some may have been facing martyrdom for their faith. Some were under pressure in their homes from pagan spouses, in their jobs from pagan employers, and in their communities from pagan acquaintances. Some were probably wondering, "Why suffer for our faith? Is it worth all the pain I'm going through?" Peter's answer is to get them to look up from their suffering to their salvation and see, "It's more than worth it because our salvation is so great! The salvation we enjoy is that which the prophets struggled to understand and into which the angels long to look!"

Because our salvation is so great, we should joyfully endure present suffering in light of the future glory.

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. Discuss a time when you experienced something that was beyond your ability to explain to others?
2. Share a time when you found yourself on an all-out search for something or someone? Were you successful at finding it? If so what things helped you in your search?

Read It

| 1 Peter 1:10-12

What's So Great about Salvation?

Explore It

1. According to verses 10-11, what were the prophets carefully searching for?
2. What events were being predicted about in verse 11?
3. Who was active in revealing these truths to the prophets?
4. Who continue to look into these things in verse 12?

Get It

1. Peter begins this passage with the words "concerning this salvation" in verse 10. In your own words what is salvation? What does it involve and where do we go to receive it? (Use as many Bible references to explain your answer)

2. We are told that “the prophets searched and inquired carefully” not only for “their understanding but for ours,” does this motivate you to become more active in your study of our salvation? Why or why not?

3. What does the text tell us about the character of the prophets of old? What additional truths can we gather from Hebrews 11:32-40 about these men and women?

4. In verse 11, Peter says the prophets looked to the sufferings of Christ. Why is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus so central to our salvation?

5. In verse 12, Peter reminds his readers that the apostles were now announcing the rest of the prophet's story to these dispersed Christians. Who are some of the people that were actively involved in announcing the good news to you?

6. In what ways does the Spirit reveal God's truth to us today?

How have you sensed His leading in your own life?

7. What does this passage tell us about the inspiration and usefulness of the Scriptures? (Cf. 2 Tim 3:16)

8. In what ways has your study of the Old Testament been useful to you when it comes to teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness?

9. *It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all that I want it to. (Isaiah 55:11)*

Since God's Word always produces, what keeps us from being more active in our study of the Scriptures?

What ways can you begin to make the searching out of the Scriptures a greater priority in your life?

10. What are the angels looking in to? What does verse 12 tell us about our privilege to experience the grace of God?

11. *Peter is arguing that our salvation is so great that whatever we must endure for Christ's sake now is nothing compared with the glory that awaits us. Just as Jesus first wore the crown of thorns and then the crown of glory, so with us who follow Him. We may suffer now, but we already have tasted of this great salvation that the prophets foretold and into which the angels long to look. We can't even fathom all the riches which God has in store for those who love Him. So when you suffer for Jesus' sake, hang in there with joy, knowing that glory lies ahead! - Steve Cole*

In what ways does the above statement encourage you to cling to your salvation amidst all kinds of trials and tribulations?

12. What about our salvation gives you hope and joy amidst all the trouble the world brings your way?

Wisdom from Others

The Christians to whom Peter was writing were among the first to be blessed with a panoramic view of redemption. They were among the first to understand that the words of the prophets, which the prophets didn't understand fully, had been fulfilled in the gospel that Peter's readers had heard and believed. They were among the first to stand awestruck in the face of complete revelation... They, of all people, had grounds for rejoicing in what God had accomplished... We, who have had twenty-one centuries to ponder the wonder of God's plan of redemption, have even more reason to rejoice and give thanks... Decades of familiarity with full revelation seem to have dulled that initial sense of amazement. We're so accustomed to living on this side of the cross that we no longer see it for the great blessing it is... We need to focus on adjust our attitudes. – Carol Ruvolo

The wonder of the salvation which was to come to men in Christ was such that the prophets searched and enquired about it; it was such that even the angels were eager to catch a glimpse of it. This passage has a great deal to tell us about how the prophets received their message, and about how they wrote and spoke; there are few passages which have more to tell us about how men of God wrote and about how they were inspired.

(i) We are told two things about the prophets. First, they searched and enquired about the salvation which was to come. Second, the Spirit of Christ told them about Christ. Here we have the great truth that inspiration depends on two things--the searching mind of man and the revealing Spirit of God.

(ii) This passage tells us that the prophets spoke of the sufferings and the glory of Christ. Such passages as Ps.22 and Isa.52:13-15; Isa.53:1-12 found their consummation and fulfillment in the sufferings of Christ. Such passages as Ps.2, Ps.16:8-11, Ps.110, found their fulfillment in the glory and the triumph of Christ. We need not think that the prophets foresaw the actual man Jesus. What they did foresee was that one would come some day in whom their dreams and visions would all be fulfilled.

(iii) This passage tells us for whom the prophets spoke. It was the message of the glorious deliverance of God that they brought to men. That was a deliverance which they themselves never experienced. Sometimes God gives a man a vision, but says to the man himself, "Not yet!" He took Moses to Pisgah and showed him the Promised Land and said to him, "I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there" (Deut.34:14). Someone tells of watching one night at dusk a blind lamplighter lighting the lamps. He tapped his way from lamp-post to lamp-post bringing to others a light which he himself would never see. As the prophets knew, it is a great gift to receive the vision, even if the consummation of the vision is for others still to come. – William Barclay

Developing a Holy Lifestyle

Week 5 | 11/18 – 11/24

1 Peter 1:13-16

Devotional

Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:13-16

A California driver's license examiner told about a teenager who had just driven an almost perfect test. "He made his only mistake," said the examiner, "when he stopped to let me out of the car. After breathing a sigh of relief, the boy exclaimed, 'I'm sure glad I don't have to drive like that all the time!'" (*Reader's Digest* [1/84])

That boy was like a lot of churchgoing Americans. They put on a good front when they know someone is watching, but the rest of the time they let down their standards. There's not much difference between them and those in the world, except that they go to church a little more.

The divorce rate among Christians is about the same as in society at large. In fact, the third highest divorce rate occupationally, after doctors and police, goes to pastors! Christians watch the same TV shows and movies for the same number of hours weekly as everyone else. Christian youths are involved in sexual immorality to the same extent as those not naming Christ as Savior. Many Christian businessmen have a bad reputation. It would seem that our Christianity doesn't have much effect on the way we live.

I know of no text that needs to be burned into the thinking of American Christians more than 1 Peter 1:13-16. Writing to many who had come from pagan backgrounds, living in a pagan society where there was great pressure to conform, Peter calls his readers to holiness in light of the coming of Jesus Christ and the holy character of the God who calls us to salvation. He makes three points:

To be holy people, we must be focused on Christ's coming, obedient in all of life, and growing in our knowledge of God's holiness.

The word "holy" means to be separate. When applied to God, it points to His transcendence, that He is above and beyond His creation in such a way as to be distinct from it. Contained in the word is the notion of God's purity, that He is totally separate from all sin. When God calls us to holiness, it means that we are to be set apart from the world unto God, separate from all sin. But since sin dwells in the very core of our being as fallen creatures, how can we ever hope to be holy?

There are three senses in which we are holy (or "sanctified") as God's people. The moment we put our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior, we are **positionally** sanctified or set apart unto God. Then we must be **progressively** sanctified by growing in holiness. This process will not be complete as long as we're in this body, but we must actively work at it (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:13). When we meet the Lord we will be **perfectly** sanctified, made completely like Him (1 John 3:2).

Dr. Ryrie illustrates these three aspects of sanctification with a little girl with a new lollipop. She sees her friend coming and knows that she should share her lollipop, but she doesn't want to. So she sets apart that lollipop unto herself by licking it all over. Now it's hers. Then she starts licking it to make it progressively hers. Finally the process is over when the lollipop is completely gone. If we belong to God, He has set us apart unto Himself. He is progressively making us like Him. And someday we will be completely like Him.

Let me make it plain at the outset that you cannot get to heaven by striving to be holy. Good works cannot pay the penalty for our sins. Only the blood of Jesus Christ can satisfy the justice of God. We must put our trust in Him, not in our good works. But, if our faith in Christ to save us is genuine, it will result in a life of progressive holiness. If a person is not striving against sin and seeking to grow in holiness, it is doubtful whether his faith was saving faith. Scripture says, "Without holiness no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14, NIV).

~ Steven Cole

Study #5 1 Peter 1:13-16

Open It

1. When you hear the word “hypocrite,” what images come to mind?

2. When you hear the word “holiness,” what images come to mind?

Read It

| 1 Peter 1:13-16

Developing a Holy Lifestyle

Explore It

1. Peter places a great deal of value on the “mind” in v. 13. What does he want us to do with our mind?

2. What significant event does Peter desire us to live in light of (v. 13)?

3. Peter teaches us that there is a difference between our old way of life and our new way of life (v. 14-15)— what is it?

4. In what areas of life does God want us to be holy (v. 15)?

Get It

1. What about Christ’s coming should get our undivided attention? Why should it inspire hope? Why should it inspire self-control and soberness (v. 13)?

10. In what ways are we called to promote holiness in the lives of other Christians?
11. What role does a church play in encouraging and exhorting holiness in the life of believers? Are there any other scriptures that come to mind in support of your answer?
12. How will holiness of the Christian and the church affect the greater society around them?
13. What is one specific area that God is calling you to holiness?

What needs to change to help enable you find success in your pursuit of holiness?

Wisdom from Others

The holy man is not one who cannot sin. A holy man is one who will not sin. ~ A.W. Tozer

The true Christian ideal is not to be happy but to be holy. ~ A.W. Tozer

It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. We are told to let our light shine, and if it does we won't need to tell anybody it does. The light will be its own witness. Lighthouses don't ring bells and fire cannon to call attention to their shining—they just shine. ~ D. L. Moody

It is time for us Christians, to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are 'defeated' by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated; we are simply disobedient. It might be well if we stopped using the terms victory and defeat to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the terms obedience and disobedience. ~ Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness*

Faith and holiness are inextricably linked. Obeying the commands of God usually involves believing the promises of God. ~ Jerry Bridges

The imperatives of Christian living always begin with "therefore," meaning that they are always preceded by the indicatives of what God has done for us. ~ Edmund Clowney

Why Be Holy?

Week 6 | 11/25 – 12/1

1 Peter 1:17-21

Devotional

Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

1 Peter 1:17-21

If you're motivated, you can do amazing things. What would motivate a person to get out of bed in the middle of the night and read with avid interest a boring, technical book? Every parent of a sick child who has read Dr. Spock at 3 a.m. knows the answer! What would motivate a person to go sit out in an icy wind for an hour on a Saturday when there are other pressing things to do? The love of our son who was playing soccer has caused Marla and I to do that very thing.

What would make a college student stay up all night banging away at his computer? Surely his body is crying out for sleep! Surely he's not so intrigued by his subject that he just can't quit! He's motivated by a professor who said, "The term paper will count for 25 percent of your grade. No late work will be accepted. No exceptions!"

Why don't we read our Bibles with the consistency and fervency that we should? Why don't we pray as we ought? Why don't we discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness? Why do we get more excited about sports or leisure activities than we do about talking with a neighbor about Christ? Why don't we strive to be holy people in every area of life? Why do our hearts grow cold toward the things of God?

The answer is that, for one reason or another, we lack motivation. If we can kindle the right motivation, we will not fall into lukewarmness (Rev. 3:14-22). We will be fervent in spirit, all-out for the Lord.

In 1 Peter 1:13-16, the apostle calls us to a holy lifestyle in light of the great salvation which God has freely given to us. But, holiness is not an easy thing! It doesn't happen automatically. To be a holy person in a corrupt world, we must live carefully. We must be focused in purpose. We must fight against the lusts of the flesh and the pull of the world. We must be distinct, which often means standing alone in the face of group pressure. To succeed, we've got to be motivated. So Peter goes on to answer the question, "Why be holy?" In 1:17-21, he gives both a negative threat and a positive incentive which should motivate us to be holy people.

We should be holy because our Father is also our Judge and because He redeemed us at infinite cost.

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. What is something that you do that requires significant motivation and discipline? Why do you do it?

2. Name someone who always seems to be up for a challenge. Why are they like that?

Read It

| 1 Peter 1:17-21

Why Be Holy?

Explore It

1. What are the two roles that Peter ascribes to God? (v 17)

2. What does Peter say that his readers are redeemed from? (v 18)

3. What is Christ compared to? (v 19)

Get It

1. Verse 16 calls the Christian to live a life of holiness. How does Christ's own example of holiness in verses 18-21 motivate us?

2. Why is it important that Peter speaks of God's mercy and grace first (vv. 3-12) and our need for holiness second? (1:13-2:3)?

3. How can God be both a loving father and impartial judge? What makes it difficult for us to play both parts?

4. What does the idea of "reverent fear" convey in the context of both a father and a judge?

5. Since Peter's focus here is on the believer's holiness, God's judgment in verse 17 probably does not refer to eternal damnation, instead it likely refers to consequences for sinful behavior of the believer. According to 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, what does the Christian learn about their own judgment?

6. What do you think Peter's statement to "conduct yourselves" (NASB/ESV) or "live your lives" (NIV) says about God's standards for holy living? How does this differ from the way that the Pharisees lived?

7. *Slaves in the Roman world could deposit money in one of the pagan temple treasuries. After a long time, and after a fee the temple would "redeem" the slave. The slave would then be a slave to the god or goddess, but in all other ways free.*
How does this custom resonate with what Peter is saying in verse 18?

How does this make Peter's statement more powerful to his audience?

8. Have you ever felt you were of no worth or of no value? In both 1:7 and 1:18-19, Peter refers to gold, the most precious thing of his day, as something that perishes. If our faith and the ransom paid are worth far more than that, what does this say about our worth to God?

9. Would it be hard to hear a preacher say that your American way of life was useless (empty)?

How was your own life "empty" (NIV) or "futile" (NASB/ESV) before submitting to Jesus?

What does this say about the change in the way we are to live as Christians?

10. Who did God the Father choose back in 1:2? When?

Who did God the Father choose here in 1:20? When?

Is the Father's foreknowledge a passive visibility into the future or an active working out of His plan? Why?

11. The Greek word *Phaneroo* translated "revealed" is more fully defined as "to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden". What does this say about God's plan for our redemption?

12. Since our faith and hope are in God (v.21) because of what Christ has done, and God has redeemed us so that we are now "slaves" to our Father, what are we saying to God if we do not lead holy lives?

13. In what ways can we help others to see "the empty way of life" (NIV) and in turn show them the full way of life of Christ?

14. How can you live a more holy life this week? Be specific.

Wisdom from Others

The Christian is the man who lives the Christ-filled life, lives the life that is different; the life that never forgets the infinity of its obligation; the life which is made beautiful by the love of God who gave it birth. ~ William Barclay

Born Again to Love

Week 7 | 12/2 – 12/8

1 Peter 1:22-25

Devotional

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart... 1 Peter 1:22

There is no such thing as saving faith apart from obedient faith. There is a subtle and dangerous error in our day that you can believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, but obedience to Him as Lord is optional. If you want a fire insurance policy to protect you from hell, then believe in Jesus as your Savior, but you don't need to go all the way and obey Him as Lord. You can just go to church when it's convenient, drop a few bucks in the offering plate now and then, and call yourself a Christian. But if you like hardship and suffering, if you think that denying yourself and taking up a cross and living a holy life sounds adventurous and exciting, then you can sign up for the discipleship track. You'll be rewarded with a few extra benefits in heaven.

Please listen carefully, because your eternal destiny depends upon your understanding this: There is no such distinction in the Bible. Christians are those who have purified their souls in obedience to the truth. In 1 Peter 1:2, Peter says that we are chosen "unto obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ" (literal translation). The word "obedience" stands alone grammatically and refers to the initial acceptance of the gospel. In 1 Peter 2:8 and 3:1, he refers to unbelievers as those who are "disobedient to the word." In 4:17 he refers to unbelievers as "those who do not obey the gospel of God."

In Romans 1:5, Paul describes the goal of his own mission as "to bring about the obedience of faith among the Gentiles." In Romans 10:16, he states that not all heed (the word means, "obey") the gospel, and then cites Isaiah 53:1 as corroborating: "Lord, who has believed our report?" Believing and obeying are used interchangeably. In Romans 16:26, he says that the preaching of the gospel leads "to obedience of faith." In 2 Thessalonians 1:8, Paul says that when Jesus Christ returns, He will deal out "retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."

John 3:36 makes the same connection between belief and obedience: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." Acts 6:7 refers to the spread of the gospel in the days following Pentecost, when a number of the Jewish "priests were becoming obedient to the faith."

Does this mean that true Christians never disobey God? Of course not! But it does mean that there is no such thing as a characteristically disobedient believer. If a person claims to be saved, but lives in chronic disobedience to God and disregard for His Word, the person is deceived (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 6:7; 1 John 3:7). Saving faith is marked by purification of the inner man and obedience to God's truth. Part of that obedience involves sincere love for the brethren.

Thus Peter's first point is that the new birth is marked by purity of soul in obedience to the truth.

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. Is there anyone in your life who always knows what to say to encourage you to keep going?
2. What types of characteristics do encouragers hold?

Read It

| 1 Peter 1:13-25

Born Again to Love

Explore It

1. How were the recipients of this letter purified?
2. How are we called to love each other?
3. What fades and withers away?
4. What lasts forever?

Get It

1. In verse 22, Peter is talking about something that takes place at conversion or the new birth – something that “purifies their souls in obedience to the truth”. At conversion, a person begins a new life of obedience to the truth of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. What is that first step of obedience to the truth? (c.f. Matthew 28:18-20, Acts 2:38)

2. Since baptism does not save us (Ephesians 2:8, Titus 3:5), what is its purpose? (Acts 2:41, Romans 6:3-11, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Colossians 2:9-14).

3. Stuart Briscoe tells about being in a village in Bangladesh with the elders of that village who were Muslims by birth and background, but who had put their trust in Christ as Savior. They were sitting cross-legged on a dirt floor discussing whether they should all publicly confess Christ by being baptized. They could believe in Christ with no consequences. But if they were baptized, they would be tried and convicted as heretics and would be publicly beaten with bamboo rods. Since most of these men were old and somewhat frail, this could very likely result in their deaths... That brings "obedience to the truth" of the gospel down to the most basic level, doesn't it!

Would you be baptized if you knew that it meant social ostracism, a public beating, and perhaps death?

4. In verse 22, Peter commands two things in a specific order. What are they?

Why is this order essential if we are going to live as healthy, loving followers of Christ?

How is this order reflected in the Ten Commandments? (Exodus 20:1-17)

Describe a time when you put loving others before loving God. What were some of the consequences?

5. It has been said that "There is no such thing as saving faith apart from obedient faith." Does scripture support or discredit that thought? (c.f. 1 Peter 1:2, 1 Peter 2:22, Romans 16:26, 2 Thessalonians 1:8, John 3:36)

12. How should our relationships in the Christian family be different from relationships in the world around us? Compare 1:22 with 2:1.

Which relationships should take priority? (Galatians 6:10)

What difference should our relationships with our Christian family make to our decisions, lifestyle and career choices?

Are your fellow-Christians merely acquaintances or just like part of your family? Does your view of fellow-Christians need to change?

13. The readers of Peter's letter learned of God's gift of salvation because it was preached to them. How have you learned about it?

14. If you were trying to convey to someone else the value of new birth in your life, what would you want that person to know?

Pray for one person you would like to introduce to Christ – and ask Jesus to present that opportunity to you.

15. *Because everything in our earthly life is only **temporary**, it makes sense to stop spending so much energy and time on things of the world and focus more intently on Jesus and His **external kingdom**.*

What are three "temporary" things you could spend less time on so you could focus more on Christ?

What will it take for you to make this change? Will you do it?

Wisdom from Others

Wherever the Bible has gone and the good news about Jesus Christ recorded in the Bible has been preached, whether among a savage tribe or in a sophisticated, educated culture, the miracle of new birth has taken place. People are transformed inwardly by God's power through His Word, not through human self-improvement. – Steven Cole

A skeptic once told Gaylord Kambarami, the General Secretary of the Bible Society of Zimbabwe, "If you give me that New Testament I will roll the pages and use them to make cigarettes!" Gaylord replied, "I understand that, but at least promise to read the page of the New Testament before you smoke it." When the man agreed, Gaylord gave him the New Testament and that was the last he saw of him for 15 years.

Then, while Gaylord was attending a Methodist convention in Zimbabwe, the speaker on the platform suddenly spotted him, pointed him out to the audience and said, "This man doesn't remember me, but 15 years ago he tried to sell me a New Testament. When I refused to buy it he gave it to me, even though I told him I would use the pages to roll cigarettes. I smoked Matthew and I smoked Mark and I smoked Luke. But when I got to John 3:16, I couldn't smoke anymore. My life was changed from that moment!"

Love is always caring, even when it must confront. It is not devoid of feelings of compassion and tenderness. It often involves sacrifice on the part of the one extending it. – Steven Cole

Getting Into the Word

Week 8 | 12/9 – 12/16

1 Peter 2:1-3

Devotional

So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. 1 Peter 2:1-3

In his book, *A Quest for Godliness*, subtitled “The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life,” J. I. Packer reports that a Puritan preacher named Laurence Chaderton once apologized to his congregation for preaching for two hours. They responded, “For God’s sake, sir, Go on, go on!” Ah! Every preacher’s dream! At 82, after preaching for 50 years, Chaderton decided to retire. He received letters from 40 clergy begging him not to, testifying that they owed their conversion to his ministry of the Word (p. 57). Packer states (p. 98): Puritanism was, above all else, a Bible movement. To the Puritan the Bible was in truth the most precious possession that this world affords. His deepest conviction was that reverence for God means reverence for Scripture, and serving God means obeying Scripture. To his mind, therefore, no greater insult could be offered to the Creator than to neglect his written word; and, conversely, there could be no truer act of homage to him than to prize it and pore over it, and then to live out and give out its teaching. Intense veneration for Scripture, as the living word of the living God, and a devoted concern to know and do all that it prescribes, was Puritanism’s hallmark. I assure you that I won’t preach for two hours (or even one hour) this morning. But I would to God that He would use my feeble attempt today to motivate each of you to get into God’s Word consistently. More than the food you eat, you must have God’s Word! Cut out of your life newspapers and television, and even sleep itself, if you must; but you must have God’s Word in your life! That is Peter’s point:

We must have God’s Word to grow in our salvation.

~ *Steven Cole*

3. How are we to rid ourselves of these sins? What does that look in our everyday life? What practical ways are we to fulfill this command?

4. Discuss a time where one of the sins listed in verse 1 caused you trouble.

5. We are told to crave the biblical truth like newborn babies. How does this word picture help the readers understand Peter's exhortation?

6. Does a Christian have to crave the scriptures or can they simply just look at it as something that needs to be done?

7. How can we as Christians know if a preacher or teacher is giving people pure spiritual milk? Explain your answer with objective and biblical criteria.

8. In verse 2, Peter calls us to "grow up in our salvation". What does a spiritually mature individual look like?

9. How does God's word help us believers to grow in our faith?

10. In what ways have you seen this growing process in your own life? Share them with the group.

11. In what ways have you personally tasted and seen that the Lord is good?

THE PRIORITIES OF GOD'S PEOPLE

Week 9 | 1/6 – 1/12

1 Peter 2:4-8

TF

Devotional

In the rush of modern life, it's easy to lose sight of our priorities. Under pressure, we tend to focus on the urgent, but not always on the important. So it's good to be reminded occasionally of our priorities as God's people.

The believers to whom Peter wrote were under pressure--probably not from being busy--but pressure from persecution. Scattered as aliens in a pagan world (1:1), it would have been easy for them to lose sight of their priorities as God's people. The pressure easily could have driven a wedge between the Jewish and Gentile members of the church, leading to church splits. Peter wanted them to see their priorities clearly so that they could fulfill the glorious purpose to which God had called them. Thus he closes this first major section of his letter by showing that our salvation must be lived out by being built upon Christ, in Christian community, with witness to the world:

**God's people must keep God central, be built together as His people,
and proclaim His excellencies to others.**

These three priorities sum up the Great Commandment (to love God and neighbor) and the Great Commission (to win and disciple the lost). They help keep us in focus when pressures build.

We keep God central by offering spiritual sacrifices to Him through Christ.

As we come to Christ, we also, "as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (2:5). This is the central text on the great doctrine of the priesthood of every believer. There is no such thing as a Christian priesthood of just a few who are ordained to ministry. In the Old Testament, only the priests could draw near to God by offering sacrifices and incense on His altar. Only the High Priest, and that only once a year, could enter the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the people.

But now, Christ our High Priest has offered Himself once for all as the perfect sacrifice for our sins. As believer priests, we all have direct access into God's presence through Christ, our mediator (1 Tim. 2:5). We need not go through any human priest. We need not bring a bloody sacrifice, since Christ's offering of Himself once for all is sufficient. But we offer up to God other spiritual sacrifices as priests.

What are these sacrifices? Romans 12:1 tells us to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God. This means that everything we do can be done to God's glory (1 Cor. 10:31). In Romans 15:16, Paul says that he was "ministering as a priest the gospel of God, that [his] offering of the Gentiles might become acceptable." Thus sharing the good news of Christ is a sacrifice we can offer to God. The Philippian church took up a collection and sent it to Paul to meet his needs. He calls their service "an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God" (Phil. 4:18; also Phil. 2:17). Hebrews 13:15-16 instructs us, through Christ, to "continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing; for with such sacrifices God is pleased."

This relates to all you do in your Christian life. Everything you do should be a thank offering to Christ. Do you work with our young people? Help with socials? Help at a church work day? Usher? Call on or take a meal to the sick? Give money? Sing? Pray? Lead a Bible study? Counsel? Whatever you do should be done as a sacrifice to Christ. It ought to be done by asking yourself the question, "Lord, does this please You?" Your motive is not human recognition, but gratitude to the Lord.

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. What did you think of Jesus the first time you heard of Him? If you were young when you heard, what is the first thing that you can recall about Him?
2. Have you ever felt rejected? Describe it. What happened? Who was it that rejected you? What was going on? How did it make you feel?
3. Have you ever had someone reject you for following Jesus? Describe it.

Read It

1 Peter 2:4-8

Explore It

4. What does Peter describe Jesus to be (v. 4)?
5. How does God the Father view Jesus (v. 4)?
6. Peter calls us “living stones” that God is using to build what (v. 5)?
7. If we place our faith in Jesus, what will NOT happen to us (v. 6)?

Get It

1. How does it make you feel to know that Jesus has been rejected by many of those in our society? What are some common causes for this rejection (v. 4)?

Wisdom from others:

That is why we must not be surprised if we are in for a rough time. When a man turns to Christ and seems to be getting on pretty well (in the sense that some of his bad habits are now corrected), he often feels that it would now be natural if things went fairly smoothly. When troubles come along—illnesses, money troubles, new kinds of temptation—he is disappointed. These things, he feels, might have been necessary to rouse him and make him repent in his bad old days; but why now? Because God is forcing him on, or up, to a higher level: putting him into situations where he will have to be very much braver, or more patient, or more loving, than he ever dreamed of being before. It seems to us all unnecessary: but that is because we have not yet had the slightest notion of the tremendous thing He means to make of us.

I find I must borrow yet another parable from George MacDonald. Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself. — C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, Book IV, Chapter 9.

THE PILGRIM LIFE

Week 10 | 1/13 – 1/19

1 Peter 2:9-12

KO

Devotional

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation. 1 Peter 2:9-12

Today, the word "pilgrim" reminds us of the quaint folks who came over on the Mayflower in 1620. We may think about them with their broad brimmed hats each year at Thanksgiving as we wolf down our turkey dinner. But we don't identify much with them.

Being a pilgrim just isn't the dominant model of the Christian life for our times. Our view of Christianity is geared to the here and now: What will it do for my marriage? How will it help me raise my kids? Will it help me succeed in my career? Will it help me overcome personal problems? Will it help me feel fulfilled as a person? Heaven is thrown in as a nice benefit at the end of the ride. But heaven is not our focus. We want to enjoy life now and cling to it as long as we're able. We don't view death as the gateway to everything we've been living for. We see it as something to be postponed and avoided at all costs. We don't view ourselves as pilgrims.

In the summer of 1986, this truth hit me in a fresh way. I was preaching through 1 Corinthians and came to 15:19: "If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." I thought, "Can I truthfully say that?" For me, the Christian life is the best way to live. I have a wonderful wife and children. I have the family of God. I have fellowship with my Creator and Savior. His Word guides me. I enjoy all the blessings He bestows. Where else can you find a way of life that brings as much joy as Christianity?

There's nothing wrong and everything right about enjoying God and the blessings He freely bestows on us in this life. But if we don't hold the things of this life loosely and aren't focused on God Himself and on being in heaven with Him as our goal, we are holding to a shallow form of Christianity. If we're just living for the good life that being a Christian gives now, we wouldn't last a minute under persecution. We wouldn't endure much suffering. Nor would we withstand the many temptations to indulge in fleshly desires. The only thing that can steel us to endure suffering and to seek holiness in this wicked world is to live as pilgrims, bound for heaven.

That's what Peter wanted his persecuted readers to see-- that the Christian life is a pilgrim life. We're aliens and strangers on this earth. Peter shows us four things we must do to live as pilgrims:

**To live as pilgrims, there is a mindset to adopt, a war to fight,
a lifestyle to maintain, and a day to remember.**

~ *Steven Cole*

Open It

1. When you are introduced to someone for the first time and you start to introduce yourself, what do you tell them so that they quickly get a sense of who you are? Why do you do that?

2. The devotional for this week speaks of being a pilgrim. Can you identify with the idea of being a pilgrim? Why or why not? (Or, would you have been willing to be one of the pilgrims in 1620? Why?)

Read It

| 1 Peter 2:9-12

Explore It

1. What are the ways Peter identifies believers in verses 9-10?

2. According to verse 9, what is our purpose as believers? (2:9)

3. What does Peter say believers have received? (2:10)

4. Why does Peter call us to a “honorable life” (ESV) among believers? (2:12)

Get It

1. What contrast does Peter set up in verses 11 and 12?

CHRISTIAN CITIZENSHIP

Week 11 | 1/20 – 1/26

1 Peter 2:13-17

Devotional

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.
1 Peter 2:13-17

We Americans live in a country that was founded on a revolution and in which defiance of government authority is viewed as a basic constitutional right. Benjamin Franklin proposed the following design for the reverse side of the Great Seal of the United States:

Pharaoh sitting in an open chariot, a crown on his head and a sword in his hand, passing through the divided waters of the Red Sea in pursuit of the Israelites. Rays from a pillar of fire in the cloud, expressive of the Divine presence and command, beaming on Moses, who stands on the shore and, extending his hand over the sea, causes it to overflow Pharaoh. Motto: "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God."²

Franklin was a deist, not an evangelical Christian. But his sentiment--rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God--is shared by many committed Christians. Most evangelicals accept the American Revolution as being a proper resistance to corrupt authority. There is a difference of opinion among Christians over whether the civil disobedience of groups such as Operation Rescue is proper or not. But the presence of the issue shows the relevance of our topic: What is the proper relationship of Christian citizens toward their government?

Those to whom Peter wrote lived with a government and society that was not favorable toward the Christian faith. Both Peter and

Paul were executed at the hands of the Roman tyrant Nero. It was not until the fourth century, under Constantine, that Christianity was afforded official legitimacy and protection by the government. Peter has just stated the general principle that Christians are to live holy lives as aliens and strangers on this earth (2:11-12). We are not permanent residents here, but are pilgrims journeying toward heaven. It would have been easy for his readers to conclude that we therefore have no civic responsibility here on earth. Perhaps they would have concluded that they could disregard and disobey human government, since they were citizens of heaven, not of this earth. So Peter anticipates and counters this wrong conclusion by showing how Christian citizens must live:

Christians must live as good citizens by submitting to human government.

~ Steven Cole

² Cited by *Vernon Grounds, Revolution and the Christian Faith* [Lippincott, 1971], p. 9.
Village Bible Church

Study #11

1 Peter 2:13-17

Open It

1. If you were to rate your natural inclination for being submissive on a scale of one to ten, where would you place yourself and why? (One is a mud-covered doormat; ten is a banner-waving firebrand.)

2. What are some laws that you find hard to obey?

In verse 12 Peter tells his readers to live good lives for the world around to see. He particularly has in mind those who are suffering or being accused of doing wrong. In 2:13-3:7, he explores what this means for us in different areas of life; in the political arena, in work and in marriage. In all these areas Christians were facing misunderstanding and suffering.

Read It

| 1 Peter 2:13-17

Explore It

1. Who are we told to submit to? (13-14)

2. Why are we told to submit? (2:13)

3. What is the purpose of human government? (2:14 & Romans 13:4)

4. Who will our honorable lives silence? (2:15)

5. According to verse 17, how should we treat God? How should we treat our rulers?

Get It

1. "Submit" (2:13) is a military word, meaning to put oneself under another in rank. It is a favorite with Peter and dominates much of the rest of this epistle. Yet, it is a dirty word to Americans... Why is that?
2. How does a Christian view of freedom differ from worldly ideas of freedom? (2:13-17)
3. Why should Christians treat their governing leaders with respect? Give a few practical examples of this. (2:13-15)
4. What effect does submission have on the talk of foolish people (v 15)? Why does verse 15 follow verses 13-14? What might foolish people be saying concerning Christians?
5. While some question it, the government promotes justice and peace, in part, by legislating morality, and rightly so. The real debate is, which morality should we legislate? In a society that is increasingly unchristian, what types of biblical standards should we try to legislate?
6. Both Paul and Peter wrote when the debauched, godless Nero was on the throne. Daniel lived under the ruthless Nebuchadnezzar. Yet all three wrote about the necessity of submitting to the government. Does the biblical principle of obedience to government authority change based on how bad the ruler is?

Wisdom from others:

A minister, pressed for time and not finding a parking space, parked in a no parking zone and put a note on his windshield: "I have circled the block 10 times. I have an appointment to keep. Forgive us our trespasses." When he returned, he found a citation along with this note: "I've circled this block for 10 years. If I don't give you a ticket, I lose my job. Lead us not into temptation." Submission means obeying the law...

There is a fine balance that Christians must maintain, between respecting the man and his office, but not respecting him more than God. If it comes to a tug of war between God and government, we must follow God. If the government forces us to disobey God, we first appeal to the government, if possible. If we have opportunity, we confront the government with its wrong. But if all that fails, we disobey the government and submit to our punishment. ~ Steven Cole

Is it ever right for Christians to participate in a revolution to overthrow a government? Obviously, God sets up and takes down rulers, and He does it through people. But should Christians be a part of such, for example, when the government is evil, such as Nazi Germany or Communist China? I tend to agree with John Calvin, who states that the only command given to Christians is to obey and suffer, so we should be hesitant to think that God has entrusted the revolutionary task to us (Institutes [Westminster Press], IV:XX:31). And yet at the same time, we are responsible to speak out against evil, whether it be practiced by rulers or other citizens (Matt. 14:4; Dan. 4:27; 5:18-28).

"It is the duty of a Christian to yield obedience to all laws of the government under which he lives, that are not inconsistent with the law of God. When the human ordinance contradicts the Divine ordinance, requiring us to do what God forbids, or forbidding us to do what God requires, the rule is plain: 'We ought to obey God rather than man' [Acts 5:29]. Nothing short of this, however, can warrant a Christian to withhold obedience from a law of the government under which, in the providence of God, he is placed" (Expository Discourses on 1 Peter [Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975], pp. 349-50).

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOUR BOSS ISN'T FAIR

Week 12 | 1/27 – 2/2

1 Peter 2:18-23

Devotional

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. 1 Peter 2:18-23

If you are a parent of children old enough to talk, you have heard them complain, "But that isn't fair!" And you responded, "Life isn't fair!" We are born with a strong inner sense of fairness and a strong desire to fight for our rights when we have been treated unfairly. Although we know that life isn't fair, we're prone to fight back when we're the victims of unfair treatment.

Let's assume that you are a conscientious worker on your job. You get to work early, you're careful not to extend your lunch breaks, and sometimes you stay late on your own time to finish a job. You're careful not to waste company time with excessive chit-chat. You work hard and produce for the company. Because you're a Christian, you don't go out drinking after hours with the boss and you don't swap the latest dirty jokes with him.

Another worker is, in your opinion, a goof off. He often comes in late, he spends a lot of time chatting with the secretaries, he takes long lunches, and he does sloppy work which you often have to correct. But he also goes out drinking with the boss and he always has a new dirty joke that sends the boss into hysterics. When a promotion opens up, he gets the better job and you are overlooked.

Life isn't fair! The important question is, "How do you respond when you're treated unfairly?" How should you respond? Is it wrong to defend yourself or to stand up for your rights? How should a Christian respond when treated unfairly, especially on the job? That is the question Peter addresses in 1 Peter 2:18-23. My guess is that you're not going to like his answer. (I can guess that because I don't like his answer either!) His answer is,

**When treated unfairly by a superior, we should submissively endure
by entrusting ourselves to God, the righteous Judge.**

~ Steven Cole

Study #12

1 Peter 2:18-23

Open It

1. Have you ever been falsely accused? How did you feel?

2. Of all the jobs you've had, which has been your favorite and why? Who has been your favorite boss and why?

Read It

1 Peter 2:18-23

Explore It

1. How are we to submit to our masters / bosses? (2:18)

2. What types of masters / bosses are we to submit to? (2:18)

3. What is God pleased with? (2:19)

4. Jesus, our role model, is held up to us. Find four things Jesus didn't do when treated unjustly. Find one thing he did do. (v 22-23)

Get It

1. How does a Christian view of 'rights' differ from worldly ideas of rights? (2:18-21)

Wisdom from others:

The cross says that God especially loves those who are hurting-- those who are under the penalty and power of sin. If you will turn to Jesus Christ and put your trust in what He did for you in taking your just penalty for sin on the cross, He will deliver you from sin's penalty and from its power. He wants to be your Shepherd and Overseer. He loves you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way. He wants to heal you from the devastating effects of sin. Will you turn to Him?

Colossians 3:23 says we are to "work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men." What about you? Do you reflect that attitude in your workplace? Do you respect your employer? Are you faithful and diligent or are you critical, obstinate, and rude? Are you careful about your use of company time and property? Ask the Lord to help you honor His name where you work. If you are an employer or supervisor, ask the Lord to help you treat the workers in a fair and just way.
– John MacArthur

Bible commentator John Brown wrote, "The unkind, irritating behavior of the master, is not to be sustained as an excuse for evading or disobeying his commands, or even for yielding a grudging obedience: the hardships of the situations are to be patiently submitted to while they continue; and there is to be no attempt to lessen or remove them by neglecting or violating relative duty" (Expository Discourses on 1 Peter [Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975], p. 499). If you are treated unfairly, realize that your obedient service honors Christ and attracts the lost to Him. In addition, the Lord will reward you for it (Eph. 6:8). Read and meditate on Psalm 57, making note of the principles that apply to your situation.

In God's calling us to salvation, we have the privilege of suffering for His name (1 Pet. 2:21). The English minister Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "We are like the school boy who would like to evade certain things, and run away from problems and tests. But we thank God that because he has a larger interest in us and knows what is for our good, he puts us through the disciplines of life—he makes us learn the multiplication table; we are made to struggle with the elements of grammar. Many things that are trials to us are essential that one day we may be found without spot or wrinkle" (The Miracle of Grace [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986], p. 39). When you encounter trials in the workplace, view them as opportunities for spiritual growth and for others to see Christ in you.

THE MEANING OF THE CROSS

Week 13 | 2/3 – 2/9

1 Peter 2:24-25

Devotional

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. 1 Peter 2:24-25

In reality, there is no more practical subject in all the Bible. The cross of Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith. The cross reveals to us the character of God: His love for lost sinners and His perfect justice meet at the cross. If we want to grow in our love for God, which is the first and greatest commandment, then we must be growing to understand and appreciate of the cross, which shows us His great love. If we want to grow in godliness, we must grow in understanding the significance of the cross, which confronts the most prevalent and insidious of all sins, namely, pride.

The cross is the place where all the wounds of sin are healed. If you suffer from emotional problems--guilt, anxiety, depression, anger, or whatever--there is healing in the cross of Christ. If you are going through tragedy or suffering, there is comfort in abundance as you contemplate the sufferings of the spotless Savior on your behalf. After all, Peter wrote these very words to slaves who were suffering unjustly under cruel masters. The words about Christ's wound (referring to the welts produced by whipping) must have spoken to the hearts of these slaves who were whipped unjustly. Peter knew that meditating on the cross would produce in them a heart of overflowing gratitude to the One who bore so much on their behalf.

Keeping the cross of Christ central will protect you from the many winds of false doctrine blowing in our day. Satan hates the cross because it sealed his doom and he is relentless in his attacks to undermine and thwart the cross. Every cult or false teaching in some way diminishes the work of Christ on the cross and magnifies human ability. I believe that the doctrine which Satan is currently working to erode in American Christianity is the doctrine of sin. If he can convince people that they are not sinners who deserve God's wrath, then they don't need a crucified Savior. If he can convince Christians that they are not ongoing sinners in daily need of repentance and the cleansing blood of Jesus, then they don't need to go deeper in appropriating the message of the cross. Thus the centrality of the cross is crucial to all sound doctrine.

**Through Christ's death on the cross, those who turn to Him
are delivered from both the penalty and the power of sin.**

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. How old were you when you first began to understand the significance of the cross?

2. In reference to your answer above, how did you come to hear the message of the cross?

Read It

1 Peter 2:24-25

Explore It

1. Who bore our sins on the tree? (2:24)

2. What three reasons are given for His death/wounds? (2:24)

3. What does it mean to stray like sheep? (2:25)

Get It

1. 1 Peter 2:24-25 is the central message of the Bible – the Good news. Explain what each of the following phrases mean:

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree,

So that we might die to sins

And live for righteousness;

By his wounds you have been healed.

For you were like sheep going astray...

Wisdom from others:

The cross says that God especially loves those who are hurting-- those who are under the penalty and power of sin. If you will turn to Jesus Christ and put your trust in what He did for you in taking your just penalty for sin on the cross, He will deliver you from sin's penalty and from its power. He wants to be your Shepherd and Overseer. He loves you just as you are, but He loves you too much to leave you that way. He wants to heal you from the devastating effects of sin. Will you turn to Him?

We are often prone to be more troubled about a great affliction we must suffer than "trivial" sins we commit. Yet in God's economy, "There is more evil in a drop of sin than in a sea of affliction" (Thomas Watson as cited in *More Gathered Gold*, John Blanchard, ed. [Welwyn, Eng. : Evangelical Press, 1986], p. 325). Jesus determined to see sinners cleansed from sin rather than escape the affliction of the cross and the outpouring of God's wrath. Are you more concerned about your personal comfort or avoiding sin?

We studiously avoid suffering, and surely we are not called to endure unnecessary suffering. Yet at times our faith demands the endurance of trials. Our Great Shepherd was faced with that necessity to save His sheep, and He walked into suffering with open eyes. The British pastor and missionary Oswald Chambers wrote, "He deliberately laid down His life without any possibility of deliverance. There was no compulsion, it was a sacrifice made with a free mind; nor was there anything . . . impulsive about it, He laid down His life with a clear knowledge of what He was doing. Jesus understood what was coming, it was not a foreboding, but a certainty; not a catastrophe which might happen, but an ordained certainty in the decrees of God, and He knew it" (cited in *Oswald Chambers: The Best from All His Books*, vol. 2, Harry Verploegh, ed. [Nashville: Oliver Nelson, 1989], p. 270). In those cases where your faith in Christ demands that you walk the path of suffering, are you willing to walk for Him as He walked for you?

Freely Submit in the Home

Week 14 | 2/10 – 2/16

1 Peter 3:1-6

TB

Devotional

Someone has said, "Usually the husband regards himself as the head of the household, and the pedestrian has the right of way. And, usually, both of them are safe until they try to prove it" (Reader's Digest [2/83]).

These verses are tough to explain and apply in light of our modern culture. It's tough enough to teach about the submission of wives to godly husbands. But to teach that wives should submit even to husbands who are ungodly seems cruel and insensitive. Wife abuse is widespread, even, sad to say, among evangelicals. Most of us are familiar with the family patterns in alcoholic homes, where a wife "enables" the husband in his wrong behavior. Many would argue that the wife's submission contributes to these problems rather than solves them. Is a wife supposed to submit in such situations? If so, what does that mean?

Furthermore, we live in a society that values individual rights, especially of those who are pushed down by the system (such as women). We're constantly encouraged to stand up for our rights and to fight back when we're wronged. Self-fulfillment is a supreme virtue in America, and those who are unfulfilled because of a difficult marriage are encouraged to do what they have to do to seek personal happiness. Submission to one's difficult husband is not usually one of the action points! Christian psychologist James Dobson wrote a book encouraging wives with disobedient husbands to practice "tough love." How does this fit in with submission?

To understand our text, we must see that Peter's theme (which began at 2:11) is still Christian witness in an alien world. In that society, a woman was expected to accept her husband's religion. If a wife became a Christian, she was viewed as being insubordinate. Thus the conversion of women was a culturally explosive situation. Peter didn't want to compound the problem with a wife's defiant behavior. So he gives instruction on how Christian women could live with their unbelieving mates in a way that would bear witness for Christ. We need to understand several things in approaching this text.

First, the qualities Peter encourages these women to adopt apply to all Christians, both men and women. We all are to develop a submissive spirit, to be chaste, reverent, gentle and quiet, with an emphasis on the inner person rather than on outward appearance. So even though I direct my comments to wives who have unbelieving husbands, the principles apply to us all, men and women alike.

Second, Peter's comments do not give warrant for a Christian to enter a marriage with an unbelieving mate. Scripture is clear that believers are not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers (2 Cor. 6:14; Exod.34:12-16; Ezra 9:1-4). Peter was writing to women who had become Christians after marriage, but whose husbands were not yet believers. Also, the Apostle Paul clearly states that if an unbelieving mate consents to live with a believer, the believer must not initiate a divorce (1 Cor. 7:12-13). Rather, the believing wife should follow the principles Peter sets forth here, namely, that...

**The Christian wife should live with a difficult husband
so that he is attracted to Christ by her behavior.**

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. Talk about the last time you really dressed up for an event? What did you wear and what was the occasion? Is getting dressed up something you enjoy, despise or simply indifferent?

2. Why does our culture put such a high priority on looking good when it comes to our outward appearance?

Read It

| 1 Peter 3:1-6

Explore It

1. What activity or attitude does Peter find necessary to address with wives in verse 1?

2. According to verse 4; where does a women's real beauty come from?

3. To what Old Testament woman does Peter point to as a model for the Christian wife to follow in verse 6?

Get It

1. Why are wives called to submit in 1 Peter 3:1-2?

2. What kind of man is referred to in 1 Peter 3:1 & how are they to "be won"? 1 Peter 2:8, 3:1-6, 1 Timothy 2:8-11

Group Discussion: Break up into men and women to discuss the remaining questions 8-13. Appoint a spokesperson to collect responses. Then come back together and share findings.

8. In what ways can a husband make it difficult for his wife to submit?

9. What characteristics are needed to make submission work within a marriage?

10. When has submission brought about a positive outcome for your marriage and family? (Women)

11. If nice clothes, jewelry and makeup are the recipe for outward adornment, how does a wife make herself beautiful on the inside? (Be specific.)

12. (MEN) What practical ways can a wife live out the principles laid forth in 1 Peter 3:1-6?

13. (Women) What practical ways can husbands make a wife's submission a joy and not a burden?

Concluding question once the group has finished discussing the above.

14. Ephesians 5:21 tells both husbands and wives to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” How does our submission to Christ directly correspond to submission in our earthly relationships?

Wisdom from others:

Those who argue for “evangelical feminism” quickly go to Ephesians 5:21 and point out that both husbands and wives are to submit to one another. They make that verse the all-governing one and explain 1 Peter as applying only to the first century because of cultural considerations. But we can’t throw out the submission of wives to husbands so easily. Paul recognizes a sense in Christian marriage in which each partner submits to the other under Christ, but he also goes on to state that the husband is the head of the wife, just as Christ is the head of the church. There is a sense in which Christ submits Himself to the church in self-sacrificing service, but at the same time, clearly He is in authority over the church. Before the late 20th century, it never occurred to scholars to interpret these texts the way modern evangelical feminists do. So I think we must interpret and apply them as written. ~ Steve Cole

Man Up! Love Your Wife!

Week 15 | 2/24 – 3/2

1 Peter 3:7

TF

Devotional

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. 1 Peter 3:7

I read a fictional story called “Johnny Lingo’s Eight-Cow Wife” (by Patricia McGerr, Reader’s Digest [2/88], pp. 138-141) that is a parable on our text. It took place on a primitive Pacific island, where a man paid the dowry for his wife in cows. Two or three cows could buy a decent wife, four or five a very nice one. But Johnny Lingo had offered an unheard of eight cows for Sarita, a girl whom everyone in her home village thought rather plain looking. The local folks all made fun of Johnny, who they thought was crazy to pay so much for a wife. But when the teller of the story finally sees Johnny Lingo’s wife, she is stunned by her beauty. She asks him how this could be the same woman—how can she be so different? Johnny’s reply shows that he’s nobody’s fool:

“Do you ever think,” he asked, “what it must mean to a woman to know that her husband has settled on the lowest price for which she can be bought? And then later, when the women talk, they boast of what their husbands paid for them. One says four cows, another maybe six. How does she feel, the woman who was sold for one or two? This could not happen to my Sarita.”

“Then you did this just to make your wife happy?”

“I wanted Sarita to be happy, yes. But I wanted more than that. You say she is different. This is true. Many things can change a woman. Things that happen inside, things that happen outside. But the thing that matters most is what she thinks about herself. In Kiniwata, Sarita believed she was worth nothing. Now she knows she is worth more than any other woman in the islands.”

“Then you wanted—”

“I wanted to marry Sarita. I loved her and no other woman.”

“But--” I was close to understanding.

“But,” he finished softly, “I wanted an eight-cow wife.”

People tend to live up—or down—to how we treat them. If we offer repeated praise and affirmation, the person responds by living up to it. If we run the person down, they oblige us by meeting our negative expectations. Peter tells husbands that, like Johnny Lingo, they should treat their mates as eight-cow wives. Husbands should understand and honor their wives. The reason Peter gives this command may startle you, if you aren’t overly familiar with the verse. We are not to treat our wives well so that we will have happy marriages, although that will be one result. Rather, we are to treat our wives properly so that our prayers will not be hindered! Isn’t that startling—that there is an undeniable connection between how you treat your wife and your prayer life! Since effective prayer is at the heart of a walk with God, this means that if a man mistreats his wife, I don’t care what he claims, he cannot be enjoying close communion with God.

**Husbands are to understand and honor their wives
so that they will have an effective prayer life.**

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. What was the first TV show you ever saw that depicted a husband and wife? What did you like/not like about the couple or their marriage?

2. Where did you learn about the roles of a husband and a wife? What did you learn?

Read It

| 1 Peter 3:1-7

Explore It

1. How are husbands to live with their wives? (v. 7)

2. Why is a man to honor his wife? (v. 7)

3. Peter says that husbands and wives are both heirs of what? (v. 7)

Get It

1. Many books have noted many of the ways men and women are different and how to love one another in light of it. Why is it necessary for us to understand the differences between men and women?

2. How do you think the Bible's instructions on husband and wife relationships differ from the world's?

"Interpreters differ over whether weaker vessel means weaker in terms of delegated authority, emotions, or physical strength. Peter is probably thinking of the general truth that men are physically stronger than women and may be tempted to threaten their wives through physical or verbal abuse."³

"This expression has given rise to two major interpretations: physical weakness, and spiritual weakness. Inasmuch as the preponderance of evidence in the ancient world uses identical or similar language when describing a woman's physical condition, it is almost certain that Peter has in mind a wife's physical capacities."⁴

1. Peter describes a woman as the "weaker vessel." In your experience, why do you think so many struggle describing a wife in that way?

Group Discussion: Break up into men and women to discuss question 13 & 14. Appoint a spokesperson to collect responses. Then come back together and share findings.

2. If you are a wife, what would you like your husband to take away from this week's study?

3. If you are a husband, what do you hope to do differently in your relationship with your wife?

Concluding question once the group has finished discussing the above.

4. After studying 1 Peter 3:1-6, and 3:7, what can we see about our own personal marriage? Or if divorced and unmarried, what you could have done differently? Or if single and not yet married, what could be done now to prepare ourselves for marriage in the future?

³ ESV Study Bible

⁴ Scot McKnight, NIV Application Commentary, p. 186.
Village Bible Church

Wisdom from others:

"If you want your prayers to be helped and not hindered you have to live with your wife in a certain way. There has to be an effort to understand her so as to know her needs. There has to be a special solicitousness of her weaknesses and what she especially needs from you. There has to be recognition that she is a fellow heir of the grace of life and an accompanying bestowal of honor rather than any belittling or demeaning. When we husbands live like this (with understanding, tender care, and honor), our prayers will not be hindered. If we do not live like this, our prayers will be hindered."—John Piper, "That Your Prayers Should Not Be Hindered," sermon, January 2, 1994, www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/that-your-prayers-may-not-be-hindered, accessed on September 18, 2012.

"Biblical support for the idea that the man has the primary responsibility to protect his family is found in Deuteronomy 20:7-8 (men go forth to war, not women, here and in many Old Testament passages); 24:5; Joshua 1:14; Judges 4:8-10 (Barak does not get the glory because he insisted that a woman accompany him into battle); Nehemiah 4:13-14 (the people are to fight for their brothers, homes, wives, and children, but it does not say they are to fight for their husband!); Jeremiah 50:37 (it is the disgrace of a nation when its warriors become women); Nahum 3:13 ('Behold, your troops are women in your midst' is a taunt of derision); Matthew 2:13-14 (Joseph is told to protect Mary and baby Jesus by taking them to Egypt); Ephesians 5:25 (a husband's love should extend even to a willingness to lay down his life for his wife, something many soldiers in battle have done throughout history to protect their families and homelands); 1 Peter 3:7 (a wife is a 'weaker vessel,' and therefore the husband, as generally stronger, has a greater responsibility to use his strength to protect his wife"—Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth*, p. 44.

THE GOOD LIFE & HOW TO LIVE IT

Week 16 | 3/3 – 3/9

1 Peter 3:8-12

KO

Devotional

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. 1 Peter 3:8-9

“Ah, the good life!” When you hear that phrase, you probably think of Beverly Hills, Palm Springs, or some other such place where the rich and famous lounge around their swimming pools or cruise by in their Rolls Royces. But we all know that that’s not the good life. People in Beverly Hills or Palm Springs aren’t any happier on the average than people in Flagstaff or any other city. In fact, some of the most miserable people in the world are those who live for the things money can buy.

So what is the good life and how do we live it? The truly good life comes from having God’s blessing upon us, particularly in the area of healthy relationships. In fact, God’s blessing is inseparable from having healthy relationships. As 1 John 4:20 bluntly asserts, if we say that we love God but we hate our brother, we’re liars, because if we do not love our brother whom we have seen, we cannot love God whom we have not seen. Being rightly related to God and to others sums up the message of the Bible (Matt. 22:37-40). So the good life is tied up with good relationships. If, so far as it depends on you, you’re at peace with others (Rom. 12:18), life is sweet, even if you don’t have an abundance of things. But if you’re constantly at odds with others, then you can have all the stuff in the world, but life isn’t so good.

Peter (3:10-11) quotes from Psalm 34 which says that if we want to love life and see good days, then we must do some things with our lips (3:10, which relates to 3:9) and our lives (3:11, which relates to 3:8) that result in healthy relationships. Then Scripture promises that God’s blessing will be on us (3:12). If we don’t live like that, the contrary is true: The face of the Lord will be against us.

**The good life results from following God’s principles for healthy relationships:
Doing good in our walk and talk.**

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. What is your ideal vacation? Have you had a chance to do it?

2. If money were no object, where would you live and what would your life look like?

Read It

| 1 Peter 3:8-12

Explore It

1. What are the character qualities Peter lists in verse 8?

2. What contrast does Peter set up in verse 9?

3. Why should we bless others? (v.9)

4. If we want a good life, what must we do? (v.10,11)

5. What contrast does Peter set up in verse 12?

Get It

1. What do the 5 character qualities in verse 8 tell us about the nature of the Christian life?

8. Peter indicates that biblical community is incredibly important for Christians living as aliens and strangers. How does being a part of the Christian community help you to carry out the actions in verse 9 in a sinful world?

9. Verse 9 reinforces the example of Jesus in 1 Peter 2:22-23 and tells us that we are to bless those who do evil to us. This is a consistent theme in the NT (see Matt. 5:44, Romans 12:17, 1 Thess. 5:15). How do you think our culture would be different if Christians actually lived this way?

10. In Luke 6:27-36, we are told to love our enemies. Peter seems to be applying this teaching to his readers' specific situation. How does this idea of love differ from what we typically think of when we use the word love?

Verses 10-12 are a quotation from Psalm 34:10-12. This Psalm refers to David's sojourn among the Philistines and Peter echoes that idea of sojourn throughout 1 Peter.

11. After reading verse 10, is it ok for Christians to love life and see good days?

12. Why do you think Peter focuses on our spoken words in verse 10? How do the things that we say affect our ability to have a "good life"?

13. Why do you think that it is not enough for us to turn from evil (verse 11)? What does this verse say about the nature of the Christian life – is it active or passive?
14. Is verse 12 reassuring to you or does it challenge you to reflect on the way that you think and feel about those who have done wrong to you?
15. This passage focuses on our relationships with people inside and outside the church. Interestingly, it challenges us to have the same attitude toward both. Take time to ask yourself the following questions. Challenge yourself to write out specific ways to change your attitude and actions if necessary.
- a. How do you view your place at Village Bible Church? Are you family, acquaintance or spectator?
 - b. If you are only an acquaintance or merely spectating, why is that? Ask God to reveal what might be holding you back.
 - c. When others wrong you, do you tend to lash out, become resentful or bitter, or do you offer blessings instead?
 - d. If you respond in the same way as unbelievers, what does that say about what you are really trusting in? Ask God to help you to place your faith in Jesus and to follow his example, not the example of the world around you.
 - e. Peter's use of Ps. 34 would seem to indicate that if David struggled in his time of sojourn, then so will we. We need to pray – to ask God for help in our struggles, in our attitudes toward those around us. How is your prayer life? Are you asking for God's help with both your attitude and your actions? If not, why not?

CHRISTIAN WITNESS IN A HOSTILE WORLD

Week 17 | 3/10 – 3/16

1 Peter 3:13-17

KD

Devotional

Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil. 1 Peter 3:13-17

We all have faced the fear of witnessing to lost people about the Lord Jesus Christ. I don't know if it's the flesh or an inbred fear of conflict or what, but we've all felt the churning stomach and sweaty palms that go with the thought, "Uh oh! I need to talk to this person about Jesus Christ! I'm scared! What am I going to do?"

Peter's theme in our text is Christian witness in a hostile world. His words apply whether we are facing torture for our faith or whether we're just nervous about the thought of telling someone about Christ. He's saying, The best witness in this hostile world combines good behavior with thoughtful words under Christ's lordship.

First, the **PLACE** we are called to witness (a hostile world); second, the **PRACTICE** of our witness (good behavior combined with thoughtful words); and, third, the governing **POWER** of our witness (the lordship of Jesus Christ). The section is connected by the word "and" to the quote from Psalm 34 (1 Pet. 3:10- 12), where Peter assures us that God will vindicate the righteous and punish the wicked. That's an important truth to keep in mind as we face hostility or feel intimidated about witnessing. Fearing God above all else will take care of the fear of man and give us the boldness we need to bear effective witness for our Savior.

Peter says that if we do suffer for the sake of righteousness, we are blessed. By "blessed" he doesn't mean good feelings, but rather the joy that comes from knowing that our lives are pleasing to God. He is reflecting Jesus' teaching, "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great,⁴ for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:11- 12). As 1 Peter 3:17 makes clear, sometimes it is God's will that we suffer for doing what is right. But, as we'll see (Point 3 below), Christ is still Lord and we can still trust Him and not fear.

So the first thing we need to recognize is that the world is hostile toward Christ and if we are identified with Christ, there's always the possibility that the world will be hostile toward us (John 15:18-20). But God has left us here to bear witness of His mercy toward those who are at war with Him. How do we do it faithfully?

~ *Steven Cole*

Open It

1. What is your biggest fear about witnessing? Your biggest hindrance to witnessing?
2. In what ways, large or small, have you experienced criticism or rejection for your faith or for doing good?

Read It

| 1 Peter 3:13-17

Explore It

1. What question does Peter ask in verse 13?
2. What advice does Peter give in verse 16? What examples have you seen of this – in your life or in another's life?

Get It

1. Give some examples of fears that might keep us from sharing our faith or working to implement change in our society.
2. Our lives provide the foundation for our lips to speak about the Savior. Why does the practice of our witness need to combine good behavior with thoughtful words.

3. In 3:15, Peter says we should always be ready to answer people's questions. But what causes them to ask, according to verses 13-17?

4. Is every Christian called to bear verbal witness or only those with the gift of evangelism?

5. How "together" must one's life be before they bear witness for Christ?

The gospel message is simple: God is Holy. Define sin is and what it has done in terms of alienating us from God. They need to know who Christ is and how He bore our sin through His death and resurrection. And they need to know how to accept God's gift of eternal life and forgiveness through faith. Learn some key verses for each point and you've got it. We're often afraid that someone will ask some thorny question that we can't answer. You can always say, "I don't know, but I'll try to find out." But there are only about a dozen questions that you'll ever get asked... You don't need to defend the Bible. That's like defending a lion! Just uncage it and it will take care of itself.

6. According to verse 16, in what way should you "give the reason for the hope that you have?"

Why are these two qualities important to communicating your faith effectively?

7. Why might unbelievers be willing to listen to reasons for hope from a person who is living the way Peter describes? (v 15-17)

8. The passage Peter is quoting in verse 14 is from Isaiah:
Do not fear what they fear, do not be frightened. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, He is the one you are to fear, He is the one you are to dread, and he will be a sanctuary...
If we fear God and nothing else, what promise does Isaiah give us?

To understand verse 14, we must realize that Peter is quoting from Isaiah 8:12-13. In that context, faithless King Ahaz of Judah had allied himself with Assyria to stave off an invasion from Israel and Syria. Isaiah and the faithful remnant were being charged with conspiracy because they opposed this godless alliance. The Lord is encouraging them not to fear the Assyrians nor those in Judah who were charging them with conspiracy, but rather, they were to fear the Lord of hosts and regard Him as holy ("sanctify" Him).

The significant thing is that Peter changes "the Lord of hosts" into the "Lord Christ," thus showing that he believed Jesus Christ to be one and the same as the Lord of hosts in Isaiah. He is telling us to fear Christ as God above anyone who threatens to harm us because of our witness. Because Jesus Christ is the Lord of hosts, over all rule and authority, we can trust Him to triumph ultimately, no matter what sufferings we may have to endure for His sake (see Matt. 11:2-6).

9. What defensive measure does Peter suggest (verse 15)? What does this mean?
10. Why do you think we are relatively free from suffering for our faith in North America? Do you think it is a good thing? Explain.
11. What summary statement does Peter make in verse 17? Give an example from your own life of each of these kinds of suffering.
12. Verse 15 says, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have." Practice doing this by preparing a short testimony in the space below. Tell how the Good News became personal for you and how Christ makes a difference in your life. As time allows, share your testimony with the group.

Wisdom from others:

Here's the irony: Christians are supposed to stand out as distinctive, but when we do, and are mocked or criticized for it, we are tempted to mock and criticize right back – and then we are no longer distinctive, because we are behaving just like everyone else! The new habits of heart and life are to be learned in the comparatively safe environment of the church itself (v.8) so that they can then be practiced and applied in the wider world (vv. 9, 12-16) – N. T. Wright

A Christian baroness lived in the highlands of Nairobi, Kenya, and had a young national employed as her houseboy. After three months he asked the baroness to give him a letter of reference to a friendly sheik some miles away. The baroness, not wanting the houseboy to leave just when he had learned the routine of the household, offered to increase his pay. The boy replied that he was not leaving for higher pay.

Rather, he had decided he would become either a Christian or a Muslim. This was why he had come to work for the baroness for three months. He wanted to see how Christians acted. Now he wanted to work for three months for the sheik to observe how Muslims lived. Then he would decide which religion he would follow. The baroness was stunned as she recalled her many shortcomings in dealing with the boy over the past three months. She could only exclaim, "Why didn't you tell me at the beginning!"

Lost people are watching our behavior, even when we don't realize it. If we are zealous for what is good, especially when we're mistreated, it's a powerful witness. I'm not talking about being sinless, but rather about living obediently to Christ as the bent of your life, and when you sin, confessing it and making it right with those you sinned against. That kind of righteous life is the basis for verbal Christian witness.

The Bible (especially the New Testament) was written by persecuted believers to persecuted believers. This context cannot be ignored without it having profoundly negative implications for how we read and apply the Bible and how we follow Christ individually and corporately. A cross-centered gospel requires cross-carrying messengers. – Glenn Penner

THE JUDGMENT AND THE JOURNEY

Week 18 | 3/17 – 3/23

1 Peter 3:18-22

TF

Devotional

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which He went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him. 1 Peter 3:18-22

Where did Christ go when He died? After His death on the cross, He was taken down quickly before sunset by Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man who was a disciple of Jesus. He was wrapped in a clean linen shroud and placed in a new tomb with a large stone rolled in front of it. But where did He go? He had died and He was soon to rise again, but where did He go between His crucifixion and resurrection? Surprisingly, scholars are divided as to where He actually went. The Scripture offers hints—glimpses into where He went, but other than a few scattered verses, it is remarkably silent on the issue. Yet, those in the early church felt that the isolated Scripture references were more than hints—they were testimonies to the power of Christ and the depth of His identification with us.

Our passage for today begins with the extent to which Christ suffered for our sins. It was “once” and only needed to be once—so great was His sacrifice. It was so that we, who are by nature unrighteous, may be brought to God. In order for Him to do so, He had to be put to death in the flesh (physically), and experience the reality of the death that we deserve (spiritually). So, in between the crucifixion and the resurrection, He went and “proclaimed to the spirits in prison” or as one of the first creeds (declarations of faith) has stated, “He descended into hell.” Did Christ descend into hell? Scholars are not unanimous in their interpretations of the Scriptures that speak to this issue. The explanation that follows is one that is supported by Scripture and is consistent with sound biblical theology. But before I address that question, allow me to illustrate something.

When someone has been captured for committing a crime, where do they go? We commonly say that they go to jail, which to most of us simply means that they have been incarcerated. But, jail is actually a temporary place for individuals who are awaiting trial. When one does go to trial they are either deemed innocent or guilty. The innocent are set free while the guilty do not go back to jail, but rather go to prison to serve out their sentence. Jail is the temporary place, while prison is the permanent place. While we may refer to jail and prison as synonyms, there is actually a significant difference between them.

When we speak of the place called “hell,” we face a similar dilemma. While we commonly understand “hell” as the place where the wicked go when they die, that’s not quite true. In the Old Testament the word used to indicate where individuals go when they die is “sheol”—which simply means “the place of the dead” or “the place of departed souls/spirit.” In the New Testament, the word is “hades,” which also refers to the “place of the dead.” Many Scripture references in the New Testament indicate that Sheol/Hades is a temporal place (Revelation 20:11-15) where souls are kept while they await the final resurrection and judgment. However, in Revelation 20:11-15, we learn that Hades will give up the dead in it and will itself be thrown into the Lake of Fire—the permanent habitation of the lost (i.e., those who do not know Christ) that only goes into effect after the Great White Throne of Judgment described in Revelation 20:11-15. So, there is a difference between Sheol/Hades and the Lake of Fire. One is temporary (a bit like jail), while the other is permanent (like prison). Hades is the temporal place while the Lake of Fire is the eternal place.

Did Christ go into hell (i.e., the Lake of Fire)? No, I believe He did not. Where then did He go? Allow me to illustrate once more. In jail there are two divisions—the place of the prisoners and those of the guards. Now, while one is considered free (the guard), the other is incarcerated (the prisoner). But for a time, both are in a similar state, for the guard is also in the jail, although he or she does not belong there permanently. They will have the opportunity to go free. Like jail, Sheol/Hades has two divisions—one for the wicked who do not know God and one division for those who do. This latter division is known in Scripture as “Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22) and “Paradise” (Luke 23:43), which is separated by a chasm that cannot be crossed by the righteous or the wicked (Luke 16:26). “Abraham’s bosom” and “Paradise” are known as the place where Old Testament saints went (such as Abraham) when they died.

When Christ died, He went to “Paradise” (Luke 23:43), and set the Old Testament saints free to go to heaven. The wicked stayed in Sheol/Hades, waiting for the time of judgment to come, while the Old Testament believers went into the presence of God. Jesus Himself did not yet ascend to heaven until sometime later, after His resurrection (John 20:17).

What can we learn from this? And why should this be an encouragement to us? First, it shows the extent of Christ’s sacrifice—it was available to those who looked forward to His coming in the Old Testament, but were not yet beneficiaries of His atoning work on the cross, who hoped in the promise of what was to come. Secondly, it shows His power and authority—He robbed the place of the dead. The Lord of life has the keys to death and Hades and nothing can stop Him! Thirdly, we see that God’s judgment is sure to come—just as it did in the days of Noah. And just Peter says in 3:20-21 that water saved Noah from God’s coming judgment, our baptism saves us—as an appeal to God of a good conscience. Realizing that His judgment is coming and how far Jesus went in order to save us should cause us to stop and praise Him. If He is willing to go through all of the horrors of the cross and death itself to save us from God’s coming judgment, then we can be sure that we can find victory through Him—both now and forevermore. Amen.

Open It

1. Have you ever won at anything? Or been a fan of a team that won everything? What was it? What was it like to know that you/they were the best?

2. Symbols are powerful—what are some of the symbols in our country and what do they mean?

Read It

| 1 Peter 3:18-22

Explore It

1. How many times did Christ suffer for sins? (v. 18)
2. What was the reason He suffered? (v. 18)
3. Who did Jesus proclaim to? (v. 18)
4. These “spirits” didn’t obey during the time of whom? (v. 20)
5. How many persons were brought safe through water? (v. 20)
6. What does baptism correspond to? (v. 21)

Get It

1. Knowing that Jesus suffered for us helps us know that God isn’t removed from our suffering, but is intimately familiar with it. How does the truth of Jesus’ suffering make you feel about the suffering you have gone or are going through?

2. God is patient toward us. What is God's patience meant to lead us to? (cf. Romans 2:4).

3. If God is patient toward unbelievers coming to the saving knowledge of Him, how should we be? (v. 20)

4. Why is it so difficult to be patient with unbelievers? How many times do we share the Gospel with them until we "kick the dust off of our feet" (cf. Matthew 10:14)?

A comparison is drawn between salvation in the ark and baptism. In both instances, believers are saved through the waters of judgment, since baptism portrays salvation through judgment. The mere mechanical act of baptism does not save, for Peter explicitly says, 'not as a removal of dirt from the body,' meaning that the passing of water over the body does not cleanse anyone. Baptism saves you because it represents inward faith, as evidenced by one's appeal to God for the forgiveness of one's sins (for a good conscience). Furthermore, baptism 'saves' only insofar as it is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism is a visual representation of the fact that Christians are clothed with Christ (cf. Gal. 3:27), and in union with Christ they share his victory over sin. Though Christians have disagreed about the proper mode of water baptism beginning in the early history of the church, Christians have generally agreed (irrespective of denominational differences) that water baptism is an outward sign of the inward reality of regeneration, which is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 3:5, 8; Titus 3:5), and which may be received only by grace through faith (see Eph. 2:8)—ESV Study Bible, study note on 1 Peter 3:21.

5. If baptism is an outward symbol of God's judgment passing over us as it was during the time of Noah, then why do so many people delay in being baptized?

Wisdom from others:

On the substitution of Christ—

“The concept of substitution may be said, then, to lie at the heart of both sin and salvation. For the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, while the essence of salvation is God substituting himself for man. Man asserts himself against God and puts himself where only God deserves to be; God sacrifices himself for man and puts himself where only man deserves to be. Man claims prerogatives which belong to God alone; God accepts penalties which belong to man alone.”—John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p. 160.

On baptism—

“According to Peter, baptism is ‘an appeal to God.’ That is, baptism is the cry of faith to God.’ That is, baptism is the cry of faith to God. In that sense and to that degree, it is part of God’s means of salvation. This should not scare us off any more than the sentence, ‘If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord...you will be saved’ (Rom. 10:9). The movement of the lips in the air and the movement of the body in water save only in the sense that they give expression to the single justifying act, namely, faith (Rom. 3:28). Baptism is the outward appeal of faith to God in the heart”—John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*, p. 132.

DIE TO LIVE

Week 19 | 3/31 – 4/6

1 Peter 4:1-6

TF

Devotional

For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. 1 Peter 4:3-5

In 1988 *Leadership*, a leading journal for pastors, commissioned a poll to determine, "How common is pastoral indiscretion?" One question was, "Since you've been in local church ministry, have you ever done anything with someone (not your spouse) that you feel was sexually inappropriate?" The responses: 23% yes; 77% no.

A second question was more explicit: "Have you ever had sexual intercourse with someone other than your spouse since you've been in local church ministry?" Yes: 12%; No: 88%.

To put these figures in perspective, they also surveyed subscribers to *Christianity Today* magazine who are not pastors. The incidences of immorality were nearly double: 45% had done something they considered sexually inappropriate; 23% admitted to adultery (*Leadership*, Winter, 1988, p. 12.)

Those figures disturb me! If one out of four pastors admits to doing something sexually inappropriate and one out of eight has crossed the line into adultery, and twice that many lay people have done so, is it any wonder that the American church is lacking God's power and blessing?

If you're thinking, "I've never done any of those things," I ask, "Do you fill your mind with inappropriate movies and TV shows? Do you feast on sexually provocative pictures in magazines or read trashy novels?" If so, you're just a bit more careful in your sin than those who have crossed the line. It's just a matter of time and opportunity before you fall.

If I add other sins such as drunkenness, greed (which amounts to idolatry—Col. 3:5), and living for selfish pleasure rather than for the kingdom of God, I'm sure the percentages would shoot up. There are other deeds of the flesh which I could call to your attention (Gal. 5:19-21). I mention these in particular because they are the sins Peter lists as characterizing the pagans (4:3). Although many of Peter's readers had come out of such loose backgrounds, he is now exhorting them to be intent on holiness—to live the rest of their lives no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God (4:2). I can think of no more relevant message for the American church today—we must be intent on holiness!

~ Steven Cole

Open It

1. Have you ever been set apart to do something special? What was it? And how did it feel to be chosen?
2. What is one thing that you are particularly passionate about? Why?

Read It

| 1 Peter 4:1-6

Explore It

1. What type of thinking are we to arm ourselves with? (v. 1)
2. If we have “suffered in the flesh” then we have ceased from what? (v. 1)
3. We are to spend the rest of our remaining years on earth living for what? (v. 2)
4. How do unbelievers respond when we don’t participate in the sins that they do? (v. 4)

Get It

1. Jesus suffered in the flesh (v. 1) and we are to “arm ourselves with the same way of thinking.” How are we to think of our suffering? What purpose does our suffering serve? What does it help us do? (v. 1)

On v. 6, "Peter considered the case of believers who had died physically. These people heard and believed the gospel when they were alive but had subsequently died. Unbelievers viewed the death of believers as proof that there is no advantage in becoming a believer, for all without exception die. Peter indicated, however, the unbelievers do not understand the whole picture. Even though from a human perspective believers seem to gain no benefits from their faith since they die, from God's perspective (which is normative), they live according to the Spirit"—Thomas R. Schreiner, 1, 2 Peter, Jude, The New American Commentary, Volume 37, p. 208.

8. Where should we begin when we share the Gospel? How much should we refer to God's coming judgment?

9. What is one take away from the lesson this week?

CONDUCT IN THE END TIMES

Week 20 | 4/7 – 4/13

1 Peter 4:7-11

Devotional

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:7-11

Every once in a while you read about a wacky religious group that has become so convinced that the Lord's coming is imminent that they have sold everything they owned and gone out to sit on a hilltop and await His coming. In 1988, thousands of pastors in America received in the mail a booklet by Edgar Whisenant, "88 Reasons Why the Rapture Could Be in 1988." It had a lot of interesting arguments, but, needless to say, they were not accurate. So, in 1989, I received another booklet explaining why his calculations were off by one year and why the Lord would come back in 1989. I didn't receive another booklet in 1990.

I'm sure that the author of those booklets is a sincere, Bible-believing man who means well. He admits in his 1989 booklet that he could be mistaken again in his specific calculations, since there are many complicated factors involved. And, his goal is worthy, namely, to wake up the sleeping church. He raises an important question: How should we, as the church, conduct ourselves in light of the fact that we are living in the end times? Peter answers that question in 1 Peter 4:7-11:

Because the end is near, the church should glorify God through prayer, love, and service.

- Stephen Cole

Open It

1. There always seems to be another end of the world "scare", sometimes from Christians, sometimes from others. Why do you think that these scenarios keep coming up?

2. Do you tend to think of yourself as having gifts and talents that are of "use" in the church? How are you using them?

Read It

| 1 Peter 4:7-11

Explore It

1. What is near? (v.7)

2. What are we to do in light of the answer to #1? (v.7)

3. What is most important? (v.8)

4. What does love cover? (v. 8)

5. What attitude are we to have in our hospitality? (v.9)

6. What do the gifts we have allow us to do? (vv. 10-11)

Get It

Use the information in the text box below to help answer questions 1-3.

The word Peter uses for “end” in Greek is “telos” which can also be translated goal or outcome. It is paired with the perfect tense form of the verb which means “to be near”. This form is often translated “is at hand” or “has come near” (Matt. 3:2, 4:17, 10:7, Mk. 1:15, Luke 10:11). This combination says more than “the end of the world is coming soon”, it says that the goal of God’s plan is coming soon – the last stage of God’s redemptive plan, consummated with the return of Christ. Currently we are living in “the last of times” (1 Peter 1:20) which was inaugurated by the resurrection and ascension of Christ. So the “end” does refer to the future, it is less about the termination of time as we know it than it is about the period of time when Christ, who is sovereign, is revealed as such. “Peter is saying that because his readers are living in the last stage of a divinely initiated process, whose outcome has already been assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1:3; 3:22), their behavior should reflect that reality.” (Jobes, 276). The end is not a tragedy, it is the glorious culmination of the Kingdom of God.

1. Would your reaction to certain news of the end of the world be prayer? Does the above information change your reaction?
2. How does Peter’s teaching in v. 7 regarding the “end of all things” challenge you? – is your attitude one of fear, smugness (“they’ll see”), or of reassured hope?
3. Why do you think that Peter’s admonition is to be alert (self-controlled) and “sober minded” (clear-minded)? How does this relate to 4:3? Why do you think that being self-controlled and clear headed should lead to prayer first? (v.7)
4. Peter’s readers are probably facing persecution because of their faith. They are probably tempted not to pray. Have you felt that way? How does the information in the above text box help you to want to pray?

HARD LESSONS ABOUT HARD TIMES

Week 21 | 4/14 – 4/20

1 Peter 4:12-19

KD

Devotional

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-13

Nobody likes hard times. But hard times are especially hard to handle when it seems like you've done everything right and you suffer anyway. You seek to live a godly life, but you suffer one health problem after another, while you know many who abuse their bodies with a life of dissipation and are never sick for a day. You follow the company procedures, but your boss blames you for a problem that was beyond your control, while the guy who didn't follow the procedures and lied about it gets praised for doing right. You invest many inconvenient hours trying to help someone get her life together and follow the Lord. But she turns against you and tells others all sorts of lies about you behind your back.

At such times, when you've done what was right, but things seem to be going against you, you begin to wonder if somehow you're out of the will of God. Or maybe there's some hidden sin in your life that you need to confess. Such answers to the problem of suffering have been with us for centuries, since those are the mistaken suggestions of Job's friends.

But Peter wants his readers to know that suffering is often according to the will of God (4:19). The idea that if you're in the center of God's will, you'll be free from trials, is not biblical. Being in the center of God's will may mean that you are in the center of suffering! Peter gives us four hard lessons about hard times--hard lessons because they're hard to apply. But they're necessary and useful lessons because not one of us will escape hard times in this life (Heb. 12:8).

As Christians, we should expect trials, exult in trials, examine ourselves in trials, and entrust ourselves to God in trials, knowing that they are according to His will.

Trusting in God has fallen on hard times. We're told today that when we suffer, we need to express all our anger toward God or we might do some psychological damage to ourselves. But trust the Lord? Get practical! I am! Trusting in the Faithful Creator is the most practical thing you can do when you're going through a difficult trial...

As Christians, we can expect trials. Don't be surprised. More than that, by God's power, we can exult in them if we see the result God is accomplishing. When they hit, we should examine ourselves more deeply and entrust ourselves to God more fully, knowing that we are in His perfect will. Hard lessons about hard times—but our God is faithful!

- Stephen Cole

Open It

1. If you have children, what are some of the things that you pray for your children?

2. Have you seen someone suffer for their faith before?

Read It

| 1 Peter 4:12-19

Explore It

When we suffer for our faith:

1. What should we not be? (v 12)

2. What should we do? (v 13) Why?

3. If we remember that God is in charge, and works through our suffering for our good, what will we do? (v 19)

Get It

1. According to verse 13, why should Christians rejoice as they suffer? Explain in your own words.

8. Is the anger “normal”, “sinful” or both?

9. Is “Let go and let God” an impractical cliché or the most practical thing you can do in a trial?

10. When have you had to trust God recently?

11. What's the danger of trying to avoid persecution and suffering for Christ?

12. Has the fear of persecution ever kept you from doing what is right?

13. If we are never persecuted, what does that say about how people view us? In what way should persecution make us happy? (4:14)

14. Why is a willingness to die, if need be, essential to healthy Christianity during persecution. What happens when we aren't willing to die, when we are afraid to "take up our cross daily" (Luke 9:23) and follow Jesus? What does this have to do with "committing ourselves to a faithful Creator"?
15. All religions recognize the reality of suffering in the world, but their responses to it can be significantly different. For instance, Buddhism says that "life is suffering" and that the only way to avoid it is to detach oneself from the cares of this world. How is that different from what Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5 and what Peter repeatedly teaches us in 1 Peter about both suffering and our attachments?
16. Peter seems to have intended that mentioning the Last Judgment would encourage his readers to endure their sufferings with joy. Why do you suppose thinking about the Judgment should encourage the persecuted?
17. How is verse 19 a great summary of the message of the whole letter?

When suffering comes, what will you trust God for? How will you view your persecutors? On what will you pin your hopes? What will be your goal in making your stand? What will help you to persevere? What will comfort you? Have you got these things sorted out yet?

PRESCRIPTION FOR A HEALTHY CHURCH

Week 22 | 4/21 – 4/27

1 Peter 5:1-5

Devotional

So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." 1 Peter 1:1-5

Good churches are hard to find! I often hear from people, as I did this week, who were in the church I pastored in California, who have moved away, who say how much trouble they've had finding a healthy church. Sometimes the church lacks vital worship. Often, they could not find a pastor who faithfully preaches God's Word. Sometimes the church is racked by dissention over petty issues or is shot through with legalism. This is not to say that our church was trouble-free, but by comparison to many other churches, they felt that it was the healthiest church they had ever been in.

What makes for a healthy church? Many scriptural elements could be listed. Especially important is a strong commitment to God's Word, our only authority for faith and practice. But what makes a commitment to God's Word happen? The answer is, strong leadership. Most churches rise and fall with the quality of leadership. But, of course, leaders can't lead without supportive followers. And, even with strong leaders and supportive followers, that ubiquitous sin, human pride, often gets in the way and causes problems. With those factors in mind, Peter here gives us a prescription for a healthy church:

In a healthy church, the elders will shepherd and the flock will submit, all in a spirit of mutual humility.

The churches to which Peter wrote were facing intense persecution ("fiery ordeal," 4:12). Such trials test the cohesiveness and strength of a church. To survive, they needed a prescription for spiritual health. Sandwiched between two sections dealing with trials (4:12-19 & 5:6-11), Peter gives this Rx ("Therefore" [5:1], in light of the trials). It focuses primarily on the elders, since strong pastoral leadership is essential. But there is also a word to the rest of the flock. And, the whole process must be wrapped in what is arguably the chief Christian virtue, humility.

- Stephen Cole

Open It

1. When you think "pastor" or "elder" what do you think of?

2. When you think about leadership, what words come to mind?

Read It

| 1 Peter 5:1-5

Explore It

1. What are the three ways that Peter appeals to the leaders who are reading his letter? (v.1)

2. Peter gives three contrasting descriptions of the way that elders should shepherd God's people. List them below. (vv.2-3)

3. What is the reward for shepherding well? (v.4)

Get It

1. Why would Peter need to appeal to the Elders in the way that he does? (v.1)

2. How does Peter's identification as a "fellow elder" reinforce his exhortation in verse 3? (cf 2 John 1:1 and 3 John 1:1).

3. How does 5:1 relate to 4:13?

In verses 1 and 2 the three major words relating to the pastoral office are used – elder (presbuteroi), shepherd (poimaino), and “exercising oversight” (episkipos). The position is given as elder (v.1), followed by a command to “shepherd” the flock and then a present participle “exercising oversight” or “watching over” which signifies repeated action tied to the primary verb – in this case “shepherd the flock”.

4. Why is it important that the primary command given to the elders is "shepherd"? How does the fact that this is God's flock, not the elder's flock, matter?

5. Why is it important that leaders do not serve because they are compelled but willingly? (v.2)

6. What kind of "dishonest gain" or "shameful gain" could entice someone to want the position of elder? (v.2)

7. 1 Peter 5:3 says “not domineering over those in charge but being examples of the flock.” This verse echoes Jesus' teaching in Matt. 20:25-27. The Greek culture of Peter's audience was all about gaining status and asserting authority, much the same as we do today. How does Peter's statement that the people are "entrusted to you" challenge this way of thinking? (v.3)

8. If elders are not to be domineering (v.3), what should their example to the flock look like? (cf. 2:21-25; 4:1; 1 Cor. 11:1) In what ways did Jesus teach elders how to shepherd?

9. Crowns were given to the winners of athletic competitions or military victories. Usually they were made of laurel leaves or sometimes gold. How does this "crown of glory" (v.4) differ from those crowns? How do the reasons for getting the crown differ?

10. How does the identification of Jesus as the "Chief Shepherd" reinforce the way the elders are to take care of the church? What does it imply about the elder's position? In what ways have you seen the elders at Village take care of the church in this way? In what ways can they do a better job? (It's okay, you can be honest. ☺)

11. Hebrews 13:7 calls for us to imitate the lives of our leaders. How can we do this? Give examples.

GROWING SOLID THROUGH SUFFERING

Week 23 | 4/28 – 5/4

1 Peter 5:6-11

Devotional

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.
1 Peter 1:6-11

One of the most crucial lessons to learn as a Christian is how to handle suffering. In this fallen world, suffering is a certainty. It may be the physical suffering that goes with living in these frail bodies that get sick and die. It may be the grief of watching a loved one suffer and die. It may be problems stemming from your own sin or from others' sins against you. It may be the common pressures of life, of providing a living and wondering how you're going to pay all the bills. It may be the emotional suffering of struggling with feelings of inadequacy, loneliness, anger, worry, or fear. But wherever it comes from, suffering is inevitable. And, it will make you grow bitter or better, depending on how you handle it. It is significant that in Jesus' parable of the sower, two of the three soils that failed to produce a crop represent people who did not know how to handle suffering. The rocky soil, Jesus explained, pictures those who receive the word joyfully at first, but do not sink down roots, so that when affliction or persecution comes, they fall away. The thorny ground reflects those who seem to grow for a while, but then allow, among other things, the worries of the world to choke out the word so that it does not bear fruit unto eternal life (Mark 4:16-19). If you don't learn how to handle affliction, worries, and other kinds of suffering, you will not persevere as a Christian. On the other hand, if you do learn how to handle suffering, you will grow solid through it. Peter here gives us four strategies for growing solid through suffering: To grow solid through suffering, humble yourself before God, resist the devil, trust the Lord, and stand firm in God's grace with the saints.

- Stephen Cole

Open It

3. Discuss with your group a time where you found yourself struggling with anxiety. What caused the concern and how were you able to overcome it?

4. Describe a time where you quickly went from the thrill of victory to the agony of defeat.

Read It

| 1 Peter 5:6-11

Explore It

1. In verse 6, what does God promise to do when we "humble ourselves"?
2. What two actions does Peter call us to in verse 8?
3. According to verse 9, how are we to resist the devil?
4. Where do we find the grace in both times of victory and suffering according to verse 10?

Get It

1. The Greek word translated, "anxiety" (NIV), comes from a word that means "to divide". What things in your life that seem to divide your attention?
2. Why must we humble ourselves in order for God to minister to us in our time of need?
3. What two things about God give us hope in verses 6-7 when times of suffering and trial come? How have you seen these two attributes play out in your own life?
4. In what specific ways are we to be self-controlled and alert when it comes to the schemes of the devil?
5. When it comes to dealing with the devil, Christians often go to one of two extremes - either they see the devil behind every bush, or they ignore him all together. What view seems to characterize your perspective regarding the devil?

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS

Week 24 | 5/5 – 5/11

1 Peter 5:12-14

TB

Devotional

By Silvanus, a faithful brother as I regard him, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it. She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings, and so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with the kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. 1 Peter 1:12-14

Have you considered how kind God is with us (even when we are in the depths of stress and despair), how His hand is guiding, and how He will restore us for our benefit and His glory? This passage is about the great hope we have because Christ our Lord is our Great Hope! There is no escape from suffering; living in a fallen world, we will, at times, experience pain and despair. The incredible news is that He still cares. Jesus will lift us up out of whatever we are in now or will ever face! And in the meantime, He will give us the strength to endure and even to learn and grow from it. This process will make us better and more mature so we will be a better help to others and more insightful and character-driven ever than before. Our foundation is secure and our standing is firm when we are in Him; we can withstand anything this world throws at us when we are in Him!

Peter's main mission was to be an encourager to the people who were in distress. How sweet words of encouragement are to those in anguish, and how much more impacting those words are when we know that the person saying them is real and sincere! Peter also offers the assurance that the Gospel is real and is relevant. It is for us now, no matter who we are, where we are, or what we face, Jesus Christ loves us and has a plan for us. God is not far off, unapproachable, detached, or antagonistic. He is here, He is with us now, His love is real and He is totally concerned for us. Peter then closes his epistle to let his people know they are not alone or distanced from God or from others. We are in this world as a community; we are together. The only time we are not is when we cut ourselves off from others; however, we can never cut ourselves off from God.

- Stephen Cole

Open It

1. Share with the group about a childhood friend. How did you meet? What do you remember about them? Are you still friends with them today?

2. Describe a time when you received an encouraging note or word from someone. What did the kinds words do for you?

Read It

| 1 Peter 5:12-14

Explore It

1. What three people does Peter mention in this closing passage of his letter?

2. What were Peter's two reasons for writing this letter according to this passage?

3. What gesture did Peter want to be used in the greetings of one another?

Get It

1. Peter says he has briefly shared the "true grace of God." Take some time to examine this letter and determine what the true grace of God consists of.
2. Who are two people that you regard as "faithful brothers or sisters in the faith?" Why do you see them in this way?
3. What do you suppose it meant to the early church for Peter to identify with and encourage them in the midst of their suffering?
4. Read Jude 4. In what ways have people turned the "true grace into a false grace"? Is this false grace present in our culture today? How can we fall into a similar pattern today?
5. Why should we not go about ministry or our lives alone? How does our community with others help us produce Christ likeness?

